IEICE Journals Have Resumed Open for All Researchers: Nonmembers Can Submit Paper

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1. Introduction
It is my great pleasure to have been awarded IEICE fellow and to have this opportunity to write this article. Since my fellowship was given to “Editing Activities of IEICE Transactions and founding a letter journal ComEX (IEICE Communications Express),” I write here recent circumstances and movements around IEICE Transactions on Communications (“TCom” hereafter) as well as ComEX and their editing activities.

2. Works and Tasks I Have Served
I first stepped into the editorial board of Communications Society in 2002 as one of the associate editors of TCom, since the editorial committee added them due to the very rapid growth of submissions from Asian countries. One of the important reasons of this increase is “Impact Factor” which TCom had got registered for a few years before. After that, I served as an Editor during 2006—2008. Thanks to a lot of papers, all the editorial committee members were spending very busy days to look for and assign reviewers and to edit them.

From 2013 to 2015, I was an Editor of ComEX and EiC (Editor in Chief) of TCom during 2018—2020. Since 2020, I have served as EiC of ComEX.

3. Anyone, Even If Nonmember, Can Submit Paper
Since this April, TCom, ComEX, and all the other paper/letter journals issued by IEICE, including the other Societies, have resumed accepting submissions from nonmembers. Namely, even if all the authors are nonmembers of IEICE, they can submit the paper without one of the author’s immediate membership application. I say again, “Now we can ACCEPT Papers written by authors of NONMEMBERS ALL.”

However, please note that the article charges are somewhat expensive in case of the all nonmembers, so I would like to recommend that the authors take this opportunity to join the IEICE.

4. Special Sections Concerning to Int’l Conferences Welcome and Appreciated
Special section proposals especially concerning to international conferences are much WELCOME, not only from the technical committees in Japan but also from overseas sections or groups of members anywhere.

I surely think that your proposals are the key issue to improve our journals’ position where it warrants no optimism as I write the next section. We really need a lot of proposals; it gets easier to plan them because nonmembers can submit a paper to IEICE. If you are to propose it for the first time or not familiar with the editing process, do not hesitate to contact Editors via IEICE editing office, trans-b@ieice.org or comex@ieice.org, for further information. Note that a joint section is possible among TCom and ComEX; there are some precedents.

5. Way toward Open Journal
The most serious problem now for our paper/letter journals is the decrease of submissions [1]. Figure 1 shows the annual submission change of the two journals issued by Communications Society. It is very clear for TCom that we must reform the editorial policy and rules immediately and revolutionarily. Or, we are certainly going to have little choice, but to close the committee and to terminate its publication.

Nevertheless, you do not have to be too pessimistic. Against this problem, we in the editorial board of Communication Society have already started the movements; the opening for nonmembers’ submission I wrote above is the most remarkable and noticeable one. Please look at and read again Information for Authors [2, 3], where you shall find the important reforming. The gloomiest and unpleasant section “eligibility” of authors has already been deleted so there is no restriction now. Anyone is cleared for submission!
Supposing a section in conjunction with an international conference/workshop, this kind of special section seemed losing the number of submissions year by year recently. It is quite natural because not a few participants would not be members of IEICE. Now therefore, those special sections are expected to gather more submissions. Additionally, as seen in Fig. 1 (b), ComEX’s submission is increasing in these three years and special sections are certainly pulling it up. Note that all of them are conjunction with international conferences or domestic workshops. Again, remember that it has got much easier to promote such special sections due to the opening.

Finance issue is also important thinking that the number of IEICE member is decreasing. Submitting a paper can certainly be one of the reasons to join IEICE, especially for overseas members. Fortunately, the budget of our journals has gotten into the black since they completely became online publications; it is now an important and nonnegligible revenue of the Institute.

The editorial board was carefully studying these issues and has come to conclude that the number of joining member could limitedly be affected by the opening. Then all the editorial committees proposed the opening for nonmembers to Board of Governors (BoG) through Director in charge of Journal and Transactions. Note that we have committed BoG to increase the submissions 10% or more.

6. Accessibility to Papers and Impact Factor
Impact Factor (IF) is the other serious one. TCom’s IF is still less than one unfortunately, although it once exceeded ONE in 2017, while ComEX has not got it yet. Why our IF is low and cannot be increased? One of the reasons must be due to the few number of submissions and papers published. Another one is the circulation of the journal: easy visibility on the Internet. Remember that almost all researchers, except for the Society members of IEICE, cannot read or access all IEICE Transactions and letter journals without using some libraries in Japan and few ones in the world.

I really think, to get IF increased, that our journals had better be, or should have been, included in IEEE Xplore, or we should make all of them into OPEN ACCESS. I dare to say, to my regret, there are not a few conservative people saying “IEICE publications should not be seen as if they became a subsidiary of IEEE,” but this is a misunderstanding. It is the most useful and effective system to promote, circulate, and sale our authors’ papers and their technical and academic achievements. We must persuade those people and we will overcome this pending problem.

I am sure, Accessibility on the Internet is Most Important Today for academic journals. Please support us and show your opinion through various channels and opportunities.

7. For Whom/What an IEICE Journal Is
I have asked this question to myself and discussed it among the editorial board for these five or six years. Is it for the members, the Institute, or the global engineers/researchers’ communities? Clearly, for the first at least, it must be for the global communities to share novel and useful results as soon as possible. Although member benefits/privileges are important of course, they should NOT make an academic journal be accessed exclusively.

Do you keep and renew your membership to submit and read papers? Is that your first incentive to be a member? My answer is “No,” though some people might join IEICE to submit their papers. Suppose IEEE Transactions, quite a few readers of this GNL are members of IEEE and would renew it in this year, in spite that even a nonmember can submit papers and you may read the Transactions if your company or library subscribes them when you quit.

8. What Journals to Edit and Produce for IEICE
There is no doubt that we must differentiate our journals from the other ones issued by institutes or publishers. It was said one of the reasons why TCom could enjoy many submissions was its quick and kind review with any fee nor membership. We will resume this point and improve them and good reputation.

Now we are discussing some ideas in the editorial board meeting, where I proposed that our journals should cooperate with each other more tightly to review a paper speedier and to accept it more. One specific idea is to extend the use of “Related Manuscript ID” in the paper registration form in Manuscript Management System. This column has been used for a previously rejected paper to quickly assign the reviewers as well as the associate editor to the revised one. We are thinking that the authors may also write-in the manuscript ID(s) that were ACCEPTED by ComEX, ELEX, NOLTA, or other IEICE Transactions and are on directly related and the continued studies. This is also effective for the quick assignment and review in cases that an author(s) submits a series of letters and papers of a study project.

9. Conclusion
It is most important for our journals to increase submissions. We really and earnestly hope to have a lot of submissions and contributions from all members as well as from nonmembers. Please do not hesitate to send us your comments and questions via IEICE editing office, trans-b@ieice.org or comex@ieice.org.

10. References