

Editors' leadership role impacts on quality of biomedical research journals

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The factors allowing a journal to achieve high quality are not fully understood, but good editorial practices such as accurate and author-helpful peer review and in-house editing are thought to be important. Now, a new study provides quantitative evidence that another aspect of good editorial practice – editors' expectations that articles adhere to international standards for quality reporting – is strongly related to journal quality. The research is published July 2 in the online, open-access journal *PLoS ONE*.

Authored by independent editor and information professional Valerie Matarese, the study examined manuscript requirements for a set of Medline-indexed research journals. Matarese assessed whether journals stipulated that: research adhere to the Declaration of Helsinki and to animal research guidelines; informed consent and ethics committee approval be obtained when needed; authorship be based on a substantial intellectual contribution; funding and conflicting interests be noted; clinical trials be registered; and manuscripts follow the CONSORT or QUOROM statements when appropriate. Journals' adherence to guidelines of the Committee on Publication Ethics was also noted.

Instructions to authors from all Italian journals and an equivalent number of UK journals were evaluated. The choice of countries was guided by the interest of examining the particular challenges faced by journals from a developed, non-Anglophone country, in a European context. The 152 journals of the study were both edited and published in one of the two countries

Using citations statistics (impact factor and parameters in the SCImago database) as measures of quality, the study found a strong relationship (multiple R², 43.4%-57.4%) with editors' expectations for research reporting. Factors that might have confounded the relationship, such as publishing language and internationality, did not have major effects. Italian journals fared worse than their UK counterparts on many of the bibliometric parameters assessed in the study, and this was reflected by a lower participation of Italian editors in the relevant professional associations.

According to Matarese, "Well formulated instructions distinguish a journal for professionalism and rigor and may be considered as evidence of 'editorial leadership.' Insufficient editorial leadership may generate a vicious circle in which authors of quality research are not attracted to submit manuscripts, obliging the journal to accept poorer quality papers. To escape this predicament, journal editors – especially from Italy – need to appreciate international initiatives promoting quality publishing. Lower-ranked journals wishing to attain higher status can consider providing greater editorial guidance to the author communities they serve."

"These same guidelines," she explained, "need to be understood by authors and applied early, when designing a study and drafting the report." Therefore, these issues receive ample attention in her graduate-level course on how to write a research paper.

Source: Public Library of Science

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