



Journal publishing challenges: A case of STM scientific journals in Croatia

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KEYWORDS

Journals;
Publishing;
Scientific
communication;
Croatia

Abstract This paper presents findings from the research of 87 scientific journals in the fields of science, technology and medicine (STM) in Croatia. Findings indicate a set of problems editors and editorial teams in the fields of STM encounter during their work such, as insufficient financial support to the journal, low quality of article manuscripts, badly formatted article manuscripts, lack of help to the editor, etc. Findings also indicate use of information and communication technology (ICT) for communication with authors, but ICT is still not used sufficiently to make the shift from print to electronic publishing possible. Most journals in research face financial problems, and they are understaffed, while editors are overburdened with other duties. The recommendation is to professionalize the management of the journals to allow editors and their associates to dedicate their time solely to this job in order to facilitate the transformation of scientific journals from paper to electronic versions and to participate actively in the scientific communication paradigm shift.

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Introduction

Publishing results of scientific research in the form of articles in international scientific journals has become the most important activity in the life of researchers because they spend a great deal of their time on the preparation of manuscripts targeted at particular journal audiences (Lundin, Jönsson, Kreiner, & Tienari, 2010). As a result, scientific journals play a central role in the life of the academic community as they allow academics to publish results of their research and to be informed about the most

recent developments in their discipline and sub-discipline (Greco, Wharton, Estelami, & Jones, 2006). "Best practice for academics is to write key research contributions as scholarly articles for submission to relevant journals and conferences" (Freyne, Coyle, Smyth, & Cunningham, 2010, p. 124). In time, this activity has become imperative for every scientist in order to get recognition for his/her work, earn his/her academic promotion and attract funds for new research. Schauder confirmed the existence of such a trend: "Publication of articles in scientific journals became the prime indicator of professional standing for researchers and the organizations that employed them" (1994, p. 75). For Chang, "Academic journals disseminate information to the community and provide quality control, a trusted archive, and author recognition" (2008, p. 274). Scientific journals are still the most important medium for

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dissemination of scientific information as they guarantee high visibility of articles published in them: "Publishing an important paper in a leading journal is much more likely to reach the widest possible audience and to bring honor to all involved" (Donovan, 2010, p. 378). Since scientific knowledge is cumulative, scientific journals contribute to the corpus of that knowledge by publishing results of scientific research: "Scientists publish their research findings and review others' research results in academic journals for maximal effect on present and future research" (Chang, 2008, p. 274). Journals are very versatile media regarding the content they publish: "Journals publish research articles, field or laboratory work notes, and book reviews; use in-house editorial or outside peer reviews; cater to scholars in a specific field or discipline; and may be considered by the academic practitioners concerned as top-, middle-, or low-ranking outlets for their scholarly products" (Shaw, 2009, p. 242). In science, technology and medicine where fast publishing is of great importance for recognition of discoveries, journals are the primary channel for publishing and dissemination of results of scientific research. In her article on scholarly books, Dalton also suggests that the primacy of the journal article in sciences: "... the primacy of the article in the sciences and the primacy of the book in the humanities, with the social sciences falling somewhere in between, are well established" (2006, p. 252).

Because of their importance for science, technology and medicine, journals remain the focus of scientists, publishers, libraries and other parties interested in this channel for dissemination of scientific knowledge. Despite their longevity, scientific journals are still burdened with many problems. To investigate some of those problems journal editorial teams encounter in their work and the influence of these problems on basic aspects of scientific journals, management in the fields of science, technology and medicine in Croatia, research was initiated. This paper presents the results of that research.

Challenges in journal publishing

Publishing a scientific journal is a complex and demanding job. Journal publishers, editors and editorial teams face many challenges: an insufficient number of reviewers, reviewers who do not submit their reviews on time, authors who submit low quality manuscripts, authors who submit badly formatted article manuscripts, insufficient financial support, insufficient numbers of members of the editorial team, editor-in-chief is overloaded with obligations outside the journal, lack of volunteers to help the editor, high cost of journal printing, etc. This part of the paper will analyze selected problems that occur in journal publishing and that influence their quality.

Scientists are interested in publishing their articles in top-tier journals. To become a top-tier journal, a journal must employ top scholars as referees and as members of the editorial team, and publish the work of top authors (Edwards & Shulenburger, 2003). Despite the increase in the number of scientists worldwide who want to publish their work in top-tier journals, the number of such journals has remained the same as the number of top-tier journals twenty years ago (Macdonald & Kam, 2009), making the

task of article publishing even more difficult for scientists, especially for young scientists. Their career depends on their choice of journals for publication of their work. To continue their careers, they must publish their articles in high profile journals because "... higher value is given to those which are published in internationally known journals" (Khattri, 2009, p. 187). According to Miller and Harris, scientists select the journal to which they will send their article manuscripts based on "... the type of papers typically published in each journal, the journal's aims and scope, and the scientific reputation of the editorial team and the editor."; "... relative qualities of the journal, the efficiency of the expected review process, and the estimated likelihood of acceptance by each journal.", and, finally, based on "... the prestige of the journal, the efficiency and fairness of the review process, the timeliness of publication, and the cost to the author" (2004, pp. 75–77).

Editors and editorial teams often find themselves under pressure to respond to the authors' demands to publish their articles and, at the same time, to maintain the high quality of the journal. Quality control in the form of the peer review process of the manuscripts submitted to the journal is still one of the most controversial yet necessary procedures in scientific journal publishing because journal editors often receive manuscripts from established authors "... that are, frankly, untidy, inaccurate, and not in the correct format, as well as failing to follow the instructions for authors" (Donovan, 2005, p. 239).

The results of the peer review process can determine the future of a scientist's career and influence other important decisions in the scientific community. Scott sees peer review as "... the main form of decision-making around: who receives money to do which science; who gets the opportunity to publish in the scientific literature; and which individual scientists are selected and promoted within research institutions" (2007, p. 827). Peer review has often been criticized for being unfair, slow, unhelpful, conservative, and expensive. Editors in scientific journals spend a significant amount of time finding reviewers who are willing to participate in a journal's quality control process and who are able to finish their peer review professionally and on time. In situations in which journal editors are able to find scientists who are willing to participate in the peer review process, they also face problems such as: untimely response from peer reviewers, unprofessionally written review, bad communication with the reviewers, receiving requests for a payment for services rendered by reviewers, etc. It is not uncommon for authors to protest upon receiving the article manuscript review which can sometimes be devastating for their career. Authors sometimes receive harsh and even offensive reviews which lead them to a decision to give up on revising the reviewed article manuscript or they give up on sending their reviewed or rejected article manuscript to another journal. Martin warns that "talented individuals have been lost to research because of damaging reports from referees" (2008, p. 301). Fischer also noticed that "manuscript reviews are not done well (e.g., tardy, sarcastic, brutally critical, vague or unhelpful)" (2011, p. 226). In their article on publishing in top journals, Macdonald and Kam also looked at peer review very unsympathetically as they claim that the top journal editors "invite legions of

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