

Editorial Note

JOURNAL-AUTHOR COMMUNICATION: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF HIGH-IMPACT JOURNALS' ACCESSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

Background: *The paper addresses the challenges faced by authors when submitting their work to high-impact journals. It highlights the most common issues authors experience in their preparation for submission, the submission process itself, and the subsequent acceptance or rejection of papers submitted to Q1 and Q2 domestic journals. The difficulties reported by the researchers embrace the issue of rejection reasons as well as the quality of communication from journals. The latter has been addressed by analysing the way and the context in which Q1 and Q2 domestic journals communicate their requirements for submission, their decision-making processes, and the guidelines provided for preparing a manuscript prior to submission.*

Methods: *The results of the research were obtained through the application of content analysis. It presupposed the formation of the corpus of illustrative material consisting of texts disclosed on journals' websites related to the submission and decision-making processes. The criterion for analysis was the presence or absence of assessment criteria disclosed by high-impact journals (Q1, Q2) to assess their adherence to principles of "transparency" and "accessibility" for authors.*

Results and Conclusions: *The issues identified by the authors in the questionnaire were addressed by highlighting the most common issues encountered when submitting manuscripts. The guidelines for authors were explained in terms of the basic elements that embody the major criteria for assessment, namely relevance, quality, ethics and integrity. These elements were presented in a table for quick reference, which potential authors can apply before submitting their papers to their chosen high-impact journal. Moreover, a list of other potential issues was provided as an extra reference for authors. To conclude, not all the journals analysed communicated the full range of information requested by authors, so in this respect, the communication of the decision-making process is somewhat complicated and thus potentially unclear for authors.*

1 INTRODUCTION

The international fame of national science is the result of an array of factors, among them the number of national journals with high impact indexed in Scopus / Web of Science. Scopus is one of the largest abstract and citation databases covering a wide range of disciplines. Web of Science is developed by Clarivate Analytics as an expansive citation index for scholarly literature. The journals are also graded by quartiles. Quartiles of the journals are formed according to their impact factor and other metrics to provide researchers with information about the journal's current status within its field. This standing of the journal can be ranked with Quartile (Q), ranging from Quartile 1 (Q1) as the most influential to journals with Quartile 4 (Q4) as the least influential in its field. Each Quartile covers 25% of all journals indexed by the database. The most preferential among the scholars aiming to spread their research to the vastest public are the journals with Quartiles 1 and 2 (Q1 and Q2), which have obtained assessment as belonging to the category with a high level of quality and influence.

According to Open Science in Ukraine (OSU) (dated 31 July 2024), there are 183 Ukrainian journals listed as such that are indexed either in Scopus or WOS.¹

According to the OSU database dated 2024, there are 29 domestic journals marked with Q1 and Q2 in Scopus and WOS in 2023,² among them are:

- 14 Ukrainian journals with only Q1 in Scopus or WOS, which make 26 % of all indexed in Scopus or WOS;
- 10 Ukrainian journals with only Q2 in Scopus or WOS, which make 18 % of all indexed in Scopus or WOS;
- 5 Ukrainian journals with Q1 and/or Q2 in both Scopus and WOS, which make up 9 % of all indexed in Scopus or WOS.

The above-listed journals are the most reputable and thus make a top choice for prospective authors. This raises an important question: Are these journals sufficiently accessible to allow the majority of prospective authors to submit their research and achieve publication? To explore this, prospective authors communicate with the journal or its editor, who acts as the journal's representative.

Upon selecting the journal, prospective authors of scientific works begin their communication with the journal by familiarising themselves with the instructions for authors. These resources come in the form of authors' guidelines, submission samples, and instructions. Such type of communication is indirect, occurring between the author and the journal's hypothetical editor through guidelines and other texts intended for prospective authors.

1 'Ukrainian Scientific Journals in Scopus and Web of Science' (*Open Science in Ukraine (OSU)*, 31 July 2024) <<https://openscience.in.ua/ua-journals>> accessed 30 September 2024.

2 *ibid.*

Content analysis presupposes the formation of the corpus of the illustration material, namely the texts disclosed on the website of the journal in sections “Submissions,” “Recommendations for Authors,” and “Guidelines for Authors” in terms of the presence or absence of some basic elements like assessment criteria, policies, samples etc. These elements, as outlined by international editorial societies, are recognised as contributing to a journal's transparency. So, the content analysis of the assessment criteria and policies disclosed by high-impact (Q1 and Q2) journals aims to determine whether these journals meet the criteria of transparency and accessibility.

Are authors, as stakeholders of the publishing process, familiar with what is requested from them?

To answer the question posed, a survey was conducted³ involving 60 participants with prior authorship experience. The questionnaire focused on monitoring authors' experience in communicating with journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science (Q1, Q2). The findings revealed that:

- 1) all respondents had had experience with their submissions to the mentioned journals within the last 5 years;
- 2) the most common reasons for rejection were:
 - mismatching the scope: outlined by 35 % of respondents;
 - issues with methods and methodology: reported by 23 % of respondents;
- 3) although the majority of respondents were quite satisfied with communication with the journal, 30 % were not content with the quality of communication they experienced;
- 4) 30 % of respondents reported that among the reasons for the rejection of their papers, some were either different or only partially different from those stated in the requirements for submission. These respondents expressed a desire for clear, open-access information outlining the journal's requirements regarding impact/originality, text quality, methodology, literature selection, and the submission and publication process.

The survey results point to several challenges, particularly in communicating requirements related to scope, originality, impact, methodology, and other key aspects. Additionally, the communication method—such as language factors, structural difficulties, or other elements within submission guidelines—was not always clear or transparent enough for authors to fully grasp. Therefore, it can be concluded that authors, as key stakeholders in the publishing process, are not always familiar with what is requested of them.

3 The survey was conducted by the National Research Foundation of Ukraine (NRFU) as part of the competition for research and development projects “2023.03 Excellent Science in Ukraine”, see: NRFU, ‘Publishing Ecosystems: Series 1 (Authors Concerns): The Questionnaire’ <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/12XE_5eCerTShwTIMN6bVfdpFOsd5bUHiiY1OOfsGIw/edit#responses> accessed 30 September 2024.

In this respect, creating a publishing ecosystem is highly requested since the journals and potential authors must be familiar with each other's needs and demands. The success of a journal significantly depends on the top research it publishes, while prospective authors rely on clear and precise guidelines from the journal to ensure their submissions meet the required standards. Therefore, analysing how journals communicate their request for originality, quality, and field of research/scope is essential to ensure their accessibility is timely. Since these expectations are typically conveyed through submission guidelines, content analysis is necessary to monitor the content of these texts.

2 ACCESSIBILITY OF A JOURNAL

The accessibility of a journal lies in its ability to clearly communicate its policies to potential authors, which in turn will contribute to further publication. Successful manuscript publication depends on many factors, one of which is the manuscript assessment. The newest study by Kate Chatfield (Editor, *Research Ethics*), supported by Joao Monteiro (Chief Editor, *Nature Medicine*) and Fritz Schmuhl (Executive Publisher Springer, *Nature*), and funded by the European Union, was presented in February 2024 under the title "Guidance for Fair and Fast Desk Assessment of Submitted Manuscripts During Times of Crisis." The study offered some basic suggestions for journals to maintain transparency and thus remain accessible to authors.⁴ These suggestions emphasise ensuring fairness in the assessment process through establishing transparent criteria, which are listed as follows:

- the criteria for submission assessment should be specified in the journal's guidelines for submission;
- the description of the editorial decision-making process is recommended to be included in the journal's guidelines for submission
- authors should be informed about the reasons for the rejection, referring to the assessment criteria outlined in the guidelines for submission.⁵

The availability of clearly defined submission criteria is a fundamental requirement for a fair journal policy and the transparency of its activities, ensuring submissions are assessed without bias. Moreover, such criteria can enable authors to understand what is requested and highly appreciated by the journal, thus aiding them in avoiding rejection due to issues of relevance, quality, ethics and integrity.

4 Kate Chatfield, João Monteiro and Fritz Schmuhl, *Guidance for Fair and Fast Desk Assessment of submitted Manuscripts During Times of Crisis: A Report for PREPARED* (EU 2024) <<https://prepared-project.eu/fast-track-guidance/>> accessed 30 September 2024.

5 *ibid* 7.

Table 1. Presence and content of authors' guidelines

Guidelines for Submission (GFS)		Process of decision making		Criteria for submission assessment	
Provided in GFS	100 % in Q1J* 100 % in Q2J**	Included In GFS	50 % in Q1J 30 % in Q2J	Specified in GFS	100 % in Q1J 100 % in Q2J
Not provided in GFS	0 % in Q1J 0 % in Q2J	Not included GFS	50 % in Q1J 70 % in Q2J	Not specified in GFS	0 % in Q1J 0 % in Q2J
		Not disclosed	20 % in Q1J 35 % in Q2J	Not disclosed	0 % in Q1J 0 % in Q2J

* *Quartile 1 Journal*

** *Quartile 2 Journal*

The analysis of 28 domestic Q1 and Q2 journals offered by the platform OSU⁶ (see Table 1) outlines that all the above-stated journals communicate the guidelines for authors, submission demands, and assessment criteria. Of these, 50% of Q1 and 30 % of Q2 journals communicate their decision-making process.

3 BASIC ELEMENTS OF SUBMISSION'S ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) outlines the necessity of transparency, educating researchers about publication policies, and publishing clear instructions in journals regarding submission expectations as top priorities for good editorial practice.⁷ To address the demand for transparency, journals are encouraged to disclose their submission assessment criteria to prospective authors.⁸

Submission assessment is the vital and decisive point in determining the status of the paper. It is a complicated process and requires the involvement of a set of indicators to

6 Ukrainian Scientific Journals (n 1).

7 In 2017, COPE reviewed the Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for Editors and consolidated them into one, much shorter, document entitled 'Core Practices', see: COPE, 'Core Practices' (*Committee on Publication Ethics*, 2017) <<https://publicationethics.org/core-practices>> accessed 30 September 2024.

8 Chatfield, Monteiro and Schmuhl (n 4) 6.

correspond on the part of an author⁹ and the criteria for submission assessment on the part of the journal (COPE, EASE). The latter function as threshold criteria embracing relevance, quality, ethics and integrity. Each of the criteria is further split into several indications to be evaluated.

Criterion of *relevance* embraces:

- assessment for scope (whether the manuscript lies within the scope and the aims of the journal);
- checking for the presence of up-to-date priorities (whether the manuscript corresponds to the current priorities of the journal);
- understanding the novelty /originality (whether the contribution of the manuscript is novel to the field);
- assessment of the quality context (whether the context of the manuscript is devised from the contemporary database).¹⁰

Clearly stating the journal's scope and aims allows journal managers and potential authors to quickly master the relevance factor of a paper, whether already published or offered for publication and ensures prospective authors submit pertinent manuscripts.¹¹ The priorities oriented toward the agenda and novelty of the research attract potential readers, bring new citations, and promote the journal's popularity. Consistent context driven by contemporary databases ensures the research's quality.

Criterion of *quality* includes:

- assessment of adhering to writing standards (appropriate academic style and required formatting);
- assessment of the quality of analysis (its depth and support by the arguments);
- assessment of methodology consistency (whether the methods for data collection are appropriate for the research aims);
- assessment of aims stated (whether the aim/hypothesis/research question is distinctly formulated).

Clearly defining "quality" in a journal's submission requirements enables potential authors to understand what falls into the category of "low" or "insufficient quality." This clarity allows the quality assessment to be transparent and allows prospective authors to evaluate the risk of rejection based on insufficient quality. Adversely, it provides authors preparing

9 Please, refer to: Sylwia Ufnalska and Alison Terry, *EASE Quick Check Table for Submission* (EASE Publ 2023) <<https://ease.org.uk/publications/ease-statements-resources/quick-check-table-for-submissions>> accessed 30 September 2024; European Association of Science Editors, 'EASE Guidelines for Authors and Translators of Scientific Articles to be Published in English' (2018) 44(4) European Science Editing e1, doi:10.20316/ESE.2018.44.e1 <<https://ease.org.uk/publications/author-guidelines-authors-and-translators/>> accessed 30 September 2024.

10 Chatfield, Monteiro and Schmuhl (n 4) 9.

11 *Open Access Journal Toolkit* <<https://www.oajournals-toolkit.org/>> accessed 30 September 2024.

for submission the opportunity to prepare thoroughly, using a checklist that includes elements such as academic writing style, sound analysis and argumentation, sound methodology, and clearly stated aims. Additionally, this proactive approach benefits both authors and journal managers by reducing the likelihood of low-quality submissions and, consequently, the workload associated with processing them.

Criterion of *ethics and integrity* includes:

- Availability of ethics approval evidence (where relevant);
- Compliance with research ethics (where relevant);
- Statement of conflict of interests (whether information on funding of the study and related issues are disclosed);
- Proper researcher conduct, with no evidence of misconduct such as data fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, citation manipulation, excessive self-citation, or suspicious submission patterns, such as third-party submission. Check for the presence of AI-generated fragments of the text.

4 JOURNAL'S COMMUNICATION OF THEIR ASSESSMENT CRITERIA, DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND TOOLS APPLIED

Guidelines for authors in Journals under analysis are split into several sections:

- ⇒ *Journal's communication of assessment criteria*
- ⇒ *Journal's communication of editorial decision-making process*
- ⇒ *Journal's communication tools applied: guidelines, templates, instructions*
- ⇒ *Journal's communication of editorial decision-making process*

Each of the sections is communicated by journals differently (Table 2).

Table 2. Communication of journals' policies

Relevance criterium	stated by 80 % of Q1J and 78 % of Q2J
	not stated by 0 % of Q1J and 0% of Q2J
	partially stated 20% of Q1J and 22 % of Q2J
Quality criterium	explained by 100 % of Q1J and 100 % of Q2J
	not explained 0 % of Q1J and 0 % of Q2J
	partially explained 0 % of Q1J and 0 % of Q2J
Ethics and Integrity Criterium	explained by 100 % of Q1J and 100 % of Q2J
	not explained by 0 % of Q1J and 0 % of Q2J
	partially explained by 0 % of Q1J and 0% of Q2J

Editorial making process is disclosed in guidelines for authors by: 50 % of Q1J 30 % of Q2J	Editorial making process is <i>not</i> disclosed in guidelines for authors by: 50 % of Q1J 70 % of Q2J
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To make the process of applying for submission assessment criteria more accessible and understandable for authors, it is recommended that some basic items be included in a brief self-assessment process. Therefore, the table below has been devised to assist potential authors in conducting a preliminary assessment of their paper.

Table 3. Quick Check of Instruments for the Decision-Making Process

Relevance	Does the manuscript lie within the scope and aims of the journal?
	Does the manuscript correspond to the up-to-date priorities of the journal?
	What novelty does the research bring to the field?
	Is the quality of the content derived from contemporary databases?
Quality	Are the norms and format of academic style followed?
	Is the analysis presented characterised by its depth?
	Is the analysis well supported by arguments?
	Is the aim/hypothesis/research question clearly formulated?
Ethics and Integrity	Is there any suspicion of non-compliance with research ethics?
	Are the authors, when working in collaboration between high-income and low-income, aware of the TRUST Code?
	Is there any issue regarding an undisclosed conflict of interest?
	Is there suspicion of available funding?
	Is there any sign of misconduct?
	Are there any authorship problems spotted?
	Is the original author submitting the paper?
	Is there any evidence that the submission is redundant or duplicates another one published previously?
	Is there any suspicion of the presence of fragments of AI-generated text?
	Is there a declaration of not using AI tools in the submitted research?

The table was designed to enhance the transparency and accessibility of the submission assessment process and facilitate more transparent author-journal communication.

Additionally, it enables prospective authors to review their submissions against international criteria for submissions, ensuring the absence of common issues such as:

- Non-compliance with the journal's scope;¹²
- Suspected ethical problems in the submitted manuscript;¹³
- Authors working in international collaborations;¹⁴
- Issues with conflict of interests;¹⁵
- Authorship disputes;¹⁶
- Manipulation involving third-party authorship;¹⁷
- Issues of redundancy and duplication.¹⁸

5 CONCLUSIONS

Author-journal communication begins when a potential author familiarises themselves with the journal, namely its specificity and grounds for publication, and continues until either the manuscript is published or rejected (unless the author does not appeal the editorial decision). This communication is implied due to the fact that the potential author communicates with the editor of the journal through the materials placed on the journal's website; its quality plays an important role in engaging perspective research to the journal. Such type of communication is not always effective. Among the problems authors face while submitting to a high-impact journal are those that cover the requirements of the journal's scope, originality, impact, and methodology. Therefore, an analysis of journal websites to evaluate the presence and availability of these requirements is essential.

12 COPE, 'Flowcharts and Infographics' (*Committee on Publication Ethics*, 2024) <<https://publicationethics.org/guidance/Flowcharts>> accessed 30 September 2024.

13 COPE, 'Suspected Ethical Problem in a Submitted Manuscript' (*Committee on Publication Ethics*, 4 January 2022) <<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.19>> accessed 30 September 2024.

14 *The TRUST Code: A Global Code of Conduct for Equitable Research Partnerships* (TRUST 2018) <<https://www.globalcodeofconduct.org/>> accessed 30 September 2024.

15 COPE, 'Undisclosed Conflict of Interest in a Submitted Manuscript' (*Committee on Publication Ethics*, 8 November 2022) <<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.6>> accessed 30 September 2024.

16 COPE, 'How to Spot Authorship Problems' (*Committee on Publication Ethics*, 5 March 2024) <<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.16>> accessed 30 September 2024.

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Additionally, it has been further established that the inclusion of such elements is a significant indicator of high-impact journals, which must adhere to the criteria of transparency and availability for prospective authors. The quality of a journal also depends on effectively communicating the requirements for submission as well as their content, namely a clear description of evaluation criteria, the submission assessment procedure and the editorial decision-making process.

Content analysis of high-impact journals revealed that all journals under analysis communicate the requirements for submission in authors' guidelines, with a strong emphasis on the requirements for originality. However, it has been established that not all journals communicate their editorial-making process or evaluation of submissions. Therefore, a quick-check table for authors to self-assess their submissions, together with a list of references to educational material, has been provided to help resolve potential challenges that mostly arise during the submission and publication processes.

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Illustrative material of content analysis

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Summary: 1. Introduction. – 2. Accessibility of a journal. – 3. Basic elements of submission's assessment criteria. – 4. Journal's communication of their assessment criteria, decision-making process and tools applied. – 5. Conclusions.

Keywords: *accessibility of a journal, high-impact journals, journal's communication, submission of article, decision-making process.*

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АНОТАЦІЯ УКРАЇНСЬКОЮ МОВОЮ

Нотатка редактора

КОМУНІКАЦІЯ "ЖУРНАЛ – АВТОР":

КОНТЕНТ-АНАЛІЗ ДОСТУПНОСТІ ЖУРНАЛІВ ІЗ ВИСОКИМ ІМПАКТ-ФАКТОРОМ

Ольга Дунаєвська

АНОТАЦІЯ

Вступ. У статті розглядаються проблеми, з якими стикаються автори, коли звертаються з поданнями до журналів із високим ступенем впливу. Дослідження висвітлює найпоширеніші проблеми, з якими автори стикалися під час підготовки до подання, самої подачі та подальшого прийняття чи відхилення їхніх робіт (поданих у вітчизняні журнали Q1, Q2). Труднощі, про які повідомляють дослідники, стосуються причин відмови, а також якості спілкування. Останнє було розглянуто шляхом аналізу способу та контексту, у якому вітчизняні журнали Q1 та Q2 повідомляють про свої вимоги до процесів подання та прийняття рішень, а також шляхом виявлення вимог до елементів, які потрібно переглянути перед поданням статті до журналу.

Методи. Результати дослідження отримано шляхом застосування контент-аналізу. Це передбачало формування корпусу ілюстративного матеріалу з текстів, оприлюднених на сайтах журналів, що стосуються процесів подання та прийняття рішень. Показником, який слід було визначити під час аналізу, була наявність чи відсутність критеріїв оцінки, які оприлюднюють журнали з високим впливом (Q1, Q2), щоб оцінити відповідність журналів принципам «прозорості» та «доступності» для їх авторів.

Результати та висновки. Проблеми, зазначені авторами в анкеті, були вирішені шляхом розгляду найбільш вразливих питань під час подання їхніх рукописів. Інструкції для авторів були роз'яснені з точки зору того, що містять основні елементи, які втілюють основні критерії для оцінювання, а саме: відповідність, якість, етика та чесність. Вони були пояснені та запропоновані в таблиці для швидкої перевірки, яку потенційний автор може застосувати перед тим, як подати свою статтю до вибраного журналу з високим ступенем впливу. Крім того, перелік інших потенційних проблем, які можуть виникнути, був зроблений як додаткова довідкова примітка автора. Підсумовуючи, не всі проаналізовані журнали повідомляли повний спектр інформації, яку запитували автори, тому внаслідок цього процедура прийняття рішень є децю складною для авторів і, отже, є потенційно незрозумілою.

Ключові слова: доступність журналу, журнали з великим впливом, комунікація журналу, подання статті, процес прийняття рішень.