

Where are our journals heading?

The guest editorial by Lakhota¹ prompted us to rethink the current scenario of scientific periodicals in India. We agree that Indian researchers have been biased towards the so-called national journals by contributing their important findings to the well-known international journals with higher impact factor. There is a need to change this attitude for the betterment of science in the country. However, our authors are not solely responsible for this situation. National journals should also be proactive in shouldering the responsibilities.

If the journals published in the country are classified, one can come across many categories. The first is 'the mushroom category' open access journals, which publish most rapidly soon after the payments are made. One need not be an expert in the journal's subject area. In many cases a researcher from one background may be asked to contribute or review a manuscript in completely unrelated field. Thanks to the growing number of educational institutions without adequate research facilities, such journals are never in a dearth of articles.

The second category includes the old and established journals, which are generally the mouthpiece of an apex organization or a society in the relevant field. These journals have made good effort in the recent past to speed up the manuscript submission-tracking process, and to improve visibility of their contents among the international audience through creation of on-line portals and websites. However, after submission of manuscripts, there is hardly any activity seen on the authors' homepage in many journals. One of the reputed journals has clearly mentioned in its guidelines that enquiries regarding the manuscripts should be made only after 3 months of initial submission. And interestingly, 'awaiting assignment' continues to be on display even several months after one's enquiry, thereby discouraging the authors from contributing another article to the journal. On the contrary, a foreign-based

international journal mentions in its guidelines that 'if we are unable to complete the review process in 3 months, the author is free to publish it elsewhere!' This difference in attitude should get dissolved to bridge the gap between the standards of the two journals. One of our colleagues submitted an article three times to the same journal due to the editor's response on enquiry – 'we received the article but right now we are unable to track it, so kindly send a copy once again!' Finally the article got published after four years of initial submission.

Another group of journals, the money-churning machines, demands handsome amounts in the form of membership, article processing and publication charges. Editors of such journals send a bill for all the charges as soon as the article reaches their desks. The rates are fixed for everything and authors need not to worry about their poor math to calculate the wide array of charges. Interestingly, soon after the demand draft reaches the journal office, the acceptance letter is dispatched without even a nominal peer review! Forget about the scientific soundness of the article, even the minimum linguistic proficiency cannot be expected from them. In this regard, our experience with a German editor is worth mentioning, who corrected our manuscript word-by-word and still sent it back for revision to clear a small doubt which she had even after two rounds of corrections! Her dedication is worth appreciation.

The last group of journals, to which the *Current Science* also belongs, is generally equipped with everything a journal should possess to have a good standing in the international scientific fraternity. They have a rapid and rigorous peer review, faster communication, open access and contribute their bit for the growth of science for the betterment of life. These journals need no publicity which the cheap, spurious, open access journals constantly need. The quality of articles published in such journals is improving drastically in recent times and many

researchers have also understood their potential.

No journal can raise its standard within a day; but it is a continuous process of improvement. The most important aspect lacking in the system is the absence of communication between editors and authors. Every author expects some kind of response from the editorial office, which keeps his/her hopes about the article alive. Many journals do not even bother to acknowledge the receipt of an article. One editor did not respond for months together, and so we mailed to the editorial office asking permission to withdraw the manuscript. Due to lack of communication, after a few months, the article was sent to some other journal. Surprisingly, a mail from the previous journal's editor appeared in the mailbox after many months saying 'your article has been accepted!' By that time, the second journal had already sent the paper to press.

We understand that being the editor of a journal involves a herculean task. However, if a swift reply is given to an author, his/her belief in the journal is bound to increase. In this case, even if an article is rejected, the author would not feel bad as he/she will be assured of fair judgement on the journal's part due to his/her belief in the system. This belief needs to be strengthened by establishing a proper relation with the authors. A good communication could assure the journals that the authors would come back to them with better articles in future.

1. Lakhota, S. C., *Curr. Sci.*, 2013, **105**, 287–288.

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