

Problems of editorial management for scientific publications. Experiences from an economics and finance journal

Problemas de gestión editorial para publicaciones científicas. Experiencias desde una revista de economía y finanzas

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Abstract

For the planning and editing of online scientific journals, emphasis should be placed on editorial processes and functions; some of which are peer review and verdict, editing, layout, publication, document preservation, storage system, access to publication, publication indexing, visibility and positioning of the article. This article analyzes the main problems of editorial management for digital scientific publications. It is a descriptive field study, in which a search and recovery of previous published works, such as articles and editorial notes, as well as the systematization of experiences of an Ecuadorian academic journal of economics and finance, with digital format and open access, which starts its activities in 2020, was carried out. The experiences were compiled from information provided by the editor-in-chief of the journal, the coordinator of the scientific committee and a reviewer belonging to the international committee. The results show that there are editorial problems that may arise during the management of the publication of scientific articles, which may be the responsibility of the author, the reviewer or the editor, depending on the case; as well as deficiencies in the use of information and communication technologies to support the management and publication of articles. It is concluded that the success of the publication of scientific papers in academic journals depends on the application of sequential editorial processes and the technological support available to the publisher.

Key words: editorial management; editorial processes; editorial management issues; academic journals

Resumen

Para la planificación y edición de revistas científicas en línea, debe hacerse énfasis en los procesos y funciones editoriales; algunos de los cuales son revisión y veredicto de los pares, edición, maquetación, publicación, preservación del documento, sistema de almacenamiento, acceso a la publicación, indexación de la publicación, visibilidad y posicionamiento del artículo. El presente artículo analiza los principales problemas de gestión editorial para publicaciones científicas digitales. Se trata de un estudio descriptivo de campo, en el que se realizó la búsqueda y recuperación de trabajos precedentes publicados, como artículos y notas editoriales; así como también, la sistematización de experiencias de una revista académica ecuatoriana de economía y finanzas, con formato digital y de acceso abierto, que inicia sus actividades en el año 2020. Las experiencias fueron recopiladas a partir de información suministrada por la editora en jefe de la revista, la coordinadora del comité científico y una revisora perteneciente al comité internacional. Los resultados muestran que existen problemas editoriales que pueden presentarse durante la gestión de publicación de artículos científicos, cuya responsabilidad puede recaer sobre el autor, el revisor o el editor, dependiendo el caso; así como deficiencias en el uso de tecnologías de información y comunicación como apoyo para la gestión y publicación de artículos. Se concluye que, el éxito de la publicación de documentos científicos en revistas académicas, depende de la aplicación de procesos editoriales secuenciales y del apoyo tecnológico con que cuente la editorial.

Palabras clave: gestión editorial; procesos editoriales; problemas de gestión editorial; revistas académicas

Introduction

Academic journals, considered a means of dissemination of research results, represent a communication space highly used by the scientific community and that has been evolving, mainly in evaluation, technical and formal aspects (Diestro et al, 2017). In this same sense, Buéla-Casal (2002), states that the growth of scientific journals has become lighter to the same extent as scientific production has been growing, being the contents they contain more specialized every day; and, it could be added, better disseminated.

According to Palacios (2016), scientific journals represent an important instrument of communication, which must meet objectives that are intertwined with each other, such as the publication of quality articles, the promotion of scientific cooperation, the internationalization of knowledge, and the stimulation of discussion in the academic field. Because they represent a means of communication, academic journals are obliged to meet the information needs of the communities to which they are addressed, attending to their desires and interests with a high sense of responsibility and quality.

The variety of scientific contributions and products, as well as their relevance vary according to each area or discipline, together with other practices that mark differences and show the nature of science, such as types of authorship, citation styles, periodicity, length, logical structure, forms of presentation, among others (Delgado and Ruiz, 2009). In addition to the above, with the advent of information and communication technologies, the management, editing, publication and dissemination of scientific journals have been greatly favored, since many of them are now available on their own website or through databases that index them (Abadal and Rius, 2006).

In another place, editors, authors and reviewers form the trio required for good and proper dissemination of knowl-

edge. Povl Munk-Jorgensen, the editor of the *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, Personal Communication, has used the expression Scientific Triangle to refer to the relationship between the author, the reviewer and the editor-reader (Heras, et al, 2010). However, the editor bears the greatest responsibility, since he/she is in charge of preserving the scientific and editorial quality of the journal he/she edits, in order to guarantee that the contributions with the option to be published in the future are evaluated correctly, accurately, objectively and without prejudice; additionally, he/she is responsible for protecting the rights of both authors and reviewers, for an appropriate dissemination of knowledge. However, there are often cases of editorial dishonesty, where a series of actions are incurred that harm the quality of the information transmitted to the scientific community and society (Valderrama, 2012).

An important detail to mention is that, in journals managed by large publishing houses, the editor's functions are normally well defined and are not only transmitted but also required by such publishers. However, as in any task that is delegated, the work can be well performed, but also poorly performed, i.e., performed efficiently or inefficiently. This is due to the fact that many times the functions are established, but not the way they should be done; thus certain editorial vices appear (Valderrama, 2012).

One of these relevant actions or vices that harm the quality of journals is editorial inbreeding or endogamy (Bošnjak et al, 2011); referred to the presence of editorial members directly related to the publisher, the journal, the scientific board or the editorial board, and who are listed as authors of a scientific article published in it. Regarding this, Parada (2017) mentions that lately the transparency policies within the editorial processes, as well as open science, are bringing

to light the degree of inbreeding present in academic journals; a situation that is being observed by authors external to the editorial board of the journals, in order to decide where to publish.

In addition to the aforementioned behavioral problems and actions on the part of editors, there are others associated with misconduct and negligence that also fall under the line of editorial ethics. Such is the case of untimely responses to authors, failure to communicate about the evaluation, skipping the manuscript evaluation process, making inappropriate decisions about whether or not to accept the manuscript, unedited evaluation reports, inappropriate or discourteous treatment of authors, incomplete or not very detailed information, or even an arrogant attitude towards authors and reviewers (Valderrama, 2012). To this is added the resistance to the existing technological support for the editorial management of scientific journals, on the part of the editors.

Based on the above, this article aims to analyze the editorial management of scientific publications, specifically, unethical editorial vices that harm the editorial management of an academic publication. It is a descriptive field study, in which a search and recovery of previous published works, such as articles and editorial notes, as well as the systematization of experiences of an Ecuadorian academic journal of economics and finance, which starts its activities in 2020, was carried out. The experiences were compiled from information provided by the editor-in-chief of the journal, the coordinator of the scientific committee and a reviewer belonging to the international committee.

The intention of this article is to look at the editorial management problems faced by scientific journals. The initial idea with the present study was to learn about the experiences of journals with little time of creation or established during the full development of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, through the application of a convenience sample, the researchers decided to work with an Ecuadorian academic journal of economics and finance, for reasons of ease of access to information, as well as the willingness of the authors to tell their own experiences as members of the editorial team of the selected journal.

A theoretical approach to editorial management

Editorial management is known as the interactive and dynamic process in which the editorial process developed by the institution or organization responsible for publishing scientific and intellectual products is planned, implemented, controlled and improved; using both material and human resources, according to the achievement of the proposed objectives based on laws and principles (Parra, 2018). For other researchers, such as Jiménez-Hidalgo, et al (2008), editorial management is supported by a program that facil-

itates the control, streamlining and efficiency of the cycle that takes place between the author and the publisher; according to these authors, editorial management is associated with software used for editorial processes; this should not be confused as such with editorial management, as it encompasses other processes.

For their part, López-Hung, et al (2022) assume the management of scientific journals as part of organizational management, whose objective is to guarantee the publication of scientific articles, integrating processes of management, editorial, evaluation and certification of relevance and originality, and evaluation and positioning of the journal; all supported by information and communication technologies, and in search of dissemination, access, visibility and impact of the scientific contribution; as well as excellence and satisfaction of the demands of the authors.

More broadly, Rivero (2019) identifies different processes applicable to the publication of articles in scientific journals. Among these are managerial processes, which include editorial policies, management and administration; academic processes that include scientific evaluations and knowledge construction from the selection of the texts to be processed; technological processes, which include the use of instruments and computer media, software, among others; and processes to evaluate the publication, which include aspects concerning quality, competitiveness and improvement of its indicators. The above, as a whole, is recognized as an editorial process.

Regarding technological processes, it should be mentioned that there are systems and programs that facilitate the management of tasks associated with the editorial process, particularly those in digital or electronic format. In this regard, Jiménez-Hidalgo, et al (2008) explain that the editorial management system is a specialized program that contributes to the control, agility and efficiency of the editorial cycle between the author of the scientific production and the publisher. Taking into account the above mentioned authors, it should be noted that a good editorial management process should be supported by technological systems created for this purpose, since this would imply not only an improvement in the quality of editorial processes, but also savings in human labor, financial resources and time.

Editorial management systems make it possible to keep a complete record of the activities carried out from the moment a manuscript is received for publication, in order to be able to control the stage at which it is and the steps that remain to be taken to finalize the process. One of the systems widely used for editorial management is the Open Journal System (OJS), which is an open source program created to expand and improve access to scientific research. Open Journal System is an online editorial management system, which has been developed under free software

principles, offering integral solutions to all those aspects associated with the edition and publication of scientific contributions. This system makes possible a dynamic website that provides the management of tasks of a scientific journal, namely, submission of articles, arbitration or review, modifications and corrections by authors, sending documents to the proofreader, contact with the layout designer, report on the publication of articles, among others (Lopez, 2012).

Under this system, all those involved in the editing process will be able to access the same platform; however, each one must enter with a personalized password to view only what corresponds to his or her function. For example, the editor may have access to a session containing the new articles received, those being evaluated and those being edited, while the author will only have access to the information he or she has submitted, as well as the status of the evaluation of his or her article and its refereeing results (Jiménez-Hidalgo et al, 2008).

In addition, with regard to the OJS structure, the possible stages of an editorial management system are (Jiménez-Hidalgo, et al, 2008):

- 1) The author sends the article to the journal editor, indicating his personal and institutional affiliation data, as well as the bibliographic data, abstract and keywords of the article. Before sending the article, the author must declare that he/she is submitting it following the established rules for the publication of articles; that he/she is sending an original work that has not been previously published, among other things.
- 2) The editor receives the article and acknowledges receipt to the author by means of an e-mail message, where he/she is also informed that the progress of the article can be followed up on the same platform.
- 3) The editor, or the section editor (if there is one), chooses the reviewers who are invited to evaluate the article; they can accept or reject the invitation. If the answer is affirmative, the original is sent to them, indicating the date by which they must have the evaluation report ready.
- 4) The reviewers evaluate the article and then send the editor a refereeing report, in which they state their verdict: accept the article, accept it with modifications (slight or substantial) or simply reject it.
- 5) The editor contacts the author with the reviewers' comments. If the verdict was of acceptance with modifications, the author must make the changes and the editor will record his final decision in the system. If accepted, the system automatically passes the article to the editing stage.
- 6) The proofreader will find the accepted article in his authorized session; he must correct errors in typography, formatting, application of rules, among others, and then upload the corrected version to the OJS plat-

form; in turn, he will contact the author to request a revision of the latest version of the article. When the author sends the corrected text, which will also be registered as another version of the article, the proofreader must make a final revision, which will be posted in the system, leaving it at the disposal of the layout designer.

- 7) The article is received by the typesetter, who composes the text, tables, charts, graphs, figures, among others. The author is then asked to review the galley proof that contains the layout and almost final text. Once the final corrections have been received, the definitive version is created for publication.
- 8) The editor informs in which volume and issue of the journal the article will be published.

In parallel to the above, the staff involved in the editorial management of the journal performs other functions associated with the content of the issues, such as writing editorial notes, reviews, description of the issue, compendium of articles in the same issue, preparation of special sections, follow-up of details necessary to maintain the quality of the journal, indexing in databases and repositories, promotion in social networks, among other functions. It could be said, therefore, that this does not represent usual tasks of the editorial management and the system, however, under the direction of the editorial boards and scientific committees, they are necessary to complete the issue in process and achieve better visibility of the publication and prestige of the journal.

Problems present during editorial management. Analysis and discussion

All those involved in the editorial process of a scientific contribution favor the success of the publication and its subsequent visibility. Heras, et al (2010) talk about the relationship between author, reviewer and editor-reader within the editorial management process, and the roles they should play. As already mentioned, each of these parties, editor, reviewer and author, have a share of responsibility within the editorial management of scientific publications for digital academic journals (De La Hoz, 2022). Table 1 shows the main problems that may be present during the editorial management for the publication of a scientific article.

Once the problems that may arise during the editorial management of a publication are known, we proceed to explain the editorial experience of the journal under study. The authors of this article, as members of the editorial committee, express that the editorial problems occurred basically at the beginning of the management of the academic journal, since, in their opinion, since it is not well known, nor indexed in catalogs, databases and recognized directories, it becomes unattractive to the scientific community (De La Hoz, 2022).

Table 1.

Main problems faced during editorial management

| Problem | What does it consist of? |
|---|--|
| Informality in the submission and receipt of articles | When the article is neither submitted nor received via the journal's official e-mail, and without a letter of request from the authors.. |
| Omission of the OJS system | When the processes of postulation of an article and assignment of reviewers through the OJS platform designed for this purpose are omitted.. |
| Straight through | The article is published without going through the arbitration process. |
| Favoritism in revisión | This consists of giving a lighter treatment to manuscripts that come from known authors or that are part of the editor's circle. |
| Inappropriate referee | When referees are chosen who are not experts in the subject matter of the article.. |
| Referee at convenience | This consists of assigning referees to an article at convenience, either because the editor wishes the article to be rejected or accepted; assigning either a demanding referee or a referee who is not |
| Incomplete referee | When only one referee is assigned to the item. |
| Minimization or omission of comments | When the editor gives little importance to a referee's comments, or, worse, omits them from his or her final report |
| Endogamy or inbreeding | Excessive publication of articles authored by editors or members of the journal's editorial committee, showing certain favoritism in the evaluation, time of publication and length of the article. |
| Resistance to plagiarism detection software | When the editorial team refuses to use reliable plagiarism detection software to detect similarities with other previously published papers. |
| Ignore similarities | Consists of letting the percentage of similarity obtained once the plagiarism detection software has been passed to the document; and proceed with the publication. |
| Untimely response | When the response time to the author is not met. |
| Non-information of the verdict | When the editor does not inform at any time the verdict of the article and publishes it without your authorization. |
| Untimely corrections | When the author fails to deliver corrections within the stipulated time. |
| "No" manifest | When the publisher does not send to the author, or the author does not return the signed manifest of authorship, originality, and authorization for publication, which must remain as a backup in the publishing house.. |

Note: based on De La Hoz (2022).

From the experience of the journal analyzed for the purpose of this research, a series of problems have been detected that could alter the editorial management process of scientific publications. These problems have an ethical approach, and not only fall on the editorial committee and the editor, but also on the reviewers or referees, as well as on the authors of the postulated document (De La Hoz, 2022).

Reviewing the first three published issues of the analyzed journal, it was observed that the inaugural issue was composed of articles written by members of the editorial committee and the team of reviewers, giving rise to editorial inbreeding, a relevant concept at this time, as stated by Bošnjak et al (2011); demonstrating a lack of exigency in the editorial management since the beginning of the journal. In this regard, Dominguez-Omonte (2019) mentions that editors, reviewers and members of the editorial board who appear as authors should not be involved in the editorial

process of their submitted manuscript, being excluded from any decision taken on it.

On the other hand, according to De La Hoz (2022), one of the main problems is associated with the reviewers, since when a journal is new, it usually has a reduced editorial team that does not cover all the subject areas, therefore, the same reviewers are usually used time after time. In addition, the limited time available to the members of the editorial committee to collaborate with the referees also plays a role, which leads to the use of reviewers who are not experts in the subject matter of the article. It should be noted that this has not been the case of the journal studied, since it has an editorial committee and a large team of reviewers with experience in the different topics of the journal; even so, the short time available for reviewers to accept manuscript revisions is still an inconvenience.

The small number of reviewers causes the editor to engage in unethical practices such as publishing the article without going through the refereeing process; giving a lighter treatment to manuscripts that come from known authors or that are part of the editor's circle; choosing referees who are not experts in the subject matter of the article; assigning referees to an article at convenience, either because the editor wants the article to be rejected or accepted; assigning only one referee to the article (De La Hoz, 2022). In this regard, Valderrama (2012) mentions that this leads to the appearance of editorial flaws during the publication management process.

According to Table 1, other mistakes made by journal editors include: giving little importance to the observations of a referee, or worse, omitting them in their final report; refusing to use a reliable plagiarism detection software to detect similarities with other previously published documents; letting the percentage of similarity obtained once the plagiarism detection software has been passed to the document, proceeding with the publication; not complying with the response time to the author or not informing at any time the verdict of the article, publishing it without the author's authorization. (De La Hoz, 2022).

On the other hand, there are also problems associated with the author. For example, on many occasions there is informality in the reception of articles, i.e., when the article is not received via the journal's official e-mail and without a letter of request from the authors. But, in addition, the application, reception and assignment of reviewers through the Open Journal System can also be omitted, not taking advantage of the facilities provided by this technological tool for the editorial management of scientific publications (De La Hoz, 2022), as referred to by López (2012).

In the case of the journal analyzed, even when manuscripts are received by the publisher's official e-mail and through the system, the Open Journal System is not being used correctly, since in some cases the author sends the document through the OJS platform itself, but then all the stages of the editorial process described by Jiménez-Hidalgo, et al (2008) are not followed through the same system. This means that neither the follow-up of the application by the author nor the assignment of reviewers is done correctly, and, in turn, the latter cannot respond to their review through the OJS; in short, the entire process is not recorded in the editorial management system.

Another problem mentioned in Table 1 has to do with the untimeliness in the delivery of corrections within the stipulated time, and with the non-existence of a manifesto from the editor to the author, stating authorship, originality, and authorization for publication, which should remain as a backup in the editorial (De La Hoz, 2022), common problems in an editorial process, as expressed by Valderrama (2012).

The experience in the journal under study indicates that this happens mainly because the authors do not comply with the timely delivery of the document duly completed and signed by all authors; and, when the time for publication arrives, the editor has no alternative but to publish without waiting for the document. Once the article is published, it is difficult for the author to deliver the document to the editor (De La Hoz, 2022).

In short, some of the editorial processes of the journal chosen for the analysis have not been carried out correctly; one of the probable reasons has to do with the age of the journal, since the results indicate that almost all the editorial problems were present in the first two issues of the journal. Therefore, an analysis of how editorial management is being carried out is necessary, which, according to Rivero (2019), involves a series of important processes prior to publication. All of them as a whole and well applied, lead, as expressed by Palacios (2016), to the fulfillment of some objectives of scientific journals, such as: efficiency, quality, scientific cooperation, internationalization of knowledge, stimulation of academic discussion, among others.

Conclusions

In order to prioritize the scientific quality of the contributions submitted to an academic journal, inbreeding should be avoided, for which editors, reviewers or members of the editorial board who appear as authors should not be involved in the editorial process, so they should be completely excluded from the decisions or verdicts made on the manuscripts in which they are authors or co-authors. This mechanism should be clearly defined in the editorial policies on the submission of scientific contributions.

The editorial board of academic journals should have internal researchers and teachers who are experts in the various areas covered by the journal, as well as invited external reviewers with a scientific background, in order to ensure the quality of their reviews. These reviewers should not know the authorship of the article they are evaluating and the review should be rigorous, detailed and precise, supported by technological tools provided by word processors, so that the author can easily visualize the observations provided.

In this same sense, reviewers should not accept manuscripts for review that are not in the area of expertise of the subject matter of the document; they should always make sure that they are not the only reviewer assigned to the article; and make sure that the editor has sent the author his or her refereeing report. In addition, no reviewer should allow himself to be manipulated by the editor as to the verdict to be issued, nor should he give in to a decrease in the rigorosity of review to which he is normally accustomed.

On the other hand, authors should be instructed on the steps to follow to submit their manuscript through the Open Journal System platform, and get them used to avoid informality in the submission. In addition, they should respect the deadlines stipulated for corrections, if any, maintain good communication with the journal editor, and sign the declaration of authorship, originality and authorization for publication before publication.

In conclusion, the value of a scientific contribution is measured by its correct editorial management, specifically

by an adequate composition of the editorial board, by the use of similarity or plagiarism detection software, by the elimination of inbreeding, by the support of information systems, among others. It should be noted that, among the support systems for reviewers and editors of scientific journals are: Microsoft Office, plagiarism detection software and Open Journal System. The first is used by the reviewers and the other two, namely, plagiarism detection software and OJS, are mostly manipulated by the editorial team, the editor, as well as by the authors of the scientific contribution.

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