

Naive or Caper: Author Behavior

SUNANDA DAS¹, HEMANT JAIN²

The era of 'hobby editors' seems to have become a 'profession' of past. With the increase in number of journals and more so, peer reviewed journals, the concept of journal editors as a profession has taken a serious turn towards good. This has worked in favour of journals as well as authors and researchers.

The handling of research papers and the critical analysis has become stringent. Peer reviewing as a job has found a place in resumes. A journal with rigorous peer reviewing process, chisels an article and gives it a final shape, which is better than the first submission. All these take up editorial working hours and dedication. The audience thus gets to read a robust work of science. This process of reviewing an article and publishing a good research, in turn helps building up a reputation for the journal. This repute, thus, forms one of the selection criteria for authors, who pick a journal to submit their research work. Most of the time, both the journal and author, maintain a long term relationship.

The depressing part of the relationship is that, at times, the editorial finds itself at a futile end. After peer review and the required corrections, the final revised form of an article never comes back. This means that the author has used up the journal resources to mold the article and then decided not to publish the work with the said journal. This could be a last minute decision or a well planned one. If the journal is known for its fine reviewers and editorial handling of articles, authors submit their work, get it polished and then back up. Contrarily, it might not be an 'ethical misconduct' on the part of an author; if the author informs the journal about the honest reason for withdrawal. However, if there is no communication from the author after receiving the feedback, the journal can not close the article immediately. It has to wait for a stipulated time or atleast send a reminder to the author. If after reminding too, there is no reply, it should be assumed that the journal was conned (punished for being good in its job!).

In our experience of more than a decade, we have faced such a situation many times. This is not encouraging for the editorial because of the waste of labour as well as funds. We do not charge for article processing; it is a one time payment of publications charges, post acceptance. After waiting for three weeks (our journal policy) we send a reminder asking for the revised submission. Sometimes we do not get a reply for a long time. At times, we find a mail with a fuzzy reason requesting for withdrawal of the article. In JCDR, we keep a tag on such impish authors by maintaining a data record. The subsequent submissions from the same author are always handled carefully so that we do not end up wasting our resources again. Such unanticipated withdrawals or incidences of authors becoming incommunicado have increased after the change in indexation status of our journal, JCDR. The authors who had published with us, know our working system. So, few of them later submitted articles only to use the journal assets and later withdrew or just refrained from submitting the revised articles. There were cases where post acceptance, publication charges were not paid neither was any communication done from the author's end. In one

such incident, we were made aware of a deceptive behavior of an author-the acceptance mail was presented to institutional authorities to obtain a high ranking job stating that the article is 'in print'. When the HR of the institution reached us, we communicated back saying that the article was never published due to non-payment.

Thinking from an author's perspective, they might have found the feedback too tough to handle or needed more time to rework on the paper, thus not responding. In any case, we as a journal, would recommend that the authors should still communicate back. The points in the feedback that can be taken up, should be used to revise the article. For the rest, we can offer some help. Either, the authors should let us know why the revision on certain points from the feedback cannot be accepted, if they do not agree to the reviewer's suggestions, if they need more time that what a journal provides for revision. In all the conditions mentioned above, there can be a middle path wherein the author need not stop carrying the article forward. This is viable only if, at the initial stage, the author is serious enough to get the article published in the said journal. If on the other hand, the author had only decided to use up the editorial process, we cannot change the final consequence (of sudden withdrawal).

Citing a recent episode; based on two reviewer feedback, an article was rejected. The research guide later wrote to us saying that they are willing to do extensive revision under editorial guidance and also cited convincing reasons based on which he wanted another opportunity. So, we sent the article for review again, to a third reviewer. The pooled feedback was then provided to the authors. Here, we want to emphasise that a communication from an author's end is always welcome and may even change the course of an article, in a better direction.

This topic has come up less often, though, we feel that journals face this not so rarely. It is important to see if such author behavior is specific to some part of the world or is more or less spread evenly. Editors discuss this topic in forums but it is time now to come up with some rules on how to handle such authors and how to recover the resources of a journal. The APC policy would be of marginal help only, because, authors would not take the paid services for honing their articles. Some journals ask for a percentage of full publication charges for withdrawal. How 'ethical' is this is a matter of unease. Also, this can be done only if the author mails asking for a withdrawal. The situation is difficult for journals who do not have an APC policy or do not state of any charges/conditions in case of withdrawals. We did not find any case report or a resolution for unannounced article withdrawal in COPE guidelines. Such articles cannot be considered as 'retracted' as they were not technically 'published'.

Some editors find a silver lining in such impromptu article withdrawals post review, stating that, the article when gets published in another journal will be atleast in a good form (since it was already reviewed). Thus the science will not be effected (it would be a localised harm to the editorial only).

We suggest that there should be a consortium of journals who should submit names of willfully defaulting authors in a database. Akin to predatory journals, there should be a list of predatory (sic)

authors. As authors check lists (DOAJ, Cabell's Predatory Journal Blacklist etc.) to skim out fake journals, editorials too should also have a list to fall back on to prevent misuse of their resources.

PARTICULARS OF CONTRIBUTORS:

1. Senior Editor, Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research, New Delhi, India.
2. Chief Editor, Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research, New Delhi, India.

NAME, ADDRESS, E-MAIL ID OF THE CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Dr. Hemant Jain,
No. 3, 1/9 Roop Nagar, G.T. Road, Delhi-110007, India.
E-mail: drhemantjain@jcdcr.net

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