

Opinion
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Ethical Reviewers are Essential for Scholarly Journals for Timely Processing of Submissions and Avoiding Retractions

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Today there are many peer-reviewed established international journals where scholars can submit their research works. There are a variety of factors that affect the authors' choices of the target journals.¹ In addition to the reputation of the journal in some specific research areas and its impact factor, the short reviewing process time is another important parameter for scholars to choose the right journal to submit their manuscripts. However, unfortunately a large number of prestigious journals are not concerned about the duration of the peer review. A long review process may not be an issue for the journals, but it causes the authors some troubles. We are living in a century of technology and time plays an important role in our lives. When the evaluation comments get back after a long time, there could be a possibility that the idea of the research is not as novel as the time when the work has been submitted. There is also a more important issue which should be noticed. When the review comments are not returned back in due time, there is a possibility that the invited reviewer does not submit the evaluation results in a timely manner intentionally so that he could have sufficient time to publish that original research in another journal as if it is his own work. This is exactly what happened to one of our recent works published in Environmental Science and Pollution Research journal.² The reviewing process of the submitted paper took about nine months. After the publication of the original research, one day I accidentally noticed that the same work has been published into another international journal by other authors. I contacted the journal we published in and was informed that the Indian corresponding author of the plagiarized paper (<https://doi.org/10.1080/15567036.2017.1407844>) was the reviewer of our manuscript. Fortunately, the plagiarized paper is now retracted, however—despite all the clear evidences regarding this blatant plagiarism—the investigation process by the journal to withdraw the offending item took about 5 months and this fraudulent article has been cited 17 times (8 self-citations, 3 citations by the authors from the same affiliation and 6 ones by the authors with the same nationality) during this time. There is a series of flow charts provided by Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) to outline the steps which should be taken by journals when they face plagiarism.³ According to the retraction guideline, plagiarized publications should be withdrawn as soon as possible in order to minimize the number of citations to the erroneous work.⁴ As well as, in the case of clear plagiarism, the editor has to inform the author's institution and also readers and victims(s) of the offending article to avoid these inauthentic citations.⁵

In conclusion, Ethical peer review is essential for scholarly journals for a timely review process and avoiding paper retractions and established international journals should consider that short duration of peer review is a privilege for both journals and authors.

As well as, blatant plagiarism is known as one of the highest research frauds and according to the research conducted by Decullier and Maisonneuve,⁶ it is one of the top reasons for article retractions. But due to the lacking of punitive measures in this regard, the extent of this indecent practice is growing among unethical researchers. Therefore, scholarly community should pursue severe punishments for those who intentionally plagiarize others' research works.

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