

Identity Verification of Author-Suggested Reviewers

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Background

- ▶ Reviewer fraud is becoming a global issue in scholarly publishing. As a result, there are more retractions and disciplinary actions taken against researchers (Normile 2017; Haug 2015).
- ▶ Recently, ASCE retracted a paper because the peer review process was compromised, calling into question the integrity of the paper (ASCE 2017).
- ▶ An author provided the name of a reviewer with a very similar email address to the real researcher's true address.
- ▶ After an investigation, it was determined that the author had reviewed his own paper.
- ▶ In response, ASCE wanted to understand the frequency of editors using author-suggested reviewers and whether the editors vetted the individuals.

Methods

- ▶ Using SurveyMonkey, editors and associate editors were asked various questions regarding the use of author-suggested reviewers, including how frequently they used author-suggested reviewers, any methods used to verify reviewer identity, and if editors felt the names were useful. Questions included:
- ▶ Does your journal require author-suggested reviewers?
- ▶ Do you use author-suggested reviewers?
 - ▶ If yes, how often?
- ▶ Do you take steps to verify author-suggested reviewer identity?
 - ▶ If yes, provide examples of steps taken?
- ▶ Do you find author-suggested reviewers valuable?

Results

- ▶ ASCE surveyed 800 editors and associate editors, and received 357 responses (45% response rate).
- ▶ Of the 34 journals ASCE publishes, 15 require authors to submit names of potential reviewers and 16 request (not require) suggested reviewers.
- ▶ Question: Do you use author-suggested reviewer?
 - ▶ The data showed 86% of the respondents use author-suggested reviewers frequently or sometimes.

Results

- ▶ Question: Do you take steps to verify author suggested reviewer's identity?
- ▶ The data also showed that 56% take steps to verify a reviewer's identity, institution, expertise and affiliation (if any) with the author, using tools such as Google Scholar and the journal's database for reviewer history.
- ▶ Editor Comments:
 - "I check the email address and university credentials"
 - "I only use them rarely and research them first for personal connections"
 - "I only use suggested reviewers that I know"
 - "I search to confirm identity, affiliation and expertise"
 - "I will check any potential connection between the author and suggested reviewer"

Results

- ▶ Question: Do you find it valuable to have author suggested reviewers?
- ▶ 70% of respondents indicated that it is valuable to have author-suggested reviewers; however, it was necessary to verify the reviewer's affiliation and expertise through various sources to avoid reviewer fraud.
- ▶ Editor Comments:
 - "Our journal is very broad, so sometimes I'm not sure who the experts are in a particular field so suggested reviewers can be helpful. I always make sure that at least one of the reviewers is not from the suggested list".
 - "In some cases the topic needs specific expertise, and the author suggested reviewers helps. In some cases the reviewer does a more critical review than others as they are known to be experts in the field".

Conclusions

- ▶ It is clear from the survey results that editors use and find useful author-suggested reviewers; however, concerns about fraud require additional steps.
- ▶ Several journals removed the option for authors to supply an email address for suggested reviewers. Authors now supply a reviewer's name and institution, leaving the responsibility for finding and verifying a reviewer email with the handling editor. Other journals chose to no longer require or ask for author-suggested reviewers leaving the editors to search for reviewers on their own.



References

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