



Helping publishers get closer to authors

Perspectives from a global survey of academic authors

Interim findings of a large global survey



Table of Contents

Highlights	2
Introduction.....	3
Method.....	3
Results.....	4
Part I – Respondent demographics.....	4
Part II – Publication-related challenges faced by authors.....	5
Part III – Author opinions on open access.....	6
Part IV – Author-journal communication.....	6
Part V – Time to publication.....	6
Part VI – Ethical issues and best publication practices.....	7
Part VII – Overall opinions about the publishing system.....	8
What do the results indicate?	8
How can you help?	9

Highlights

1. The survey **seeks to find out whether authors are happy with the status of the academic publishing system**; if there is anything that they would like to change about it; and the major challenges they face while attempting to get published in international journals.
2. The survey questionnaire covers all major aspects of the journal publication process—manuscript preparation, journal selection, journal processes, peer review, open access, and publication ethics—and is being administered in English, Simplified Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Brazilian Portuguese. **Of 5293 survey respondents, most identified themselves as “authors” and as working in Medicine and Allied Health Sciences.**
3. The top five countries represented so far, in descending order, are **China, Brazil, South Korea, Japan, and the U.S.**
4. Although majority of the authors have been **involved in academic research for more than 5 years**, they indicated that they had **published less than 5 papers**. They also indicated that English was not their first language and that they find it challenging to write in English.
5. Most authors find the manuscript preparation stage, especially framing a research question, "very difficult."
6. Most authors **ranked "impact factor" highest** from among 7 factors that they consider while **selecting a journal**.
7. More than half the authors reported that they had published in an open access (OA) journal. The **most frequently stated reason for publishing OA was increased research reach**.
8. Most authors have reportedly written to a journal for queries or clarifications during the publication process. Of these, the majority indicated that the **journal’s response was prompt and clear**.
9. Most authors indicated that the shortest time (from submission) in which they had a paper published was between 3 to 6 months, **and that the ideal time to publication would be under 3 months**.
10. Respondents varied in their understanding of what constitutes plagiarism and who should receive authorship credit, but **most indicated that they were not familiar with industry-recognized good publication practice standards**.
11. **About one half of the respondents stated that they would like to change something about the academic publishing system**, while the other half stated that they were generally satisfied with it the way it is.
12. The top ranked aspects of journal publishing that authors would like to change, in descending order are **“time to publication,”** followed by **“peer review process/quality,”** followed by **“fairness/objectivity/bias.”**

Introduction

In the last couple of years, a popular yet disconcerting opinion has been frequently shared through industry news in academia: “[Scholarly publishing is broken!](#)” Many [headlines to this effect](#) have emerged in [academic industry news channels](#) spurred by factors such as the increasing competition among researchers to publish in international journals, the reproducibility crisis, lack of recognition for peer reviewers, and questionable research practices. Considering the magnitude of research output generated per year, the possibility that academic publishing might indeed be a broken system is alarming!

In such a scenario, it would seem that obtaining a contemporary perspective from research authors—who function at the very heart of the publishing system—has never been more essential. To systematically aggregate a global author perspective on this matter, [Editage Insights](#) (a global learning and discussion platform for researchers) is currently [running an in-depth survey for academic researchers globally](#). The survey encourages research authors to think about the academic publishing system, and seeks answers to 3 basic questions:

- 1 Are authors happy/satisfied with the current status of the academic publishing system?
- 2 Is there anything that authors would like to change about the system?
- 3 What are the major challenges faced by authors as they attempt to get published in international English-language journals?

Here we present an interim report of our survey findings so far, some key highlights of which have been presented at the 2017 International Association of Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishers (STM); Council of Science Editors (CSE); and Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP) conferences. We hope that this report will pique the interest of publishers, academic societies and institutions, organizations involved in scholarly communication, and researchers themselves, so that we can maximize responses and augment the collective voice of researchers globally.

Method

Survey design - The survey questionnaire contains a total of 37 items, including demographic questions, dichotomous (yes/no) questions, and opinion-based questions that either require respondents to rate statements on a specific descriptive continuum or rank a set of given statements in an ordinal sequence. The survey questions seek respondents’ opinions on all major aspects of the journal publication process—manuscript preparation, journal selection, journal processes, peer review, open access, and publication ethics. Confidentiality of respondents’ contact details and personal information was assured.

Distribution - Originally constructed in English, the survey has been translated and is being run in [English](#), [Simplified Chinese](#), [Japanese](#), [Korean](#), and [Brazilian Portuguese](#). All versions of the survey have been made virtually accessible using [SurveyMonkey](#), an online survey platform. Survey promotion is primarily being driven by Editage Insights and [Editage](#), a leading provider of language and publication support services to authors and journals, and through local-language websites of these entities, country-specific social media forums for researchers, and email blasts. Respondents have been offered lucky-draw based incentives on survey completion, varying from a [free 1-minute video summary](#) of their most recent published paper (created by the Editage video team) to gift vouchers from Amazon and similar retailers in countries where the survey is being promoted.

Industry backing - Editage Insights is grateful for the support received from various publishers, academic societies, and scholarly industry organizations in promoting the survey through their websites, social media accounts, and email databases. Some of the organizations that have contributed significantly are mentioned below. Join them and help to augment the voice of researchers globally!



Results

Part I – Respondent demographics

The interim results are based on a sample of 5293 respondents. Of these, a large majority (83.4%) identified themselves as “authors.” For the purpose of the interim report, only author responses are discussed hereafter.

The following figures give an overview of the respondents' demographic information. In particular, they cover the respondents' profile (Fig. 1), their broad field of study (Fig. 2), the total number of respondents for each survey language (Fig. 3), respondents' current location (Fig. 4), duration of their involvement in academic research (Fig. 5), number of papers they have published in an international English-language journal (Fig. 6), and authors' written English proficiency (Fig. 7).

Fig. 1. Respondents' profile

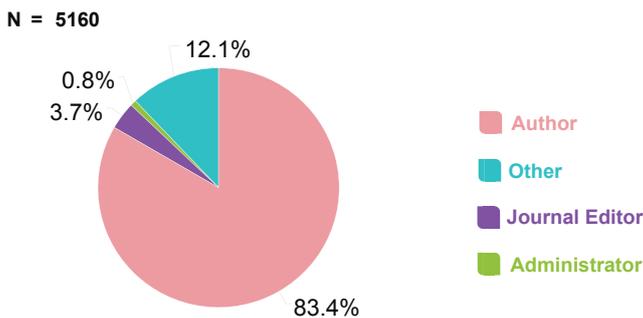


Fig. 2. Authors' broad field of study

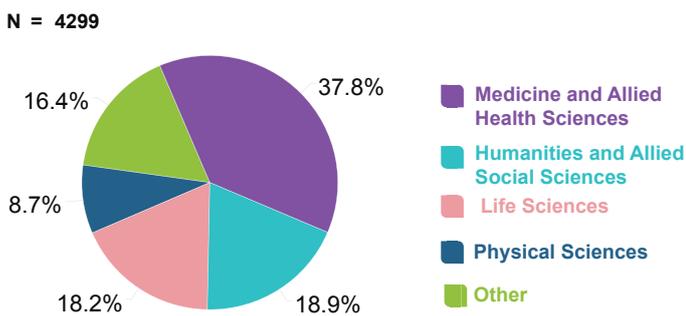


Fig. 3. Total number of respondents for each survey language

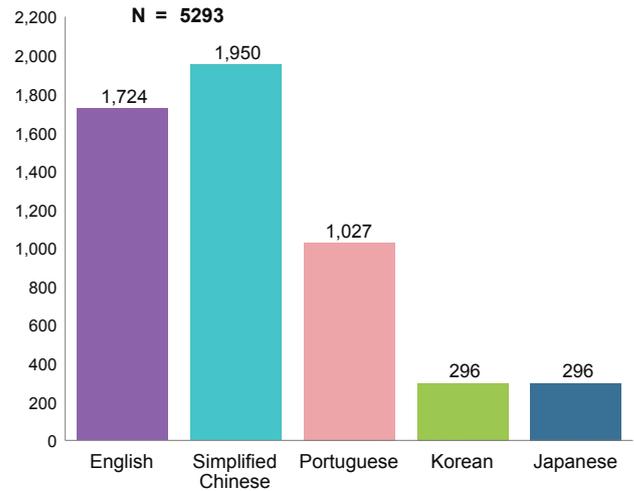


Fig. 4. Respondents' current location (top 10 countries)

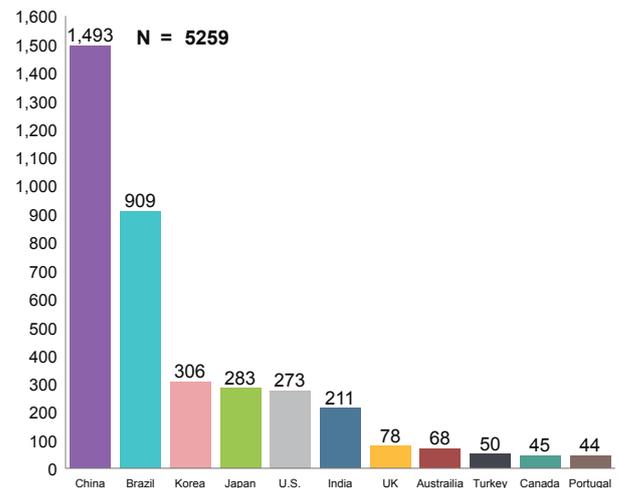


Fig. 5. Duration of authors' involvement in academic research

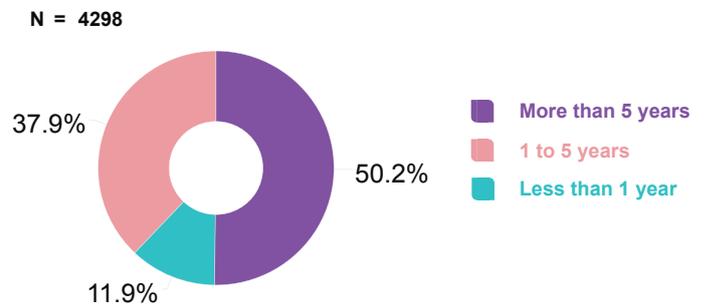


Fig. 6. Number of papers authors have published in an international English-language journal

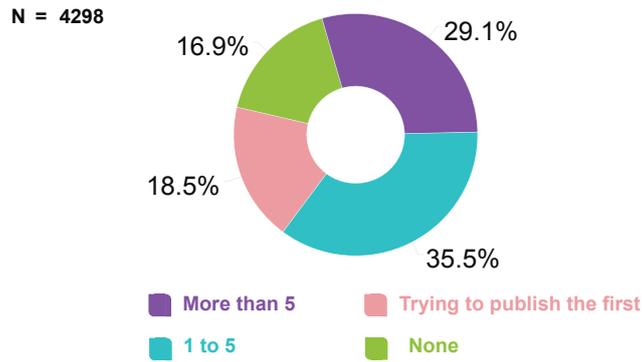
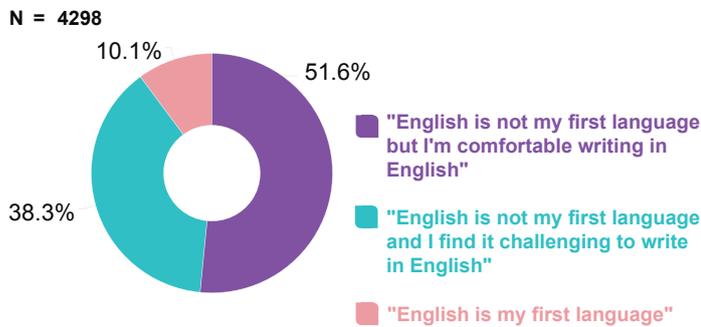


Fig. 7. Author proficiency in written English



Part II – Publication-related challenges faced by authors

Fig. 8. Percent authors rating various stages of academic publishing "very difficult"

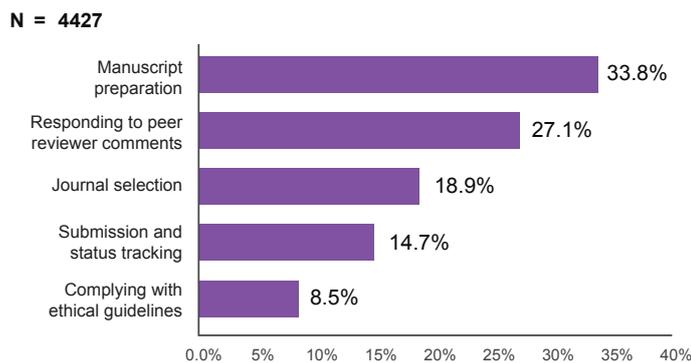


Fig. 9. Percent authors rating various aspects of manuscript preparation "very difficult"

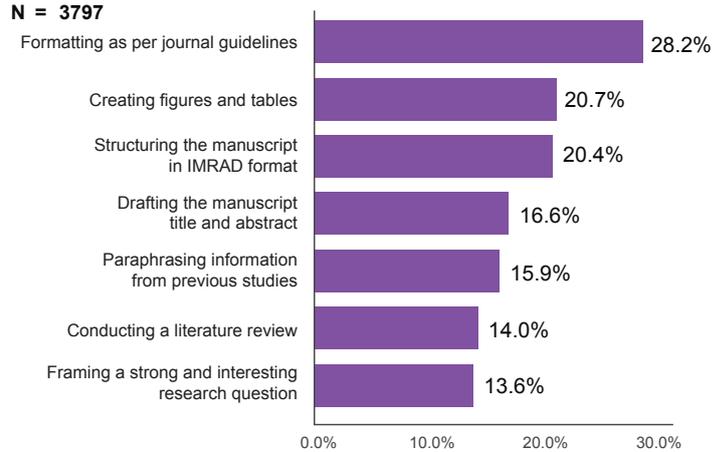


Fig. 10. Percent authors rating various aspects of manuscript submission and processing "very difficult"

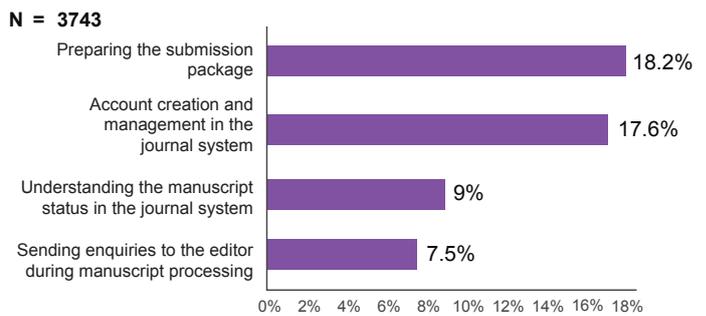


Fig. 11. Where authors seek help when they face challenges during the publication process

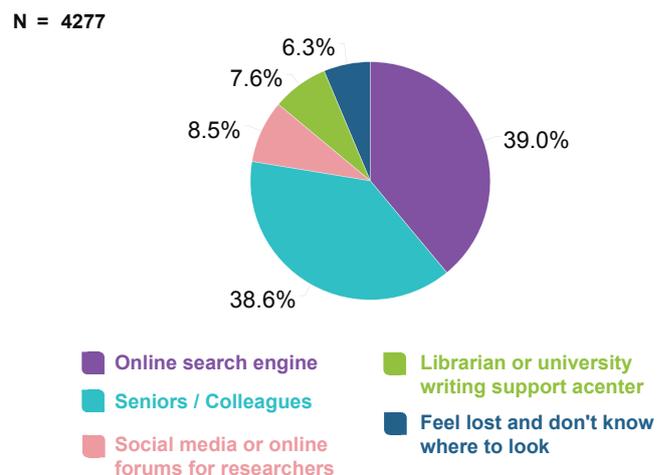
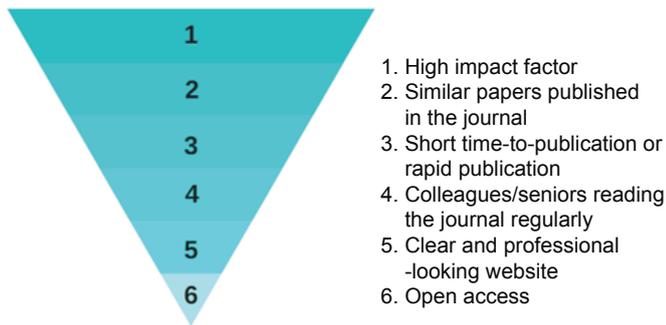
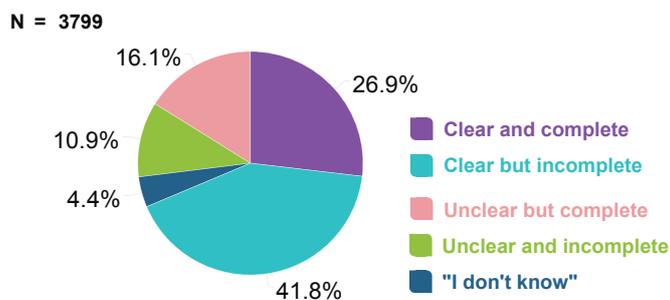


Fig. 12. Factors considered by authors when selecting a journal, ranked from most to least important



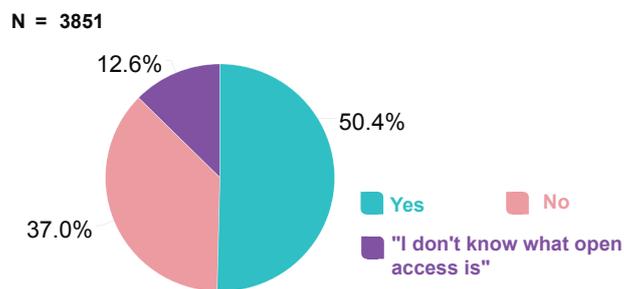
In addition, authors ranked “the journal’s submission process and charges should be clearly mentioned on its website” as least important.

Fig. 13. Author opinions on how journal guidelines for authors are framed



Part III - Author opinions on open access

Fig. 14. Percent authors who have chosen to publish in an open access journal



The authors who had not published open access stated the following reasons (all percentage values represent % respondents):

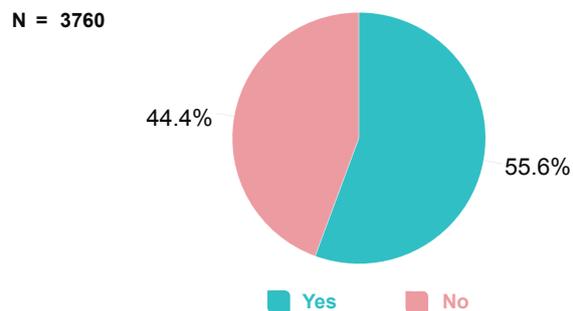
- Coincidence (34.3%)
- Affordability (29.5%)
- Lack of understanding (15.3%)
- Mistrust in quality of OA journals (13.6%)
- Lack of visible, adequate benefits of OA (7.3%)

Conversely, authors who had published open access indicated the following reasons:

- Increase research outreach (34.3%)
- Coincidence (29.5%)
- Preference for OA (15.3%)
- Publication guarantee by the journal (13.6%)
- Institutional/funding body (7.3%)

Part IV – Author-journal communication

Fig. 15. Percent authors who have written to journals for queries or clarifications during the publication process.



The authors who had written to journals described the journal's response as follows:

- Prompt and clear (42.7%)
- Delayed but clear when it came (28.4%)
- Prompt but not clear (17.7%)
- Failed to receive a reply (7.8%)

The authors who did not write to journals indicated the following reasons -

- Lack of queries (51.1%)
- Unaware of how to contact the journal (14.8%)
- Unaware of being allowed to contact the journal (16.6%)
- Scared to contact the journal (17.4%)

Part V – Time to publication

Fig. 16. Shortest time taken to get a paper published from the time of first submission

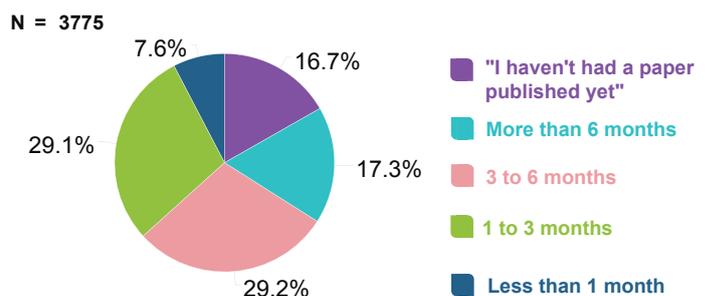


Fig. 17. Ideal time to get a paper published in a journal

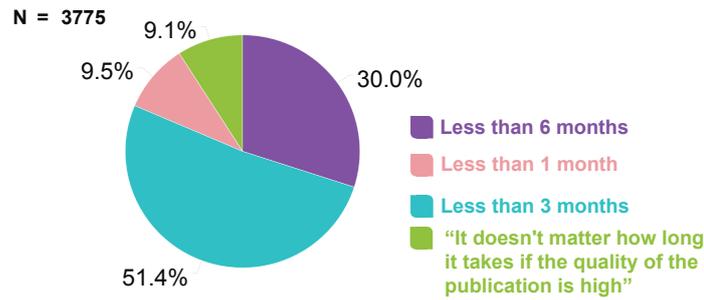


Fig. 18. How long a manuscript remains at the "With Editor" status

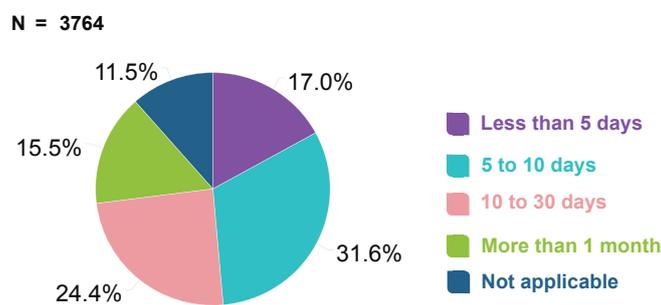


Fig. 19. How long a manuscript remains at the "Under Review" status

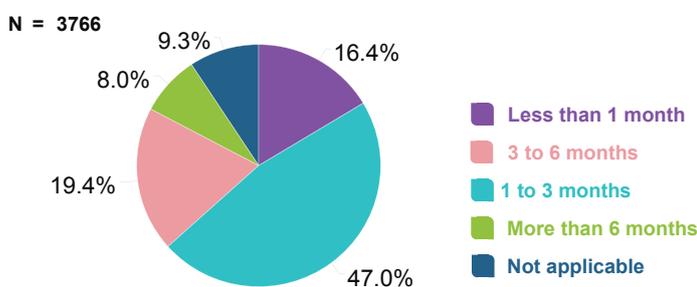
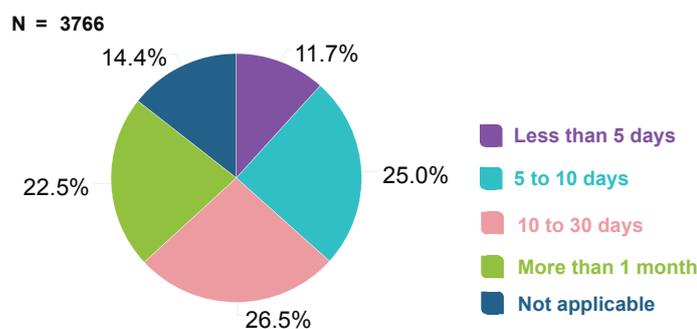


Fig. 20. How long a manuscript remains at the "Decision in Process" or "Awaiting Decision" status



Part VI – Ethical issues and best publication practices

Fig. 21. Percent authors who have been contacted by a journal, guaranteeing publication or promising rapid publication

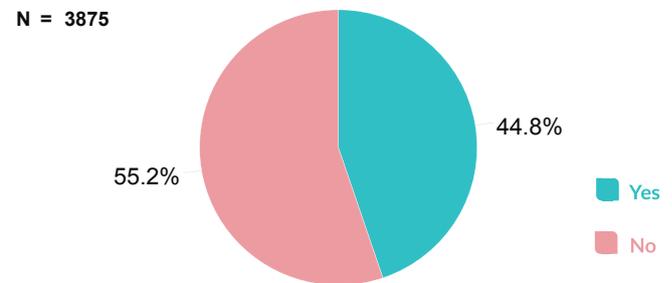
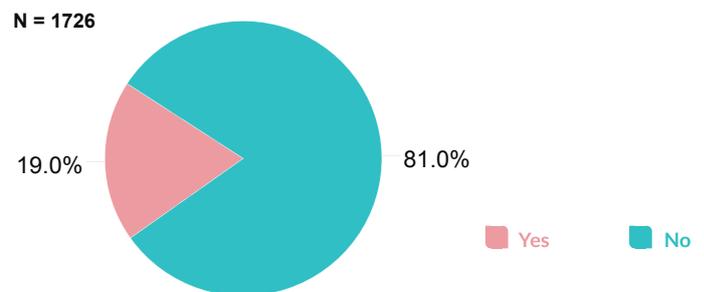


Fig. 22. Percent authors who submitted to a journal, guaranteeing publication or promising rapid publication



The authors who had submitted to such a journal, guaranteeing publication or promising rapid publication, indicated the following outcomes:

- Their manuscript was accepted and published as promised (68.3%)
- The journal demanded unexpected article processing charges (14.4%)
- The journal stopped responding to their queries after authors submitted their manuscripts (6.6%)
- Other reasons (0.1%).

Conversely, those authors who did not submit to such a journal stated the following reasons:

- They did not trust the journal (67.8%)
- They did not recognize the journal (40.4%)
- They already had another journal in mind for the paper (21.8%)
- They were simply not sure (4.8%)

Fig. 23. Scenarios that would constitute plagiarism according to respondents

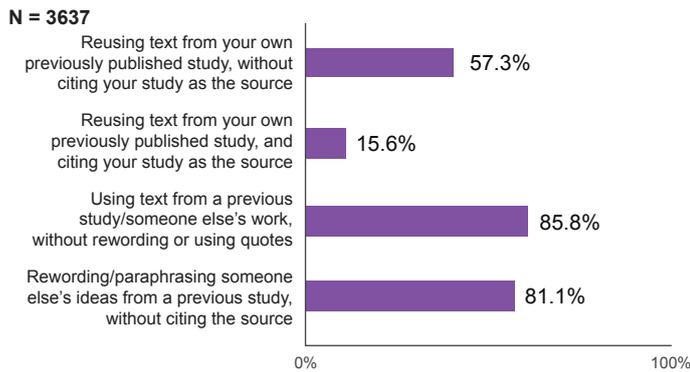


Fig. 24. Contributors deserving of co-author status, according to respondents

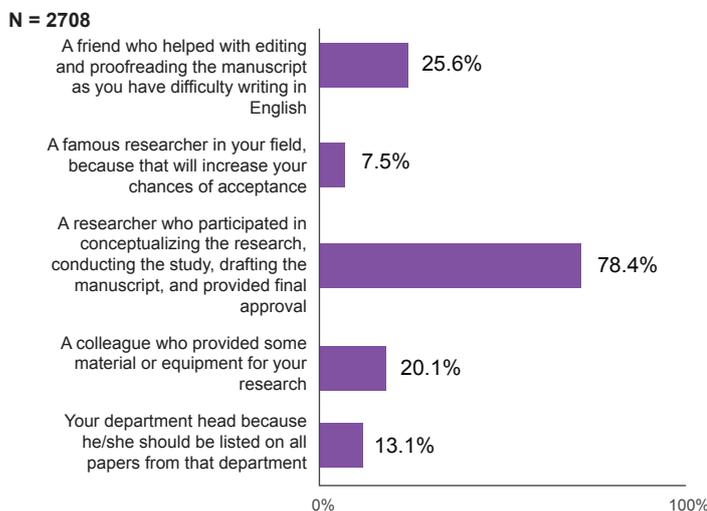
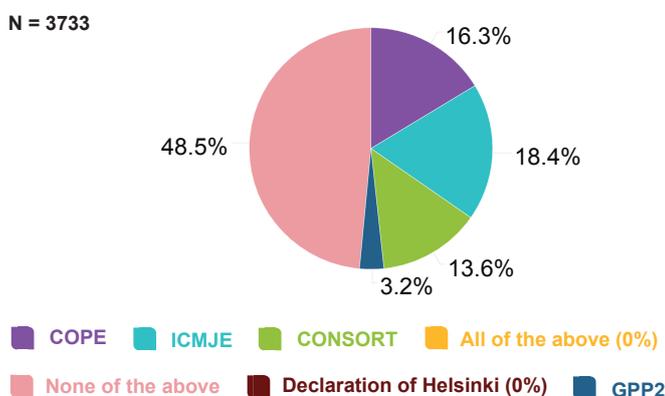


Fig 25. Authors' familiarity with industry-recognized good publication practice standards.



Part VII - Overall opinions about the publishing system

Of 3712 authors, approximately one half (51.7%) indicated that they would like to change something about the publishing system, and specified the change they wish to see in a subsequent comments section. The other half (48.3%) indicated that they did not wish to change anything about the academic publishing system and that they were satisfied with it.

Fig. 26. Author-suggested areas of improvement within the publishing system



What do the results indicate?

Before we start talking about what the survey results indicate, we would like to revisit the questions we started out with: Is the academic publishing system really broken? Is this opinion held universally by all stakeholders within academia? Where do authors stand if they are dependent on a system that is broken? And, most importantly, can academic publishing as a system be rescued and restored to its former glory?

As the above results indicate, this survey represents a treasure trove of very valuable author perspectives that provide answers to some of these questions as well as clear suggestions for what authors would like to change. These perspectives have never been captured before in such detail. And these are just the interim results! Imagine the power of these results extended to 20,000 authors covering all geographies and demographic variables that are currently represented! Imagine the sheer volume of comparative analysis the final survey results will procure! We would be able to compare global author perspectives across variables such as author profile, seniority, location, written English proficiency and many more. Just thinking of the changes these results could initiate is very exciting!

How can you help?

You can also become a part of the movement to augment a global author perspective! The more responses we have, the stronger the evidence we can gather. Spread the word and help us reach 20,000 researchers!

Here are a few simple steps you could undertake:

- Send out an email blast to your database
- Share a link to the survey on your social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)
- Share the survey on your blog, or through your newsletter
- Share banners, images or posters of the survey on your website

We'll provide you with the content you will need for email blasts and newsletters and also banners and posters for spreading the word. Join us in attempting to actualize this (never before tried) endeavour! We'll support you with any assistance you need in the process.

Contact us to know more about how to get involved!

Stop Stalling, Start Sharing!

Scan a QR code or visit www.editage.com/survey-author-perspectives-on-academic-publishing



Acknowledgement

This report was created with intellectual inputs and contributions from Clarinda Cerejo, Editor-in-Chief, Editage Insights; Jayashree Rajagopalan, Senior Writer & Editor, Editage Insights; Andrea Hayward, Associate Writer & Editor, Editage Insights; Sneha Kulkarni, Managing Editor, Editage Insights; Kakoli Majumder, Senior Writer & Editor, Editage Insights; Marisha Fonseca, Senior Managing Editor, Corporate Accounts, Editage; and Richard Bradford, Independent Statistical Consultant.



Register for free with Editage Insights for useful resources and tips at each stage of the publication cycle.

ed|tage Insights™
Resources for authors and journals

Access Editage Insights in the language of your choice

English: www.editage.com/insights Simplified Chinese: www.editage.cn/insights Japanese: www.editage.jp/insights Korean: www.editage.co.kr/insights