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Editorial Article

Peer Review Week 2020: Insights into Building Trust in Peer Review

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INTRODUCTION

Developing and sustaining trust in the peer review process is essential to preserve the legitimacy of scholarly publications. Considering the paradigm shift in scholarly communication and increasing volume of COVID-19 literature, the Steering Committee of 6th Peer Review Week (PRW) announced the theme "Trust in Peer Review," which was celebrated globally between September 21 and 25, 2020. The Steering Committee of PRW 2020 comprised industry experts from 42 organizations¹ worldwide. Despite the pandemic, the PRW was well attended through webinars, online discussion forums, blogs, e-publications, video messages, short training courses and workshops.

The theme, which covered various topics, received diverse opinions and thoughts on what trust in a peer review process means in today's world and how to develop and maintain that trust. Expressive outcomes of the event included 19 video messages and 03 webinars from different industry and academic experts as well as an infographic on "Peer Review Builds Trust," designed by Phil Bogdan and Lindsay Miller of Research Square², Alice Ellingham of Editorial Office and Lisa Hinchliffe of Scholarly Kitchen. These presentations were managed on The Peer Review Week YouTube Channel³ by Duncan Nicholas of DN Journal Publishing Services and the European Association of Science Editors. In Table 1, we provide details of the most viewed video messages of PRW 2020.

The Asian Council of Science Editors (ACSE) supported the PRW by disseminating the necessary information to >7000 active members in its database through the ACSE official blog, email campaign and video messages. In the PRW, most participants and organizations concurred that developing and maintaining trust in the peer review decision-making process is the only approach to resolve immediate challenges in the publishing world.

Considering peer review as an integral part of the academic publishing lifecycle and how publishers build trust in the peer review system, Enago arranged an interactive

panel discussion with the industry experts Michael Willis of Wiley, Kim Eggleton of IOP Publishing, Christna Chap of Karger Publishers and Ashley Fernandes of Enago Academy⁴.

Cactus also conducted a webinar on "Maintaining Trust in Peer Review During the COVID-19 Pandemic," facilitated by Duncan Nicholas, Director of DN Journal Publishing Services and President of European Association of Science Editors (EASE) and Manlio Vinciguerra, Principal Investigator at the International Clinical Research Center (FNUSA-ICRC), St. Anne's University Hospital, Brno, Czech Republic. The webinar highlighted the pandemic's effects on the peer review system, challenges in maintaining quality and the need for journals to adapt to the pandemic constraints⁵.

ACS Publications conducted a webinar, "Peer Review- Why, How to and What Not to Do!," facilitated by the Campus team and Pamela Tadross, Associate Editor of Organic Process Research and Development, which focused on what editors typically look for while reviewing submissions, tips for responding to reviewer comments and effective strategies to evaluate a submitted manuscript⁶.

"Trust is an obvious ingredient in peer review and communication is the key to success, each person involved in the process has a responsibility to be trustworthy and to stick to the rules and ensure that ethically everything was done correctly," said Lizi Dawes, Executive Managing Editor, from PA Editorial, while explaining the importance of trust in research and publication.

Researchers are under constant duress by industries to publish their studies, resulting in the creation of society journals and publishers with the unreliable, ineffective peer review process. This challenge can only be resolved by increasing transparency in editorial workflows and using artificial intelligence to facilitate most steps in the peer review process.

It is imperative to design new standard operating procedures for peer reviews to help reviewers understand the importance of the process and its ethical functioning. Moreover, young researchers should participate in the peer review process and initiate awareness campaigns, training or

Table 1: Top five most viewed videos*

Speaker, video title	Total views*	Organization	URL
Maryam Sayab, "How we can adapt to better facilitate trust in peer review?"	1388	Asian council of science editors	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HANI3cP6b0C
Dr. Sam T Mathew, "Developing trust in new initiatives."	971	Asian council of science editors	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWrA0AfSybA
Lizi Dawes, "How trust underpins everything in research?"	258	PA editorial	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6L1gy29BJEM
Dr. A.D. Carson, Loren Kajikawa, and Sara Jo Cohen, "Trust in the experimental, reviewing a rap mixtape/essay."	125	The University of Michigan press	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfK2yPptJG0
Dr. Fabiola Rivas, "Mechanisms to improve clarity in peer review."	82	Deputy editor of immunity at cell press	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aopSpk9gn8w&t=13s

*According to the analytics of the PRW YouTube Channel, As of 08, 10 2020, 11:45 GMT

workshops to ensure scientific literature's quality and integrity. Publishing a reviewed manuscript along with the reviewer comments and changes from the original manuscript will increase review transparency and highlight the journal's editorial integrity, thereby generating trust in peer reviews⁷. Ms. Maryam Sayab from the Asian Council of Science Editors highlighted another important aspect, she said, "Instead of trust we need trust² in peer review," meaning we need trusted reviewer databases to generate trusted reviews, which will help develop trust in peer reviews.

Dr. Fabiola Rivas, Deputy Editor of Immunity at Cell Press, said that trust in peer reviews could be improved by implementing the CROSS review strategy prior to an editorial decision on the paper, by making the reviews available to all the reviewers and requesting their additional input on a manuscript or existing reviews. This strategy enhances clarity in communication between authors, reviewers and editors, resulting in a clear and constructive process⁸. Ms. Valeria Mazzon, CEO of Reviewer Credits, recommended using platforms such as Reviewer Credits to overcome challenges associated with the peer review process and increase transparency⁹.

In an interview by Michael Willis from Wiley, Professor Graeme D. Smith, Editor of the Journal of Clinical Nursing, elaborated the theme of "trust" in peer reviews from an editor's perspective as, "I believe good peer review involves the objective and expert assessment of new scientific knowledge, ensuring integrity and quality throughout the entirety of the publication process. Good peer review does not only involve input from journal teams (including editors), it also requires input from authors and reviewers. Presently, it is clear that not all peer review is totally effective and this may be partly due to key roles and responsibilities within the peer review system being ill-defined. More clarity around the specific roles of editors, reviewers and authors may have a positive impact in the level of trust that is given to academic peer review systems¹⁰."

Alice Meadows, in her article "In Peer Review Week We Trust," published by Scholarly Kitchen¹¹, was optimistic that PRW 2020 would also focus on preprints to enhance trust in peer reviews by enabling "rapid and open publication as well as the opportunity for informal community review and commentary," although discussions around the topic were scant.

Peer review of research publications, although considerably exciting, is challenging for reasons including unavailability of reviewers, lack of relevant, constructive and timely feedback, conflict of interest of reviewers, lack of transparency and time is taken for the peer review. These

issues have been precipitating more evidently during the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been several COVID-19-related research papers waiting for reviewer feedback.

Dr. Sam T Mathew, Ambassador, ACSE, stated that since peer review is the most significant contributor in ensuring the quality of published research, it is inevitable to look for alternatives to overcome the challenges of the current peer review process. He said that the burden on peer reviewers could be reduced by employing automation and big data principles to check for editorial quality, reference accuracy and research novelty or by considering alternatives such as preprints. The editorial community has to leverage positive aspects of preprints to enable quick addressal of manuscripts waiting for peer review. A clear objective should drive the selection of preprints as an alternative to the conventional peer review process. Preprints to improve manuscript quality are not recommended due to the absence of substantial evidence of its superiority to other processes, although findings from studies have been debatable. Preprints can be considered with required caution for quick knowledge dissemination, credit gain, benefit from diverse feedback, visibility and citation enhancement. Published studies have reported that preprints accelerated research dissemination during the Zika and Ebola outbreaks¹².

A preprint can be considered an advantageous alternative to conventional peer review once its limitations, such as process integrity and outcome quality are addressed to improve the trust. Therefore, the current preprint process, in which the author directly submits to the preprint repository, receives feedback through this platform, updates the manuscript and submits to the journal or the repository, must be modified appropriately.

Trust in preprints can be built by enhancing transparency and upholding ethical practice throughout the process. It is recommended to submit the manuscript first to a journal, not a preprint repository. In this case, the journal will supervise manuscript posting to preprint repositories and subsequent activities. This calls for a centralized, independent preprint repository, which will allow the journal to post a manuscript, facilitate access to the manuscript through Google search and enable stakeholders to place comments on a particular topic. Further, the journal should be provided the privilege to access the manuscript, transfer the manuscript submitted for review, view reviewer comments, view changes made by the authors and make a final decision to publish.

Suppose a journal decides not to accept a manuscript even after revisions within an allocated time. In that case, other journals registered in the preprint repository can consider them for publication after author consensus.

For authors submitting a manuscript for the first time, the journal can provide three options for peer review: preprint alone, preprint and regular peer review or regular peer review alone. However, the editor-in-chief of the journal will make the final decision on peer review choice based on author preference, the immediate impact of the research outcome and reviewer availability.

The web version and all downloadable versions of preprints must have clear, unambiguous disclosure statements mentioning the manuscript's status as "non-peer-reviewed" or "unsure scientific integrity of research." Statements must also include messages such as "this document is not peer-reviewed and, hence, the scientific integrity is not confirmed" or "this cannot be considered a peer-reviewed research publication or equivalent to an article published in a science journal." It is also recommended that downloadable citation formats of these preprints indicate the status.

Overall, PRW 2020 provided a common and appropriate platform for all stakeholders involved in scholarly publishing to express their views on improving trust in peer reviews. However, it is crucial for organizers and participating institutions to review, categorize and prioritize inputs from PRW 2020 and attempt to implement them in a phased manner.

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