Reviewer's report

Title: Are pediatric Open Access journals promoting good publication practice: An analysis of author instructions

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Reviewer: Tove Faber Frandsen

Reviewer's report:

The interesting question raised in this paper is whether open access journals as a group have characteristics that cannot be directly related to how they are financed. In this case the authors are asking if open access journals are more flexible in taking up recommendations? The authors argue:

"Open-access electronic publishing has been associated with a number of editorial innovations aiming at improved access to and transparency of research results.[16, 17] Open access publications are generally made available online to anyone anywhere with no charges for access. They usually maintain peer review to ensure academic reputation and most recover costs by charging an author publication fee. We wondered whether journals adopting this new publication model might be more flexible in taking up the above-mentioned recommendations, which aim to ensure publication of research results in an unbiased and transparent manner."

However, it is worth considering whether the financing model of a journal will have an impact on the content of journals. van Raan argues in 1997 in relation to electronic publishing developments:

"In our opinion, the new electronic publishing developments will not influence conceptually [the] main functions of scientific communication. Of course, technology will certainly influence, even dramatically, these functions, particularly in terms of performance and of mechanical improvement."

Furthermore, Mackenzie Owen (2007) finds that online only journals such as the typical open access journal do not transform the research article by incorporating specific digital properties. On the other hand other studies can show an impact of electronic developments on other aspects of scholarly communication.

Studies investigating whether open access journals as a group have characteristics that cannot be directly related to how they are financed are extremely difficult to carry out because we are looking for a potentially small effect size between two relatively small heterogeneous groups of journals. The effect of OA is very difficult to assess and the great challenge is the determination of causation. A study that illustrates association is much simpler because in order to determine causation a study must control for the effect of other variables. This study includes data from the websites of the journals. The data is relatively easy to obtain and straightforward to analyse. However, it would
be interesting to obtain the data suggested in the discussion that includes any additional instructions not available on the website. It could also be included in the study how the instructions are reflected in the articles published. Making information available on the website does not necessarily imply that the recommendations are being taken seriously. Finally, more disciplines could have been included. The article raises a number of interesting questions but on the basis of the data included it is difficult to draw conclusions.

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached):

The authors should provide an overview of the existing literature regarding whether open access journals have specific characteristics that are not directly related to how they are financed. Open access journals have been studied intensively in the past decade and a number of these studies relate to whether we can tie the characteristics of these journals to how they are financed. The authors should reflect on why open access journals should be more flexible in taking up recommendations. Why would authors and editors perceive their role in an open access journal differently from a toll-access journal in terms of the recommendations? Finally, the authors should reflect on to what extent a journal can be represented by the information made available on the website.

Literature:


**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests