

## *Original Paper*

# “Promising” and “Inaction” in the Evaluation of Academic Journals: Thoughts on the Construction of Academic Credibility Value

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Received: May 6, 2023

Accepted: June 3, 2023

Online Published: June 8, 2023

doi:10.22158/csm.v6n3p1

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/csm.v6n3p1>

### ***Abstract***

*Comparatively speaking, academic credibility has dual tension at system and the value level, which cannot be replaced by academic administrative power. Academic evaluation and academic research are integrated and inseparable, and the process of academic journal evaluation and its own development cannot be separated from the participation of academic community. At present, it is urgent to build academic credibility based on academic spontaneous order at the boundary between administrative power and academic power, and strengthen the maintenance of credibility by scientific rigid system norms, so as to form consistent action and self-discipline of academic community and constantly improve academic ecology.*

### ***Keywords***

*Academic governance, Academic credibility, Academic journals, Academic evaluation, Evaluation of academic journals*

### ***Introduction***

Academic journals, as the exchange and the display platform of academic research, have the function of spreading academic information to readers, and are also an important part of academic evaluation system. Since 1960s, quantitative evaluation has been introduced into academic journals, resulting in the concept of core journals, which defines journals with more citations as important journals with higher quality. In 1993, Nanjing University linked SCI evaluation index with scientific research evaluation, and formed an academic journal evaluation system by verifying the evaluation of academic papers by journals through

the literature quantification. Then, in scientific research evaluation, the academic value of the papers published by journals was determined according to the influential power of journals (Feng, 2016). As a result, the evaluation of academic journals has become increasingly fierce, and a variety of journal evaluation systems have been formed based on bibliolatrous statistics. Linking academic journal evaluation with scientific research evaluation saves the evaluation link and repeated operation of scientific research management to a certain extent, but it confuses the fundamental purpose of academic journal evaluation, academic evaluation and scientific research evaluation. At first, the evaluation of academic journals are to provide readers with the basis for screening effective journals, to quickly select journals suitable for authors, and to publish papers efficiently; providing reliable reference for libraries to subscribe to periodicals and saving costs is also a kind of introspection of periodical industry's own development, not to solve the problem of scientific research evaluation. Over-evaluation or regarding journal evaluation as scientific research evaluation goes beyond the scope of academic journals and goes against the initial intention of academic journal evaluation, which leads to the alienation of academic journal evaluation function.

### **Second, the performance of alienation of academic journal evaluation**

1) the relationship between academic journal evaluation, academic evaluation and scientific research evaluation

Academic journal evaluation, academic evaluation and scientific research evaluation have common categories, but they cannot belong to each other. The existing evaluation of academic journals considers the academic power and communication power of academic papers published in academic journals through various evaluation indicators, so as to evaluate the discipline influence and academic influence of academic journals. The existing evaluation of academic journals does not include the evaluation of normative standards such as editing and proofreading and management and operation ability in the industry. The main object of evaluation is academic papers published in academic journals. It is an important index to measure the professional level and academic influence of academic journals. Academic evaluation is the purest, evaluating all kinds of academic works that reflect the academic content and academic value of researchers.

The core of academic evaluation is works, including papers, works, topics, teaching materials, patents etc. Different academic works should have their own evaluation measures and standards. Scientific research evaluation is an activity that scientific research administrative departments carry out the value judgment on academic achievements, personnel and institutions according to definite purposes and standards and adopting certain theories and methods. Scientific research evaluation is based on administrative management system and aims at administrative functions, which involves more complexity. At present,

in scientific research management, it is usually a simple operation to equate academic journal evaluation with academic evaluation, and then interweave academic evaluation with scientific research evaluation. Academic journal evaluation, academic evaluation and scientific research evaluation are three evaluation methods based on different goals, among which there are their own non-standard and individual references, while the unusual modal references have their own performance evaluations to describe and analyze (Yang, 2018), academic value evaluation is the common point of the three, but the three cannot be simplified. It can be seen that the current alienation phenomenon is not so much the alienation of periodical evaluation as the alienation of academic evaluation and diverse scientific research administrative management systems, which reflects the academic governance problems.

## 2) the alienation of academic journal evaluation

At present, the evaluation of academic journals has become a baton of scientific research evaluation, and its evaluation criteria have led to the distribution and organization of various scientific research resources, affected the choice of various guiding work policies, and accordingly formed the academic discourse power. This is of positive significance for concentrating superior academic resources and improving the efficiency of scientific research evaluation, but it also shows numerous academic chaos.

(a) A large number of manuscripts are invested in “highly evaluated journals”, while ordinary journals lack high-quality manuscripts, resulting in waste of academic resources and forming the so-called “Matthew effect”; (b) The publishing effect is better than the academic effect. Academic journals pursue academic hotspots, and those hot and highly concerned topics become papers that is competing to be published, while some unpopular Juexue are neglected. Some academic journals do not hesitate to set up sections across fields in order to win attention, resulting in improper publication of academic journals; (c) The evaluation of academic journals becomes more and more fierce, which leads to the development of academic journals relying heavily on the academic influence and popularity brought by the evaluation of journals, pursuing the academic interests of quantitative indicators of journal impact factors unilaterally, ignoring their own academic responsibilities, forming passive dependence under the evaluation. It leads to the homogenization development of periodical style, and then causes the lack of its own characteristics, and its own discipline characteristics and the purpose characteristics of running journals is not obvious; (d) Academic utilitarianism prevails, and academic journal evaluation has become an important indicator in the promotion of professional titles, awards and evaluation, which makes “operability” introduced into the academic evaluation system, and academic public trust and academic value are constantly challenged. Some researchers do not hesitate to commit academic misconduct such as data fraud, human manuscripts, and even spending money on papers and other academic misconduct, and even form related industries against academic fraud, thus causing a serious crisis of academic public trust value.

It can be seen that the alienation of academic journal evaluation distorts the significance and initial intention of running a journal, and when non-academic factors become dominant in academic research, it

will become an alienation force that restricts researchers and journal practitioners, and promote researchers' academic research behavior not to realize personal value and social value, which will lead to the variation of academic spirit and the crisis of academic anomie.

### **Third, the limitations of academic journal evaluation**

#### **1) Fuzziness in the evaluation of academic journals**

(a) There are many subjects in evaluation, such as Peking University, Nanjing University, Wuhan University, China Institute of Science and Technology Information, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Chinese Academy of Sociacademic journalal Sciences, CNKI etc. The third-party academic journal evaluation subjects composed of universities, information research institutes and journal database publishers have successively carried out a series of academic journal evaluation work (Yang, 2015). Therefore, according to different starting points, purposes and standards of grading, the types, titles and evaluation standards of various academic journals have been produced. Many "politics" have affected the fuzziness of core concepts, which is only relative and referential for scientific research evaluation.

(b) With the intersection and integration of disciplines, academic journals, as an important carrier for publishing advanced academic research results, do not make strict structural classification according to the Classification Table of Periodicals in China Library Book Classification, which leads to duplication and flaws. The columns of academic journals are widened, and interdisciplinary manuscript collection and over-range publication have become the norm, resulting in fuzziness in the disciplinary orientation of academic journals and their papers.

(c) The research population base of different disciplines will also affect the reading volume and citation volume of papers in this field, which will affect the evaluation indexes of academic journals, such as journal citation frequency, average citation rate, the reaction rate, journal citation rate, journal citation half-life, number of papers by international authors, Web download volume etc. The academic flow between different disciplines is quite different, which shows that part of the communication power originates from disciplines, not journals, and how to compare academic journals between different disciplines is a vague definition.

(d) With the development of academic journals database, academic journals as a whole academic unit are gradually being weakened. From the perspective of academic evaluation, the granularity of academic factors is correspondingly refined to a single article, which causes the ambiguity of the overall evaluation of academic journals.

To sum up, the evaluation of academic journals is a quantitative technical evaluation, and its basic boundaries and norms are still uncertain, which determines the fuzziness of its understanding itself, and it is difficult to make a very accurate overall evaluation of the quality of academic journals with completely quantitative data.

## 2) Communication or innovation

With the data dissemination power of journals far exceeding the dissemination power of paper media, under this background, various indicators of bibliomaniacal, such as citation frequency, the impact factor, average citation rate, the reaction rate, other citation rate, citation half-life of journals, number of papers by international authors, Web downloads and other evaluation indicators, are based on dissemination power to explain the development law and growth trend of academic journals for quantitative analysis, revealing the distribution law of subject literature quantity in academic journals (Chen, 2014).

Based solely on bibliography, the data obtained by the influence evaluation indicators such as citation indicators and the inclusion situation more reflect the communication power and attention of academic works, while weakening the analysis of academic factors such as academic quality and academic innovation. Although the academic influence of journals will drive the dissemination of published articles, and the dissemination of articles will also reflect the innovation of articles, the internal mechanism between evaluation indicators is not clear. The fundamental goal of academic journal evaluation is to balance the academic quality of each academic journals, and only when it is truly based on the academic quality of academic journals can it have evaluation significance.

Based on the professional, academic and innovative characteristics of academic journals, it is difficult to present all quality dimensions comprehensively, truly and accurately through quantitative evaluation based on bibliography. It is especially necessary to introduce peer review based on research groups and evaluation based on the expert perception. The qualitative evaluation factors in the evaluation of academic journals need to shape the value system of academic public trust, such as open and transparent academic rules, professional ethics and public academic order. To sum up, the evaluation system of academic journals is a complex and pluralistic system, which needs to be developed, and is still in the process of gradual revision, gradual enrichment and perfection of several iterative accumulations.

### **Fourth, the construction of academic credibility value system**

At present, the evaluation of academic journals is getting worse and worse, with multiple systems and various indicators, but it cannot solve the alienation of academic journal evaluation and various chaos in academic evaluation. The reason is that the evaluation of academic journals, academic evaluation and scientific research evaluation can not be reduced, and the evaluation of academic journals is a quantitative and technical evaluation, not a substantive evaluation. When the evaluation of academic journals is accepted by the administrative power department, the evaluation of academic journals changes from academic behavior to administrative power above academic research. However, relying too much on evaluation and replacing management with evaluation can not solve the original problems in scientific research activities and academic research, but will lead to confusion of academic value system.

The subject of scientific research evaluation takes academic journal evaluation as a baton, which will form the distribution and organization of various scientific research resources, affect the choice of various guiding work policies, and correspondingly form a public academic discourse right (Jing & Lu, 2017). This kind of power needs not only rigid institutional norms, but also academic public trust supervision based on academic community.

The modern academic system formed since the May Fourth Movement is an institutionalized academic system, but it lacks hierarchical evaluation system, rigid system norms and value-based public trust supervision in its implementation. Therefore, it is urgent to build an academic governance system with academic value system as the core, academic public trust as the credit and system as the guarantee from three levels of evaluation, system and value. Starting from scientific academic evaluation and according to the academic credibility system formed by the evaluation system, the value system and administrative system, an academic communication environment with academic credibility should be established. In order to resist the spiritual variation and academic crisis caused by the lack of credibility and authority.

#### 1) Classified and hierarchical evaluation system

On the basis of perfecting evaluation, academic journal evaluation, academic evaluation and scientific research evaluation should return to their respective places, and a set of more systematic and meticulous system design and thinking should be established. Academic journal evaluation, academic evaluation and scientific research evaluation are independent evaluation systems, and academic nature is a common factor among them. In the construction of evaluation indicators of the three, it is necessary to clarify the different evaluation purposes, methods, standards, applicable scope, limitations and other factors, so as to establish interoperable academic factors among the three in the form of core concepts and modularization, classify academic evaluation, journal evaluation and scientific research evaluation, and establish a more professional and refined hierarchical classification evaluation system.

(a) In the evaluation of academic journals, the evaluation method of subdividing disciplines and fields should be adopted. Academic research involves a wide range of fields, with a large degree of professional differentiation, and different fields and disciplines uphold different research standards. Therefore, in the evaluation of academic journals, it is necessary to strictly distinguish the nature of disciplines to which journals belong, set different evaluation indexes and weight systems according to the major categories of disciplines, and obtain corresponding evaluation indexes.

Ye Jiyuan put forward personalized characteristic indicators for academic journals of different disciplines and types, including: the principle of times, functionality, utility, review and factual evidence, and the principle of application of new technologies (Ye, 2021).

Hu Xiaoyang believes that the evaluation of academic journals should adhere to the quality evaluation of published content as the basic evaluation, and the evaluation of the influence, service capacity, and

contribution evaluation of journal platform as the value-added evaluation, in order to achieve the integrated development of basic evaluation and value-added evaluation (Hu, 2022).

(b) There are great differences in research objects, methods, cycles and results in various fields of academic evaluation and research. The standards for various academic works should be independent, objective, clear, unified and interpretable. Academic, evaluation and academic research are academic communities that go in opposite directions, and feedback and cooperation within the academic community should be strengthened. Through academic evaluation, the academic factors and evaluation norms that can be shed among academic journal evaluation, academic evaluation and scientific research evaluation are formulated and established. Constantly optimize the effective application of evaluation tools and evaluation techniques in academic evaluation.

(c) In scientific research evaluation, from the orderly operation of scientific research management objectives, the indicators based on scientific research evaluation can achieve a clear understanding of scientific research evaluation according to the needs of evaluation subjects, formulate a fair and transparent evaluation work plan, comprehensively consider the academic contribution of academic works themselves, and pay more attention to the scientific application and transformation of evaluation results. From multiple perspectives, multiple index systems and multi-source data, the quality evaluation, effect evaluation and contribution evaluation of the entire life cycle of researchers are obtained through dynamic tracking evaluation.

Completely consider the specific citation situation of the paper after publication, objectively balance the research influence of the paper on this research field, the influential papers and their citation situation, as well as the research direction, scientific problems and application results after citation, and then refer to some values in academic journal evaluation, combined with peer review and expert certification, and obtain the evaluation results.

## 2) Value-based public trust supervision

Academic credibility is a kind of values and spirit for academic community, which is the adherence of academic groups to the core values of research in academic research, and also the social rules and the action environment on which they depend for survival. It is a credit system for researchers, and then forms a code of conduct with professional ethics, and chooses behavior consciously, voluntarily and independently. As far as academic journals are concerned, it represents the ability of learning to gain support and trust from peers and the public, the result of persuading their peers under the same public mechanism, and the quality and influence of academic achievements published by academic journals. As far as the evaluation of academic journals is concerned, it plays a role in providing value support and value evaluation for the evaluation system of academic journals.

Academic credibility has the dual tension of degree and value, which originates from endogenous, and plays the role of providing value support and the value judgment for the system and restraining individual

behavior as an individual's conscious, voluntary and independent choice, which cannot be replaced by academic administrative power. On the one hand, based on the same public mechanism, the public trust results supported and trusted by the academic community can often be trusted by the public, thus realizing the social synergy of academic judgment and evaluation. On the other hand, entering the academic public domain and the operational level of policy system with academic public trust as the core can assist or even replace the administrative system to a certain extent, and play a substantial role in regulating social relations. Thirdly, the boundary between administrative power and academic power forms the middle zone of academic credibility of academic spontaneous order with academic self-discipline, which makes both administrative power and academic power subject to the supervision of academic public trust, and restricts each other from non-academic factors in academic research to become the mainstream.

Specifically, it is feasible to strengthen the credibility construction from the following aspects: (a) Increase the credibility of the system. Constantly improve the academic evaluation system procedurally, establish perfect standards for peer review expert certification, review process record, review the quantity identification and review quality evaluation, optimize the review process, and establish review supervision and reward and punishment system. Improve the one-vote veto system and lifelong tracing system in relevant laws and regulations, on-the-job evaluation, the project declaration and awards. (b) Establish standardization credibility. Establish the compilation standard of academic papers, conform to the international, unique and lifelong digital resource identifier DOI (Digital Object Identifier), and establish the identification, tracking and recording of all kinds of information and the whole process of academic papers, academic journals and researchers related to academic achievements, so as to ensure that papers can be traced back, authors can be identified and responsibilities can be positioned. (c) Enhance the participation of academic community. Academic community is the main force of academic research, which encourages the value creation of academic community in the research process, so as to enhance the deep understanding and self-purification of academic connotation of academic community. Cultivate academic organizations, guide the ecological development of academic publishing and evaluation, and constantly promote the improvement of academic governance system and governance capacity. (d) Enhance the credibility of technology. Establish a nationwide networked academic integrity database based on the storage and certification of academic achievements, and implement digital management of academic integrity. (e) Enhance the value shaping of academic research. Professional ethics, such as academic ethics and academic norms, run through the whole life cycle of researchers' vocational education, constantly generate the sense of honor and mission of academic community, pay attention to the leading role of authoritative scholars in academic connotation value, and radiate the formation of individual values.

## Concluding Remarks

At present, while pursuing the same frequency development of academic journal evaluation and international academic, we must consider the implementation significance of its localization and make self-innovation suitable for the national conditions. The value system of academic credibility includes the ecological system of spontaneous order of various academic elements such as academic journals. For the current mobile and diversified academic development, only by clearing the source, systematically and holistically solving the problem of academic evaluation transformation from scientific standards, core values and rigid systems, repairing academic public trust, and returning academic journal evaluation, academic evaluation and scientific research evaluation to academic value can we promote the ecological and sustainable development of academic journals and academic journal evaluation in the new era.

Fund Project: 2021 Editorial Program of the National Association for the Study of Liberal Arts Journals in Higher Education Institutions “The Development path of Academic Media in the Intelligent Era: The Reconstruction of knowledge Production Chain” (PY2021029). The 2020 Scientific Research Project of Zhejiang Periodical Association and University Periodical Branch of Zhejiang Higher Education Association, “Research on the Reconstruction of Academic Periodical Credibility from the Perspective of All Media” (ProjectNo.: ZGXB202001); Zhejiang Open University “312 Talent Training Project” training project.

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