

Peer review ethics in Iranian LIS scholarly journals: a comparison between views of reviewers and authors

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ABSTRACT

Peer review is one of the most efficient ways to ensure the quality of papers for possible publication in scholarly journals. However, the process of peer review is not free of bias and disorders. Many reviewers are unaware of how their attitudes towards the evaluation of scholarly papers may violate Peer Review Ethics (PRE). This paper attempts to analyze the different ethical issues influencing the job of reviewing. The research sample for this study included 7 Iranian library and information journals, 124 Iranian peer reviewers, and 34 authors. Peer reviewers and authors were asked to evaluate the most important ethical elements of peer review in Iranian LIS journals through two different questionnaires based on Rajabali Beglou et al. (2019) research.

Findings showed that there was no difference among authors and reviewers in terms of gender in most PRE elements. Also, the level of experience of the authors was not significant in terms of understanding and acceptance of the PRE among reviewers and authors. However, review experiences regarding some PRE elements were significant in respondents' viewpoints. The experiences reviewers had already gained were influential on their views about PRE. In addition, results showed that there were significant differences among reviewers and authors about the PRE elements in LIS journals. Authorship experiences had no effect on the PRE elements and the dual role of peer reviewing and authorship had no impact on their views.

KEYWORDS

Peer Review; Peer Review Ethics (PRE); Scholarly Journals; Ethical Issues; Iran.

Introduction

Most research outputs are published in scholarly journals. The quality of journal papers depends, to a great extent, on the quality of peer reviews. Almost all journals benefit from a group of reviewers who base their jobs on a list of criteria to evaluate papers. This process involves a great deal of thinking, analyzing, reasoning, and decision-making about accepting the paper for publishing or rejecting it.

Peer review is a core part of a self-regulating global scholarship system that defines the process in which professional experts (peers) are invited to critically assess a manuscript. It is also a vital component at the core of research communication processes, with repercussions for the very structure of academia, which largely operates through a peer-reviewed publication-based system. (Tennant et al. 2017).

Reviewers along with authors and editors, as the most important actors of publishing in scholarly journals, have obligations, responsibilities, and ethical standards to which they should adhere (Hames 2007, 4-6). Typically, the editor-in-chief has the highest level of decision-making. However, Zinn and Goldsby (2016) believe that the role and importance of reviewers and assistant editors in the review process are sometimes neglected in scientific journals. In other words, less attention is paid to their ‘invisible hands’ in the editorial outputs of the works, as well as the experience that the authors have about these actors. They also believe that good reviewers and assistant editors can turn an accepted article into a major and serious contribution to knowledge production, and their efforts, especially in a double-blind process remain unrecognized. In the meantime, reviewers and assistant editors use their knowledge, insight, and talent to improve the work.

Moreover, different guidelines have been provided for editors and peer reviewers to improve their knowledge and insight in this respect. COPE (Committee On Publication Ethics) Ethical guidelines for peer reviewers is a well-set of codes. known. Besides, different international guidelines and good practices including the American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles for Evaluators (AEA 2018), the Australasian Evaluation Society Guidelines for the ethical conduct of evaluations (AES 2000, 2010, 2013) the UK Evaluation Society Guidelines for Good Practices in Evaluation (UK 2019) and the United Nations Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (UNEG 2008) are provided in evaluation ethics field. As Biagetti, Gedutis and Ma (2019) point out, the recently mentioned guidelines considered as an overlapping area with research ethics shaping research evaluation ethics which are apparently relevant to Peer Review Ethics (PRE) in main categories such as bias, accountability, and CoIs (Conflict of Interests), respect, etc.

However, during the peer review process many factors, especially ethical issues may influence the review quality as well as the approach taken by reviewers towards ethical issues. Authors may see the approach taken by reviewers as ethically inappropriate and even insulting. This is a very important issue for authors as well as for the credibility of scholarly journals and their editors. This may happen to many journals regardless of the fields they deal with. PRE has been a major issue for many scholarly journals to the extent that there are many research papers dealing with it.

By generalizing Zinn and Goldsby’s (2016) viewpoints, this sequence can be considered as a network of time sequences and responsibilities that, not only affects the components of this system but are also affected from outside the system. In other words, during various times and processes

that extend from the design and implementation of research to the peer review of scientific outputs, some actions occur that relate to various actors, and these responsibilities are not necessarily related to peer review. These actors or components and the network can be imagined as an ecosystem that removing, changing, or adding to the duties or reducing the activities and responsibilities of each of the components will affect the entire ecosystem. This impact can create some contexts for the appearance, occurrence, and violation of PRE in the framework of the scientific ethics ecosystem. The same conditions prevail in scholarly journals in Iran, especially in Library and Information Science (LIS) journals. Meanwhile, other components, such as the chief editor, members of the editorial board, author(s), the journal's system, and reviewers also operate in this ecosystem. The action and impact of each of these components can produce different contexts and situations. These situations and contexts can have direct or indirect effects on other components.

Regardless of peer review approaches, the reviewer's role can sometimes become complicated and intertwined with their other roles and situations. Since the role and the necessity of reviewing manuscripts are important and effective in improving research outputs, the reviewers must perform this scientific behavior properly so that they help authors to improve the manuscript (Rajabali Beglou, Seghatoleslami, Rajabali Beglou, in press)

As will be discussed in the Review of the Literature in this paper, ethical issues in peer review cover a range of problems showing up in the formal processes which each journal requires. This includes LIS journals as well. Such problems are prevalent in many countries due to a lack of enough attention to ethics in general and PRE in particular. While the number of Iranian LIS journals has increased in the last two decades, little research has been done on the status of PRE in those journals. Based on this issue, the main problem in our research is that we do not know the perception of peer reviewers and authors about the degree to which and how PRE is observed in Iranian LIS scholarly journals. It is also not known to us how different the two groups perceive PRE. Thus we attempt to find answers to the following questions/hypotheses:

- RQ1: Based on the level of experience, are there any differences among peer reviewers and authors regarding the PRE variables?
- RQ2: Is there any difference between the viewpoints of men and women peer reviewers and authors about the PRE variables?
- H1. There is a difference between the viewpoints of peer reviewers and authors about the PRE variables in Iranian LIS journals.
- H2. Peer reviewing and authorship experiences are not predictable variables to make difference in PRE variables.

The present paper seeks to investigate the views of both the reviewers and authors about ethical issues in Iranian LIS journals. In this study, we compare the views of the two groups based on the different elements relating to PRE.

Review of the related literature

PRE has attracted the increasing attention of many researchers dealing with different aspects of this issue such as confidentiality of peer review (Rooyen 2001; Jagsi et al. 2014), knowing about the

identity of actors (Relman and Angell 1989; D'Angelo 2012; Jagsi et al. 2014), the role of editors in observing the ethics of review (Resnik and Elmore 2016), violation of research ethics in peer review (Mulligan 2005; Souder 2011; Bohannon 2013), CoIs (Gasparyan et al. 2013), quality of review reports by peer reviewers (Resnik and Elmore 2016), bias in peer review (Resnik and Elmore 2016), and responsibility of peer reviewers (Wendler and Miller 2014).

Some papers dealing with PRE in the last two decades are as follow: Kempers (2001) focuses on some general ethical issues in biomedical journals such as authorship, peer review, duplicate or repetitive publication, and conflict of interest. He suggests that considering ethical issues would “stimulate all those involved in the field to take an active role in promulgating and enforcing the highest ethical standards in biomedical publications” (Kempers 2001, 261). In an article published in the *Journal of Academic Ethics* Corlett (2005) reviews several papers which already make some rather critical observations about peer-review processes in academic journals. He points to many of the ethical issues raised in those papers as very useful for the betterment of scholarly journals. Rockwell (2006) reports that many ethical issues and problems are revealed during the review processes. She states that “throughout the process of handling the manuscript and writing the review, and even after the review is completed and submitted” some reviewers are not aware of the implications of their approach towards ethical issues. According to her, some of the ethical issues reviewers should be aware of are: having the expertise the editor is looking for, having any real or apparent conflicts of interest, and having the time to review the article within the time frame requested by the editor. King et al. (2007) suggest that being aware of ethical issues, such as conflicts of interest inherent in peer review, is important to ensure fewer difficulties for authors, publishers, and readers.

From the perspectives of authors and editors, Shattell et al. (2010) examine the quality of peer review including ethical issues. Also, they report the extent to which manuscript reviews provide constructive guidance for authors to further develop the quality of their work for publication, and for editors to make informed and sound decisions on the disposition of manuscripts. Their findings show that a majority of authors agree that peer review provides constructive guidance and an adequate rationale for editors' decisions. Ratings of reviews by the editors reveal problems such as inconsistency, insufficient feedback to the author, reviewer bias, and disrespectful tone.

Souder (2011) published a literature review summarizing the research and commentaries on peer review and the ethics of peer review. In his paper he explores the various ethical issues being important among the key participants in peer-review systems (such as authors, editors, referees, and readers). According to him, issues such as bias, courtesy, conflict of interest, honesty, and transparency are the most important ethical issues in scholarly journals. In his commentary paper, Stewart (2016) suggests that there is a link between the ideas of ‘netiquette’, the online academy, and the ethics of reviewing. Atjonen (2018) reports the experiences of authors of journal papers in eight universities in Finland. Focusing on PRE he investigates the best and the worst processes in peer review. According to him, ethical principles such as “honesty, constructiveness, and impartiality are appreciated but promptness, balance, and diplomacy are criticized.”

Although many reviewers consider their job an integral part of the responsibility of scientific communities, when we precisely evaluate the review process, we find some evidence showing that the fundamental principles of research ethics are not taken into consideration. Hope and Munro's (2019) state that this is because of the bias in some parts of the reviews and a lack of scientific

humility as well as. Some researchers, such as Ahmed and Gasparyan (2013), believe that peer review has its own shortcomings but they do not provide a better alternative. Other researchers, such as Thomas (2018), claim that the phrase ‘*review tampering*’ refers to the existence of a circle of people who review or cite each other’s papers. Therefore, there are different views on studying the ethical dimensions of peer review.

Reasons for ethical misconduct can be intentional or due to a lack of knowledge or educational experiences reviewers received. Wagner et al. (2003), Callaham (2003), Smith (2006), and Patel (2014) emphasize a lack of knowledge, experience or training to properly or ethically review manuscripts alongside with a variety of options. Some of these options are standardizing procedures, blinding reviewers to the identity of authors, reviewing protocols, being more rigorous in selecting and deselecting reviewers, rewarding reviewers, providing detailed feedback to reviewers, and using more checklists. Moreover, Wagner et al. (2003) state that journals should also consider the need to evaluate authors’ satisfaction with their peer-review experiences and use that feedback to help improve their peer review process. Patel (2014) stresses ‘specialization in peer review so that specific fields can define the purpose and aims of peer review to suit their own needs’. She believes that ‘peer reviewers can be taught to spot fundamental flaws and be periodically evaluated. On the other hand, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (2017) asserts the advantage of enrolling in mentorship or training programs to improve peer review skills.

One of the most important challenges and issues in PRE is the anonymity of authors and reviewers, especially in the double-blind approach. Jagsi et al. (2014) examine authors and reviewers’ anonymity and their attitudes toward review ethics. They state that some reviewers can identify the identity and organizational affiliation of authors which may affect their review results. There are different views regarding this issue; for example, some researchers, such as Hope and Munro (2019), believe that anonymity has a minor effect on the quality of the review, and some others, such as Smith (2006), consider the review as a ‘faulty process’ that there is no clear evidence for its effectiveness. Adler and Strayer (2017) consider it because we cannot expect a blind review from preventing subconscious bias. Cawley (2011) is one of the leading critics of peer review who considers it a problematic process and full of moral challenges. He analyzes the unethical nature of the review and claims that it is both intrinsically and structurally unethical. In his paper, Kostoulas (2018) reports his experiences with peer reviewers’ feedbacks some of which are considered disrespectful or even insulting to authors.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, little research is done on the issue of PRE in Iranian scholarly journals. Since the issue is new to many Iranian journal editors, peer reviewers and authors, only two papers have so far focused on PRE in Iranian LIS journals. In a conference of the editors-in-chief of scholarly journals of Islamic countries (Shiraz 2014), ethical issues in scientific publishing were taken into account in a presentation as a general issue (Ethical issues in Scientific Publishing). Masoumi and Astaneh (2014), and Fattahi (2014, in Jawaid 2015) talked about ethical issues such as ethical misconduct, author disputes, conflict of interest, redundant publication, duplicate submission, fraud, plagiarism, data fabrication and data falsification.

The findings of a research by Rajabali Beglou et al. (2019) reveal that only half of scholarly journals in Iran have PRE statement. In a recent paper, Rajabali Beglou, Rabiei, and Rajabali Beglou (2022) explore two elements of peer review, namely “timeliness” and “objective and constructive suggestions” in the Iranian *Journal of Information Processing and Management (JIPM)*. They report that,

in terms of “timeliness”, JIPM is in a relatively good position but the reviewers do not perceive “objective and constructive suggestions” well.

Methodology

In this study we used a survey method to investigate and compare the viewpoints of reviewers as well as authors of Iranian LIS journals regarding their observation of and perception about different ethical issues in the process of peer review. The population for this research included the reviewers and authors of 7 Iranian LIS journals (all published in Persian). Research population also included Iranian peer reviewers and authors in Persian LIS journals. A list of reviewers, who had a records of more than five number of reviews and a list of authors, who had published more than five number of papers were identified from the website of the journals. Both of these groups were asked to evaluate the most important ethical elements of PRE based on their experiences. In addition to demographic information including age, gender, subject field, level of graduation, etc., thirty-one PRE elements for reviewers and twenty PRE elements for authors were asked to provide feedback. The PRE elements identified in Rajabali Beglou et al. (2019) formed the content of the questionnaires which were classified into eight categories including timeliness (3 elements), confidentiality (4 elements), bias (2 elements), Conflict of Interests (4 elements), research misconduct (2 elements), respectful and fair expressions (3 elements), constructive and objective feedback (5 elements), and accountability and responsibility (8 elements). Both groups were asked to evaluate the most important PRE elements of peer review through two different but simultaneous online questionnaires.

The validity of the questionnaires was verified by five experts familiar with research and review ethics. They recommended the exclusion of some (nine) elements already appeared in Rajabali Beglou et al. (2019). The reliability of the questionnaires was tested against Cronbach’s alpha with scores 0.889 in the external group and 0.810 internal group (Tab. 1). 124 reviewers and 34 authors responded to the questionnaire.

Table 1. external and external group Cronbach’s alpha

		N	%	Reliability Statistics/ Internal group		Reliability Statistics/ External group	
Cases	Valid	124	78.5	Cronbach’s Alpha	N of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha	N of Items
	Excluded ^a	34	21.5	.889	52	.810	16
	Total	158	100.0				

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

The PRE elements in this research are shown in Tab. 2.

Table 2. Main elements, PRE elements, variable group and variables for reviewers and authors

Main elements	PRE elements - reviewers	Variable group	Variable	Elements of PRE - authors	Variable group	Variable
Timeliness	Agree to review at a reasonable time	TimeR	R1	N/A		
	Review in the determined time frame		R2	Reviews in the time frame	TimeA	A1
	Not to prolong the review process		R3	Not to prolong the review process		A2
Confidentiality	Not to harm or discredit author(s)	ConfidR	R4	Prevents the author (s) from being insulted or discredited	ConfidA	A3
	Not to involve others without the journal's permission		R5	Not to involve others without the journal's permission		A4
	Notify the names of others in the review		R6	N/A		
	Not to disclose the review process and details		R7	Not to disclose the review process and details	ConfidA	A5
Bias	No bias	BiasR	R8	No bias	BiasA	A6
	Inform the journal if knowing the author(s)		R9	N/A		
Conflict of Interest (CoI)	If Conflict of Interest (CoI), inform journal	CoiR	R10	N/A		
	Not to use the content of the paper for personal/other benefit		R11	Not to use the idea of paper for personal/other benefit	CoiA	A7
	Not to review if paper is similar to the reviewer's work		R12	N/A		
	Not to see full-text of paper if the reviewer does not review		R13	N/A		
Research misconduct	If distinguishing any ethical disorder and disruption, reports to the journal	RespR	R14	N/A		
	If research misconduct is occurred, report to the editor/journal		R15	If research misconduct is occurs, report to the editor/ journal	RespA	A8
Respectful and fair feedbacks	Not to rewrite writing style of the paper	MiscR	R16	Does not rewrite the writing style of the paper	MiscA	A9
	Respectful and fair expression		R17	Respectful and fair expression		A10
	Not to express unfair or unprovable criticisms		R18	Not to express unfair or unprovable criticisms		A11
Objective and constructive suggestions	Feedback on the quality of paper	ObjR	R19	Feedback on the quality of paper	ObjA	A12
	Objective and constructive feedback		R20	Objective and constructive feedback		A13
	Request supportive evidence for claims		R21	Requests supportive evidence for claims		A14
	Suggestions based on valid scientific and technical reasons		R22	Suggestions based on valid scientific and technical reasons		A15
	Useful feedback for further clarification		R23	N/A		

Responsibility and accountability	Not requesting to cite the reviewers' works	AccountR	R24	Not to request to cite the reviewers' works	AccountA	A16
	Understand the scope of the review before reviewing the paper		R25	N/A		
	Review seriously in revisions		R26	Review seriously in revisions		A17
	Not to review if having no expertise		R27	Not to review if having no expertise		A18
	Not to communicate directly with the author(s)		R28	Not to communicate directly with the author(s)		A19
	Considers changes in review transfer		R29	Considers changes in review transfer		A20
	Get permission from the journal to review the transfer		R30	N/A		
	Provide supporting evidence in the review		R31	Provides supporting evidence in review		A21

About two third of the PRE elements, as appeared in the above table, are not applicable from the viewpoints of the authors. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality were carried out to determine the normality of the data. The result of the normality test showed that all the variables were not normal except the authors' total viewpoints about PRE. Therefore, non-parametric tests were used in this study (Table 3).

Table 3. Tests of Normality with Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk

Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
TimeR	.254	124	.000	.802	124	.000
ConfidR	.306	124	.000	.670	124	.000
BiasR	.290	124	.000	.774	124	.000
CoiR	.160	124	.000	.888	124	.000
MiscR	.478	124	.000	.486	124	.000
RespR	.246	124	.000	.819	124	.000
ObjR	.203	124	.000	.851	124	.000
AccountR	.132	124	.000	.899	124	.000
TimeA	.167	124	.000	.936	124	.000
ConfidA	.103	124	.002	.947	124	.000
BiasA	.286	124	.000	.753	124	.000
CoiA	.241	124	.000	.843	124	.000
MiscA	.218	124	.000	.835	124	.000
RespA	.141	124	.000	.959	124	.001
ObjA	.106	124	.002	.961	124	.001
AccountA	.121	124	.000	.976	124	.026
ReviewAll	.079	124	.056	.937	124	.000
AuthorAll	.050	124	.200*	.991	124	.561

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Data analysis

The data collected through the online questionnaires were coded and analyzed. According to the data collected, the number of men and women responding to the questionnaires was almost equal (80 women vs 78 men). However, most of them were from the fields of social sciences and humanities. Furthermore, most of the respondents (81%) had PhD degree and, about half of them had no academic position in educational and/or research institutions. Authors and peer reviewers had published at least one paper (99.4%) and they were professional authors of papers in these journals (57.4%) with more than 10 papers. About 2/3 of the reviewers (66.9%) had experience of reviewing more than 10 papers which means that they had a good experience of reviewing in their scientific activities.

Results

RQ1: Is there any difference between the viewpoints of men and women reviewers and authors about the PRE variables?

The result of the Mann–Whitney U test showed that there was not a significant difference between men and women regarding PRE variables except for the variables “respectful and fair feedback” and “responsibility and accountability” (Table 4). In other words, gender was not a predictable variable at least in all of the PRE elements and there were no significant differences in most of these elements. Therefore, this variable could be neglected in the PRE in the two groups of reviewers and authors in Iranian LIS journals.

Table 4. Mann–Whitney U test of the difference between men and women in PRE variables

	<i>TimeR</i>	<i>ConfideR</i>	<i>BiasR</i>	<i>CoiR</i>	<i>MiscR</i>	<i>RespR</i>	<i>ObjR</i>	<i>AccountR</i>	<i>Review All</i>
Mann-Whitney U	1803.500	1695.000	1623.000	1557.500	1818.000	1522.000	1838.500	1462.500	1496.000
Wilcoxon W	4081.500	3973.000	3901.000	3835.500	4096.000	3800.000	4116.500	3740.500	3774.000
Z	-0.563	-1.195	-1.543	-1.787	-0.677	-2.032	-0.368	-2.258	-2.073
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.573	0.232	0.123	0.074	0.498	0.042	0.713	0.024	0.038
	<i>TimeA</i>	<i>ConfidA</i>	<i>BiasA</i>	<i>CoiA</i>	<i>MiscA</i>	<i>RespA</i>	<i>ObjA</i>	<i>Account A</i>	<i>Author All</i>
Mann-Whitney U	2916.000	2873.500	3089.500	3028.500	2867.000	3083.000	2816.000	2770.500	3117.500
Wilcoxon W	6156.000	5954.500	6329.500	6268.500	5948.000	6323.000	5897.000	5851.500	6357.500
Z	-0.717	-0.866	-0.115	-0.337	-0.918	-0.130	-1.063	-1.221	-0.009
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.473	0.387	0.909	0.736	0.359	0.896	0.288	0.222	0.993

RQ2. Based on the level of experience, are there any differences among peer reviewers and authors regarding the PRE variables?

The result of Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there were not any significant differences among the four groups of novice, somewhat novice, somewhat experienced, and experienced authors about PRE (according to table 4 and table 5). However, there were significant differences among

the four levels of experience (novice, somewhat novice, somewhat experienced, and experienced) among peer reviewers with authors' viewpoints regarding 'research misconduct', 'respectful and fair feedbacks', 'objective and constructive suggestions', and authors' total viewpoints (according to the table 4 table 6). However, the differences in the bias variable category was not significant regarding different levels of experience among authors and reviewers.

Table 5. Kruskal-Wallis test of differences among four groups of authors' viewpoints about PRE

	TimeR	ConfidR	BiasR	CoiR	MiscR	RespR	ObjR	AccountR	ReviewAll
Kruskal-Wallis H	1.667	.880	1.460	.381	.736	3.349	.708	1.071	.127
Df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	.644	.830	.692	.944	.865	.341	.871	.784	.988
a. Kruskal Wallis Test									
b. Grouping Variable: paper published									
	TimeA	ConfidA	BiasA	CoiA	MiscA	RespA	ObjA	AccountA	AuthorAll
Kruskal-Wallis H	1.143	4.414	.373	6.534	3.777	.682	1.994	1.451	2.739
Df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	.767	.220	.946	.088	.287	.877	.574	.694	.434
a. Kruskal Wallis Test									
b. Grouping Variable: Paper reviewed									

Table 6. Kruskal-Wallis test of differences among four groups of authors and reviewers' viewpoints about PRE

	TimeA - TimeR	ConfidA - ConfidR	BiasA - BiasR	CoiA - CoiR	MissA - MissR	RespA - RespR	ObjA - ObjR	AccountA - AccountR	AuthorAll - ReviewAll
Z	-9.373 ^b	-7.385 ^b	-1.271 ^b	-3.812 ^b	-6.984 ^b	-6.190 ^b	-8.926 ^b	-8.626 ^b	-8.957 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.204	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test									
b. Based on positive ranks.									

H1. There is a difference between the viewpoints of peer reviewers and authors about the PRE variables.

The result of the Wilcoxon test showed that there were significant differences among peer reviewers and authors in all the variables except the 'bias' variable (Tab. 7).

Table 7. Wilcoxon test of the difference between viewpoints in peer reviewers and authors about PRE variables

	TimeA - TimeR
Z	-9.373 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	
b. Based on positive ranks.	

Table 8. Wilcoxon test of the difference between viewpoints in peer reviewers and authors about PRE variables

	TimeA - TimeR	ConfidA - ConfideR	BiasA - BiasR	CoiA - CoiR	MissA - MissR	RespA - RespR	ObjA - ObjR	AccountA - AccountR	AuthorAll - ReviewAll
Z	-9.373 ^b	-7.385 ^b	-1.271 ^b	-3.812 ^b	-6.984 ^b	-6.190 ^b	-8.926 ^b	-8.626 ^b	-8.957 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.204	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test									
b. Based on positive ranks.									

In other words, the issue of bias (covering violation of neutrality, systematic prejudice in gender, organizational affiliation, nationality, language, specialization, religious or political beliefs, etc.) is not different in the two groups of authors and reviewers. Therefore, from the viewpoint of respondents, this variable is not a predictable variable among authors and reviewers.

H2. Peer review and authorship experience are not predictable variables to make difference in PRE variables.

The result of the Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there were significant differences among the four levels of novice, somewhat novice, somewhat experienced, and experienced among peer reviewers with authors regarding ‘misconduct of research’, ‘respectful feedbacks’, ‘objective and constructive feedbacks’, and authors’ total viewpoints about all the variables (Table 9). Furthermore, the result of Mann–Whitney U test showed that authorship was not a predictable variable to make difference for PRE variables (Table 10). In other words, considering that 34 authors did not have any review experiences, the authorship role did not influence or intervene in their peer review role.

Table 9. Kruskal-Wallis test of difference among different groups of experienced peer reviewers

	TimeA	ConfidA	BiasA	CoiA	MiscA	RespA	ObjA	AccountA	AuthorAll
Kruskal-Wallis H	1.901	3.754	7.297	5.088	8.452	8.439	9.147	3.442	11.674
df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	0.593	0.289	0.063	0.165	0.038	0.038	0.027	0.328	0.009
a. Kruskal Wallis Test									
b. Grouping Variable: How many reviews									

Table 10. Mann-Witney test of difference among mere authors viewpoints about PRE variables

	TimeA	ConfidA	BiasA	CoiA	MissA	RespA	ObjA	AccountA	AuthorAll
Mann-Whitney U	2105.000	1902.000	1824.500	1947.500	1811.500	2000.500	2090.000	2048.500	1863.000
Wilcoxon W	2700.000	2497.000	2419.500	2542.500	2406.500	9750.500	9840.000	2643.500	2458.000
Z	-.013	-.880	-1.296	-.720	-1.309	-.460	-.077	-.253	-1.037
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.990	.379	.195	.472	.191	.645	.939	.800	.300
a. Grouping Variable: Reviews in authors’ viewpoint									

Conclusions

Peer review processes are necessary to evaluate and improve the quality of research output, improve general standards, and help authors publish quality manuscripts. In addition to determining whether a scientific work is suitable for publication, peer review helps authors improve their manuscript to reach higher quality and produce more effective and useful knowledge ultimately being published. Regardless of the criticisms about ethical issues in scientific publications and especially in scholarly journals, there are different factors influencing and interfering with the peer review processes. As mentioned in earlier, the ecosystem of scholarly journals is an interwoven network of interactions and communications, technologies, and responsibilities where each of the actors in this ecosystem has its role and importance. The same conditions prevail in scholarly journals in Iran, especially in the LIS journals and it seems that all actors involved in the process of publishing a scientific article, more or less, have a crucial role and contribution to PRE. If we take into consideration the atmosphere formed among the components or actors as the smallest possible cloud in the scientific ecosystem of journals and scientific ecosystem, the manuscript is at the center of this ecosystem. Meanwhile, other components, such as the chief editor, members of the editorial board, author(s), the journal's system, and the reviewers also operate in this ecosystem. The action and impact of each of these components can produce different contexts and situations. These situations and contexts can have a direct or indirect effect on other components. In other words, first of all, the ecosystem in which the journal operates is based on the interaction among actors and stakeholders of the journal. Therefore, if one of these actors and stakeholders does not perform his/her assigned duties properly, it creates a situation so which the other actors and agents of scientific communication in the next layer cannot fulfill their scientific, professional, and especially moral responsibilities properly. For example, consider an article that is not monitored by the editorial board members and does not have the main and fundamental features of a scientific article; this article by itself can lead to 'disrespectful and unfair expressions' or 'not taking the responsibility of review seriously' by the reviewer. One of the most frequent evidence in the review documents examined in the research carried out by Rajabali Beglou et al. (2019) was the frequent and unnecessary use of exclamation marks "!" and the question "?". Such an approach may be considered a disrespectful expression from the point of view of the authors. This issue can be generalized and transferred to the context of other scholarly journals. In other words, if we examine the scientific context of journals in the LIS field and examine the observance of PRE elements from the point of view of reviewers and authors, we can consider it generalizable and transferable to a larger context. Of course, the current research did not examine the PRE elements in all scholarly journals of Iran contextually and qualitatively, but the results of the current research can be compared to the results of Rajabali Beglou et al. (2019) because, the Journal of Information Processing and Management (JIPM) was one of the journals examined in their research, and the reviewers and authors of that journal also participated in the current research. Therefore, the investigation of quantitative variables in the present research can be considered as a supplement to the results of the mentioned research.

Gender was one of the variables that seemed to be able to influence the PRE elements in the viewpoints of the reviewers and authors. The results of the present study showed that there were no differences among authors and reviewers in terms of gender in most of the PRE elements. This re-

sult indicates that gender cannot be considered a determining variable in the PRE. Also, the level of experience of the authors was not significant in terms of their understanding and acceptance of the PRE. In other words, authorship experiences had no relationship to people's viewpoints about the PRE elements. However, review experiences regarding 'research misconduct', 'respectful and fair feedback, and 'objective and constructive suggestions' elements, and authors' total viewpoints about the PRE elements were significant. In other words, the experiences reviewers gained in their previous review cases were influential in their view of the PRE. This result can indicate the fact that the more experiences gained in scientific reviews, the more knowledge will be developed about the PRE elements. The results gained in this research were consistent with the necessity of training reviewers in the mentioned literature (Wagner et al. 2003; Callaham 2003; Smith 2006; Patel 2014; COPE 2017). In other words, as the level of experience and knowledge of reviewers increase with various methods such as training and conducting the review, it can be expected that they will be more aware of the importance of the PRE elements. Therefore, it is expected to act more morally and become a better reviewer.

In addition, the results of the present study showed that reviewers' and authors' viewpoints in the LIS journals were not the same regarding compliance with the PRE elements. Of course, except for 34 respondents, who had no review experience in these journals, others had both review and authorship experience. Therefore, it can be concluded that the experiences of authorship in scientific articles did not affect their views about the PRE elements. This result indicates the issue that the dual role of reviewing and authorship could not influence their views in such a way as to cause a significant change regarding the PRE elements. In other words, in the ecosystem of the LIS scholarly journals in which people are usually assigned various roles, at least authorship does not have a significant effect on their perception of the PRE elements. Of course, the results of this part of the research should not be generalized to other roles in the scholarly journals' ecosystem in which there are other aspects of review at least until further research is performed.

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