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CQ Authors' Reactions to My Editorial Policies and Practices

Michael Lynn

Cornell University, wml3@cornell.edu

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CQ Authors' Reactions to My Editorial Policies and Practices

Abstract

[Excerpt] Academic journals can only publish what is submitted to them, so their editors need numerous high quality submissions to consistently publish high quality articles. To encourage more high quality submissions to Cornell Hospitality Quarterly (CQ), I implemented a number of what I considered to be author-friendly editorial policies and practices when I became editor.

Keywords

Cornell, editorial, publishing, empirical articles, writing, review process

Disciplines

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Comments

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Academic journals can only publish what is submitted to them, so their editors need numerous high quality submissions to consistently publish high quality articles. To encourage more high quality submissions to *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly (CQ)*, I implemented a number of what I considered to be author-friendly editorial policies and practices when I became editor. Specifically, I

1. eliminated formatting and style requirements for initial submissions to reduce the time and effort costs of submitting to *CQ*,
2. began accepting and using existing reviews from other journals when authors provided the reviews (with previous editorial decision letters) to reduce demand on *CQ* reviewers' time, to give authors an opportunity to dispute previous reviewers' comments and recommendations, and to speed up the editorial process on previously reviewed manuscripts,
3. increased the desk-rejection rate (to about 70% last year) to reduce the time commitment of authors submitting papers destined to be rejected,
4. provided clear, honest, and explicit (though succinct) reasons for rejections to inform unsuccessful authors about what would be required for success in the future,
5. asked reviewers to return their reviews within 21 days to provide faster feedback and turn-around times to authors,
6. treated reviews as inputs into my own judgments about papers rather than as determinative votes to insure well-justified decisions and to protect authors from weak reviews and reviewers,
7. provided clear and explicit information about what problems/issues must be addressed in R&Rs so that authors could better estimate the likelihood of success when deciding whether or not to revise and resubmit and could increase the likelihood of successful R&R by concentrating their efforts on fixing the most critical problems/issues,
8. promised to (and did) make decisions on R&Rs without seeking additional input from reviewers to allow authors to more freely disagree with reviewer comments they find unhelpful and to provide faster feedback and turn-around times on those R&Rs,
9. asked for no more than two rounds of R&R before either accepting (including conditional acceptance)

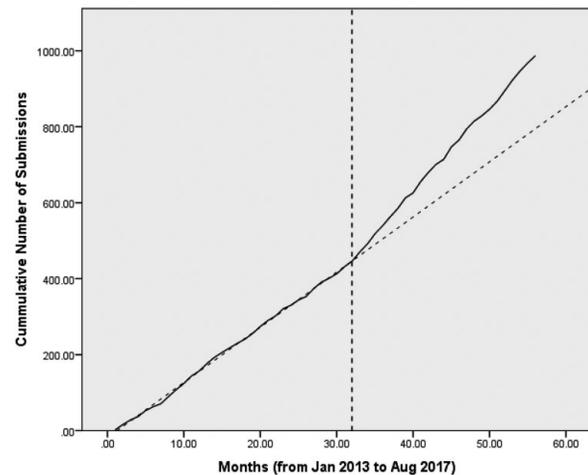


Figure 1.

Cumulative number of original submissions to *CQ* by month from January 2013 to August 2017.

Note. The vertical, dashed, reference line marks the last month before I began processing new submissions. The diagonal, dashed, reference line marks the linear monthly trend before I began processing new submissions. *CQ* = *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*.

or rejecting a paper to reduce unproductive investments of authors' time and energy, and

10. published editorials clarifying my editorial preferences and expectations as well as summarizing my decisions and turn-around times to inform prospective authors' decisions about whether or not to submit a particular paper to *CQ*.

In short, I have strived to be an active, independent, and transparent editor under the assumption that doing so would increase author satisfaction with and submissions to *CQ*. To shed some light on whether or not these policies and practices have had the desired effect, I examined submission trends over time from January 1, 2013, to August 29, 2017, and conducted a survey of authors who submitted manuscripts to *CQ* over the past 2 years under my editorship. The remainder of this editorial will summarize the results of those studies.

An examination of submission data over time reveals that submissions increased when I took over editorship of the journal and have remained high since then. Figure 1 presents the cumulative number of submissions by month from January 2013 to August 2017. A linear increase in

cumulative submissions over time is expected if there is no change in the submission rate over that time period. As can be seen in the graph, the rate of growth in cumulative submissions was very consistent from January 2013 to August 2015 after which point it increased and has been fairly consistent at that higher level since then. I took over processing of new manuscripts in September 2015 and began adopting my new editorial policies and practices at that time. This timing corresponds with the observed increase in the rate of growth in cumulative number of original submissions to *CQ* and (though only correlational) suggests that something about my editorship increased those submissions. The increase in submissions immediately following the start of my editorship cannot be attributed to my new policies and practices, because those policies and practices were not described in the journal (and, hence, widely known) until May 2016. However, it is possible that the initial increase was attributable to author's desires to try a "new" editor, and the persistence of the new, higher rate of submissions over 2 years is attributable to my policies and practices.

To shed more light on authors' reactions to my editorial policies and practices, I asked authors of *CQ* submissions about their experiences with and attitudes toward those policies as well as their willingness to submit future work to *CQ*. Invitations to complete the survey were sent to all *CQ* authors registered in the SAGE online submission system. A total of 188 people responded, but 34 responses were dropped because the respondent did not indicate that he or she had submitted a manuscript within the past 2 years. That left a final sample of 154 respondents. This sample disproportionately represents people whose work was accepted—42% of respondents had a paper accepted while the journal acceptance rate was approximately 12%—but this sampling bias did help to provide sufficient numbers to reliably describe that subgroup's attitudes and to compare them with those of the larger subgroup of authors whose work was not accepted. Moreover, it is accepted authors' attitudes that are most important to the future of the journal as envisioned by the editor because they are more likely to produce future work the journal under that editor would want to publish.

Overall attitudes toward various editorial policies are summarized in Table 1. These results indicate that there is overwhelming support for my "active-editor" policies—that is, for (a) making speedy decisions at every stage of the review process, (b) providing my own evaluations of manuscripts in addition to those of the reviewers, (c) providing clear guidelines for R&Rs, and (d) making final decisions on or before the third round of review. Although authors like speedy decisions, they have mixed to predominately negative attitudes toward three of my policies that facilitate such decisions—(a) accepting and using existing reviews of papers rejected at other journals, (b) desk-rejecting 60% to

70% of submissions, and (c) almost never sending R&Rs back to reviewers. Many authors also appear to dislike my treatment of reviews merely as input to my own opinions and decisions rather than as determinative votes. In short, almost all authors like active editors, but there is less consensus about the desirability of independent editors.

Interestingly, attitudes toward 60% to 70% desk-rejection rates, editor acceptance of papers that reviewers want rejected, and not sending R&Rs back to reviewers (all "independent-editor" policies) are significantly more positive among authors whose work I have accepted than among those whose work I have not accepted. This difference may reflect a tendency for attitudes toward these policies to depend on authors' evaluations of the editor's judgment. Authors whose work is accepted may trust an editor's judgment and, therefore, like the editor's independence from reviewers more than do those whose work is not accepted for two reasons. First, the relationship between having work accepted and trusting the editor may be due to shared research attitudes and opinions—sharing an editor's research related attitudes and opinions increases the likelihood of producing work the editor finds acceptable. Second, the relationship between having work accepted and trusting the editor may be directly causal—an editor's acceptance (or rejection) of their work may elevate (or lessen) authors' opinions of the editor's judgment.

How well these attitudes toward the various editorial policies and practices predict submission intentions and behaviors was assessed via regression analyses. First, attitudes toward the various policies were factor analyzed and formed into indices to reduce multi-collinearity. A factor analysis with Promax rotation produced two meaningful factors. Factor 1 loaded highly on items reflecting editor speed and provision of feedback (Items 4, 5, 6, 10, 13, and 14). An index of these items (with a coefficient alpha of .85) was constructed and labeled "active editor." Factor 2 loaded highly positively on items lessening the power of reviewers (Items 3, 7, 8, and 12) and highly negatively on items empowering reviewers (Items 9 and 11). An index of these items (with a coefficient alpha of .67) was constructed and labeled "independent editor." These indices, together with binomial variables reflecting whether or not authors had a paper accepted and/or desk-rejected under my editorship, were used as independent variables in regression models predicting reported number of submissions to *CQ* over the past 2 years and rated willingness to submit future work to *CQ* under my editorship and under a different editor using my policies. The distributions of the dependent variables are presented in Table 2 and the results of the regression analyses are presented in Table 3.

The regression results in Table 3 indicate that authors who report a greater liking of active and independent editors also report a greater willingness to submit future work to *CQ* under my editorship and editorial policies/practices

Table 1.
Means, Standard Deviations, and Sample Sizes for Attitudes Toward Various Editorial Policies.

Please indicate how much do you (as an author) like or dislike each of the following editorial practices. (1 = <i>dislike a great deal</i> , 7 = <i>like a great deal</i>)			
	All respondents	Respondents with an accepted paper	Respondents without an accepted paper
1. Editor requires submissions to conform with journal style guide before it is sent out for review	4.49 (2.05) 150	4.74 (2.00) 50	4.38 (2.12) 69
2. Editor accepts and uses existing reviews of papers rejected at other journals	3.56 (1.93) 149	3.10 (1.88) 50	3.99* (1.91) 69
3. Editor desk rejects 60%-70% of submissions	4.23 (1.89) 147	4.76 (1.81) 50	3.67** (1.92) 67
4. Editor gets desk-reject decisions back within 3 days	5.88 (1.63) 149	6.20 (1.34) 50	5.36** (1.86)** 69
5. Editor provides his or her own evaluation of your manuscript (beyond what the reviewers said)	5.95 (1.52) 149	6.18 (1.30) 50	5.59* (1.76)* 69
6. Editor explains what problems/issues MUST be addressed for a successful R&R and what problems/issues are less important	6.32 (1.20) 148	6.62 (1.03) 50	6.07* (1.33)* 68
7. Editor goes against reviewer recommendations he or she disagrees with by accepting papers they recommend be rejected	5.07 (1.76) 148	5.44 (1.59) 50	4.71* (1.90) 68
8. Editor goes against reviewer recommendations he or she disagrees with by rejecting papers they recommend be accepted	3.98 (1.95) 149	4.44 (1.92) 50	3.70* (2.00) 69
9. Editor lets reviewers drive decisions on manuscripts	4.22 (1.75) 147	4.14 (1.68) 49	4.26 (1.81) 68
10. Editor gets decisions on refereed manuscripts back within 30 days of submission	6.49 (1.10) 146	6.51 (1.21) 49	6.36 (1.15) 67
11. Editor almost always sends R&R's back to reviewers	4.99 (1.66) 145	4.45 (1.74) 47	5.31** (1.61) 68
12. Editor almost never sends R&Rs back to reviewers	3.73 (1.95) 146	4.31 (2.01) 49	2.99*** (1.72) 68
13. Editor gets decisions on R&Rs back within 10 days of submission	6.01 (1.34) 143	6.31 (1.18) 49	5.70* (1.51) 67
14. Editor makes a final decision on or before the third round of consideration (R&R 2)	5.95 (1.56) 146	6.47 (1.04) 49	5.47** (1.84)** 68
15. Editor does not reject papers after the third round of consideration	5.60 (1.77) 144	5.40 (1.95) 48	5.69 (1.66) 67

*Reliably different at the .05 level from the corresponding statistic for respondents with at least one accepted paper. **Reliably different at the .01 level. ***Reliably different at the .001 level.

(see Model 2). However, liking of active and independent editors did not predict the number of submissions authors reported actually making to *CQ* under my editorship (see Model 1). Nor did it predict willingness to submit to *CQ*

under a different editor using my editorial policies and practices (see Model 3). Thus, it would appear that the positive attitude effects in Model 2 are spurious (perhaps reflecting the effects of authors attitudes toward me on both their

Table 2.
Frequency Distribution and Summary Statistics for Reported Number of Submissions Over the Past 2 Years and Rated Willingness to Submit Future Work to CQ Under Different Conditions.

Number of original submissions over past 2 years	1	2	3	4	5+	M (SD)
	89 (57.8%)	42 (27.3%)	16 (10.4%)	4 (2.6%)	3 (.18%)	1.68 (1.13)
How willing would you be to submit a new manuscript for possible publication in CQ?	Not at all willing (0)	Slightly willing (1)	Willing (2)	Very willing (3)	Extremely willing (4)	M (SD)
Under the current editor and editorial policies/practices	15 (10%)	19 (12.7%)	35 (23.3%)	29 (19.3%)	52 (33.8%)	2.56 (1.34)
Under a different editor who keeps the current editorial policies/practices	7 (4.5%)	29 (19.3%)	43 (28.7%)	40 (26.7%)	31 (20.7%)	2.39 (1.15)

Note. CQ = Cornell Hospitality Quarterly.

Table 3.
Coefficients (and Standard Errors) From Regression Analyses Predicting Reported Number of Submissions Over the Past 2 Years and Rated Willingness to Submit Future Work to CQ.

	Model 1: Number of submissions over past 2 years ^a	Model 2: Willingness to submit under current editor and policies	Model 3: Willingness to submit under different editor using current policies
Intercept	-0.12 (0.43)	-1.36* (0.59)	0.66 (0.61)
Active editor	0.05 (0.07)	0.32** (0.10)	0.16 (0.10)
Independent editor	-0.04 (0.07)	0.40*** (0.10)	0.10 (0.10)
Had a paper accepted (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.60*** (0.16)	0.88*** (0.24)	0.73** (0.25)
Had a paper desk-rejected (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.40** (0.16)	-0.03 (0.23)	0.11 (0.23)
R ² or Pseudo R ²	.05**	.45***	.17***

Note. CQ = Cornell Hospitality Quarterly.

^aAnalyzed with negative binomial regression.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

attitudes toward my editorial policies and their willingness to submit work to me) and that author's attitudes toward these sets of policies do not strongly affect their submission intentions and behavior.

Further supporting this conclusion is the fact that, after controlling for whether or not they had work accepted, authors whose work I desk-rejected were neither more nor less willing to submit future work to CQ. Those receiving a desk-rejection did submit more manuscripts to CQ over the past 2 years than those not receiving a desk-rejection, but this is probably attributable to two reasons other than a general effect of desk-rejections on subsequent submissions. First, many papers with flaws I wanted to see corrected before sending the paper out to review were desk-rejected with an invitation to submit as a new manuscript that corrected the problem and many of those authors accepted that invitation. Second, the more manuscripts an author submitted the greater the opportunity, and therefore likelihood, of

desk-rejecting one of his or her submissions. Thus, discounting Model 1, receiving a speedy desk-rejection does not appear to encourage future submissions; though thankfully, it does not appear to discourage them either.

What does appear to enhance submission intentions and behavior is past success at a journal. Authors whose work I accepted submitted more work to CQ under my editorship and were more willing to submit future work to CQ both under my editorship and under a different editor. The relationship between having a paper accepted and the number of submissions an author made may reflect the effects of either one on the other, but the relationships between having a paper accepted and willingness to submit future research to the journal cannot be explained by two-way or reverse causality. The most plausible explanation for the latter relationships is that past success at a journal encourages authors to submit more work to that journal. This effect cannot, however, explain why submissions appear to have increased

under my editorship, because I have not substantially increased the journal's acceptance rate, which remains about 10% to 15%.

If my efforts to be an active and independent editor and my acceptance rates do not explain the increase in submissions when I became editor, what does explain that increase? I do not know the answer to this question for sure, but I suspect that my preference for quantitative and, especially, experimental research was/is well-known from my earlier stint as *CQ* editor (when I also strove to be transparent) and that knowledge about that preference has encouraged experimental and other quantitative researchers to submit more work to the journal. Of course, it probably discourages qualitative researchers from submitting their work to *CQ*, but I suspect that quantitative researchers are more numerous and prolific than qualitative ones, so that the net effect of increasing quantitative and decreasing qualitative submissions is an increase in overall submissions. Again, this explanation is speculative and I would welcome alternative explanations from readers who have other ideas.

In summary, I have tried to be an active, independent, and transparent editor in an attempt to increase author satisfaction with and submissions to *CQ*. Submissions to the journal have increased under my editorship and an author survey indicates that most authors do like active editors who provide their own opinions of manuscripts and clear

guidelines for revisions and who do so in a timely manner. Authors' attitudes toward independent editors who reduce the power of reviewers are mixed but also appear to be more popular than not among those authors producing the kind of work I find most suitable for publication in *CQ*. I would like to be able to attribute the increased submissions under my editorship to my active- and independent-editor policies, because I would like to give other editors a stronger reason for copying those policies. However, attitudes toward policies defining active and independent editors do not appear to be strongly related (positively or negatively) to authors' actual or intended submissions to editors implementing those policies. Instead, submissions seem to be driven by past success when submitting to a particular journal and perhaps by perceived likelihood of success stemming from consistency of the authors' methods and topics with the known preferences of the editor. Overall, the effects of editorial policies and the determinants of authors' decisions about where to submit are interesting, important, complex, and poorly understood. Hopefully, this editorial will encourage more research on the topic and will embolden (if not encourage) editors to become more active, independent, and transparent.

Michael Lynn