Not to be outdone, Nature Magazine rejects data, publishes opinion

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Abstract

Barely a fortnight has passed since *Science Magazine* published the outcomes of a hoax perpetrated by one of their reporters, John Bohannon. Not surprisingly, the news article was widely criticized, not the least on this obscure blog. The content was simple enough: Bohannon picked a swath of largely fake journals, submitted fake manuscripts and boasted that more than 60% of his submissions were accepted.

Keywords

Cognitive Neuroscience (Subfield), Science Politics, Journal Rank, Nature Magazine, Publishing

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Barely a fortnight has passed since *Science Magazine* published the outcomes of a hoax perpetrated by one of their reporters, John Bohannon. Not surprisingly, the news article was widely criticized, not the least on this obscure blog. The content was simple enough: Bohannon picked a swath of largely fake journals, submitted fake manuscripts and boasted that more than 60% of his submissions were accepted. My criticism of this stunt was that we actually do have reliable, peer-reviewed data on topics such as the quality of the articles in the scientific literature – only that *Science Magazine* has refused to publish these data.

Today, not be outdone by their major rival, *Nature Magazine* (which also rejected our manuscript on precisely the same topic) publishes an opinion piece on journal rank. This article laments that perhaps scientists are becoming fed up with the journal hierarchy, but nevertheless recounts several individual scientist's opinions on how good they felt about their papers in *Nature Magazine* and how they might, possibly, have helped their careers. It is quite telling that *Nature* publishes this touchy-feely article, but rejects publishing a paper that presents the hard, cold facts, namely that there isn't anything in the available literature that could be used as a justification for the status of *Nature* or *Science* and their ilk, by providing the following reason:

> *we will decline to pursue [your manuscript] further as we feel we have aired many of these issues already in our pages recently*

Well, if that is the case, why publish this opinion piece instead of the data?

The only time there is any sort of reference to actual data is at the very end, when they cite a study, indicating that more and more highly cited papers are published outside of the traditional 'top' journals.

In contrast to the article in *Science Magazine*, though, it has to be emphasized that at least *Nature Magazine* does not pretend their article contains actual data and they are upfront about the anecdotal nature of their article:

> *@brembs @phylogenomics it is at least transparent in the piece that the data are anecdotal. Blogpost in preparation...*
>
> *— Stephen Curry (@Stephen_Curry) October 17, 2013*