

Editorial Comment

Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité in the International World of Publishing: How to Get Recognition as an Author*

1. Purpose

The intent of this paper is to discuss the difficulties and impediments which the community of scholars, the world over, is facing when trying to publish articles, papers and books in the international market place. The author is mostly familiar with the American market. However, given the international nature of the publishing business, the remarks made below apply to publications in France as well as publications in other countries in the Western hemisphere. Given that the same publishers of books and journals work on both sides of the Atlantic, authors face the same difficulties everywhere [1].

2. Introduction

Other things being equal, success in obtaining the publication of a manuscript should depend on the ability of the author: a) to match the quality of the manuscript with the quality of the journal, and b) to fit the content of the manuscript in the narrow niche of the journal's target market. However, the publishing world is an imperfect world which displays inequities and barriers to the free exercise of publication rights.

Facetiously, I use the famous statement of 'Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité' to characterize the international world of publishing [6]. Basically, we must realize that, in today's international world of publishing, there is very little liberty, equality or fraternity that prevail in this system. I will illustrate

why below.

In another paper [4], I discussed the nature of liberty or freedom in a planning system and I postulated that the nature of freedom can be planned. I borrow from this previous paper to explore the conditions prevailing in the publishing business and to identify the opportunities which enhance the exercise of the publication rights and identify the barriers which impede them.

3. Conditions Prevailing in the System Determine the Publishing Barriers and Opportunities

The conditions indicated in the following subsections prevail in the system. They are the determinants of the barriers and opportunities open to authors.

3.1. Rationality

Without evidence to the contrary, we assume that all the agents of the system act rationally to pursue their own set of goals and objectives.

3.2. Equality

Equality in the world of publishing implies that, when we present a manuscript to an editor, we have an equal opportunity to obtain a satisfactory result and see our work published. Unfortunately, the sad reality is otherwise. There is an American saying: 'We are all created equal but some are created more equal than others' which is to say that

true equality does not exist anywhere.

Reasons why *equality* in the world of publishing is a fallacy:

a) *Due to their unequal ability and talent*, authors are not created equal. Some of us have a greater inherent literary talent, in particular when writing in our first language, be it French, Spanish, etc. However, our texts suffer when translated into English. In part, this difficulty can be overcome by using professional translators. However, translators are not always available and they imply an extra cost which is not always warranted or easy to bear.

b) *Journals are not of equal quality*. Based on the quality of the manuscripts which they accept, on the strictness of the refereeing process, and on the selection work of the chief editor, journals can be classified in a hierarchy of quality which exhibits the following levels [5]:

- Level 4. *Professional Journals*. Most authors aspire to publish in the journals which are at this level. Journals at this level only publish articles which are refereed anonymously in an impartial process which is guided by editors who are usually recognized as experts in their respective professional fields. Journals continuously ‘jockey’ for position to be on top of the hierarchy. See, for example, [2,3] where the relative quality of journals which publish articles concerning Strategic Management is evaluated and discussed. A pecking order within each level is also in dispute.
- Level 3. *Technical Journals*. Journals at this level are considered of lower quality than those at level 4. As well as the journals at level 4, journals at this level may also pertain to prestigious professional associations but they do not attract the top scholars nor do they report the latest advances in their respective fields. Journals at this level can be commercial ventures that cater to specialists and technicians.
- Level 2. *Trade Magazines*. As their names imply trade magazines refer to publications designed to reach practitioners in a specific market. Publications at this level attempt to bring readers explanations of matters related to their respective trades. Publications at this level are usually paid by advertisers and promotions.
- Level 1. *Magazines and Newspapers*. Publica-

tions at this level aim at the mass market. They are extremely verbose without being very informative. They try to popularize events and treat issues of importance in a superficial way.

c) *Equality among authors’ affiliation*. In a completely democratic system, the name of the school or organization from which the author originates should not influence an editor’s decision to publish. However, given the social and professional links among editors who usually constitute the experts and the elites (see below), first-time authors and authors who happen to work in smaller, lesser known schools have more difficulty to obtain recognition than those who have published before or who work in institutions with a high reputation for scholarship and research.

Other conditions which prevail in the publishing system, are given in the next subsections.

3.3. Experts and Elites

In the world of publishing, the editors of professional journals have been anointed ‘experts’ as a result of their outstanding work in their respective fields. After they reach this level, they abrogate to themselves and to their board of editors, the right to judge everyone else’s work. To the extent that every professional association and every professional journal has its coterie of ‘experts’, they naturally constitute an elite with which the author has to contend in his/her effort to get published.

3.4. Participation

Editors and referees decide and judge an author’s work, more or less impartially and more or less anonymously, depending on the rules imposed by the board of editors. There is little participation between author and editors, except to the extent that the author has to follow the rules and the corrections demanded by referees.

3.5. Change

Authors have little or no say in the Instructions to Contributors published by each journal. Therefore, they cannot influence the rules of the game.

3.6. Control

Authors complain, and rightly so, that they do not exercise any control over the fate of their publications. Authors are completely at the mercy of a large system which is often contemptuous and even insulting. In the case of books, once a publisher has signed a contract, it has power over the author and the manuscript. In spite of the contract or in some cases, because of the contract, the publisher 'owns' the manuscript, can postpone its publication, delay it or even sell it to a foreign publisher without as much as the author's permission.

Nowadays, publishers are conglomerated in large empires which exercise a virtual *monopoly* in certain disciplines. Given the hierarchy among professional journal, authors strive to push their manuscript, to the most important journal of their discipline. Their professional future depends on it, in particular, if a 'Publish or Perish' atmosphere prevails in their work environment. It is paradoxical and ironic, that authors write and are happy to virtually give away the right of publication of a journal article to a publisher who, then, turns around and sells the authors' contribution that was obtained for free at a hefty profit.

Even when books are concerned, I calculated that for the ordinary author who is fortunate enough to see his/her book published, he/she is paid about \$0.50/hr. or less for his/her efforts. Of course, I am not taking into account the best sellers which constitute a completely different proposition.

Under 'Control', one may want to consider the power of *censorship* that editors and publishers exercise over ideas and statements which do not agree with their own. We could supply many illustrations of the power of censorship in every country and in every discipline, regardless of whether we live in advanced industrialized so-called 'democracies' or developing countries of the third world. It is interesting to note that, when the publishing industry, in a particular discipline or in particular locale, is concentrated in a few large entities, it shows monopolistic and dictatorial tendencies. It resorts to overt censorship by publishing only what agrees with its own philosophy or point of view.

3.7. Conflict

Instead of friendly cooperation, we often find *competition* among authors, *competition* among institutional affiliation and allegiance, *competition* among journals in a particular discipline, *competition* among editors and, finally, *competition* among publishers. I have even found competition among editors of the same publishing house working on different sides of the Atlantic, fighting over the publication of the same material written by a prestigious author.

3.8. Technology

In our day and age, technology plays an important role in determining the opportunities and barriers opened for publication. The author who can avail himself/herself of a computer, word processor, e-mail and electronic databases has a decided advantage. This individual can work faster and more efficiently and can tap the information needed to remain relevant and up-to-date with less effort than an author who struggles with manual searches and antiquated libraries.

3.9. Values and Morality

The agents and actors in the publishing world are a diverse lot. They exhibit different worldviews which determine their beliefs and shape their decisions. They are not motivated by the same purposes. For instance, publishers work for a profit, authors for recognition, editors for recognition and to improve the status of their journal. Are these individuals ever in search of the Truth? It would be interesting to research the extent to which the bulk of what is published in books and journals pushes the frontiers of knowledge. I presume that the answer to this question would not be very encouraging.

3.10. Opportunities and Barriers

Finally, when all the conditions which prevail in the system are taken into account, it becomes obvious that publishing is an endeavor fraught with many difficulties and uncertainties. These condi-

tions determine the barriers and opportunities which an individual author in search of publication faces. These barriers are not only geographic, but are also institutional, cultural, barriers of language and, last but not least, can be paradigmatic, i.e., determined by the progress of one's discipline and the role that the individual aspiring author plays in this process.

How organizations can satisfy high as well as low level imperatives, such as the ones imposed by the world of publishing, is discussed in [7].

References

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