

## Ghost Shopping to Improve the Quality of Scientific Journal Services

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### ABSTRACT

Along with the increasingly rapid development and high competition, especially scientific publication in journals, managers must always maintain and improve scientific publication services. That is why a study is needed to assess the quality of scientific journal services. The discussion focuses on ghost shopping as a method for assessing the quality of scientific publication services in journals. The ghost shopping is important to evaluate the quality of service, improve service, measure compliance, provide objective feedback and improve customer satisfaction. The steps of ghost shopping in assessing the quality of academic journal services are: impersonate an author or reviewer, observe the submission and review process, assess the quality of feedback and evaluate availability and accessibility. Predictions of developments towards positive trends by ghost shopping are increased transparency, achievement of higher service standards, the progress of innovation in the publication process, increased satisfaction of authors and reviewers in the future, and useful for efforts to develop better policies and procedures in the future. As conclusion, ghost shopping is an effective tool to improve the quality of service, transparency, and satisfaction of authors and reviewers in the scientific journal publication system; which is then useful for future journal development efforts.

**Keywords:** scientific journal; service quality; publication; ghost shopping; manager; reviewer; author

### INTRODUCTION

Scientific publication is a service that is currently developing very rapidly in various parts of the world, such as the publication of scientific books, scientific papers in conferences, and the most popular is scientific publication in journals.<sup>(1)</sup> In this case, the service provider is the publisher, while the customers are the authors and reviewers from educational institutions, research institutions and even public service institutions. Along with the increasingly rapid development and high competition, especially scientific publication in journals, managers must always maintain and improve scientific publication services.<sup>(2-4)</sup> That is why a study is needed to assess the quality of scientific journal services, so that it can be the basis for efforts to continuously improve quality. There are at least four ways to assess the quality of service for customers, namely the complaint and suggestion system, customer loss analysis, ghost shopping and customer satisfaction surveys.<sup>(5)</sup> Furthermore, in this paper, the discussion focuses on ghost shopping as a method for assessing the quality of scientific publication services in journals.

### HOW DOES GHOST SHOPPING WORK?

Ghost shopping or mystery shopping is an evaluation method in which someone pretends to be a customer to assess the quality of service.<sup>(6)</sup> This method is often used in various industries, such as banking, hospitality, and retail.<sup>(7)</sup> Ghost shopping allows organizations to get an accurate picture of how their services are received by customers, helps identify strengths and weaknesses in service, and provides objective and unbiased feedback.<sup>(8)</sup> Although rarely or perhaps never thought about, ghost shopping can be done to improve the quality of scientific publication services in journals. Of course, the publisher regulates the implementation of this ghost shopping.

Here are some reasons why ghost shopping is important. The first is in order to evaluate the quality of service. In this case, ghost shopping allows organizations to get an accurate picture of how their services are received by customers.<sup>(9)</sup> This helps identify strengths and weaknesses in service. The second is in order to improve service. In this case, by knowing the areas that need improvement, organizations can take steps to improve the quality of their services.<sup>(10)</sup> This could include additional training for staff or changes in operational procedures. The third is in order to measure compliance. In this case, ghost shopping can be used to ensure that staff comply with the standards and procedures that have been set by the organization.<sup>(11)</sup> This is important to maintain consistency in service. The fourth is in order to provide objective feedback. Because ghost shoppers act as regular customers, the feedback given tends to be more objective and unbiased.<sup>(12)</sup> This provides a more realistic view of the customer experience. Fifth is in order to improve customer satisfaction. In this case, by identifying and fixing problems in service, organizations can improve customer satisfaction, which in turn can improve customer loyalty and organizational reputation.<sup>(10)</sup>

## HOW IS GHOST SHOPPING APPLIED TO SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL SERVICES?

Here are examples of steps that can be taken to implement ghost shopping in assessing the quality of academic journal services.

- 1) The first is to impersonate an author or reviewer. Ghost shoppers can pretend to be authors who submit articles or reviewers who assess articles. This allows you to assess the responsiveness, professionalism, and quality of service of the journal staff.

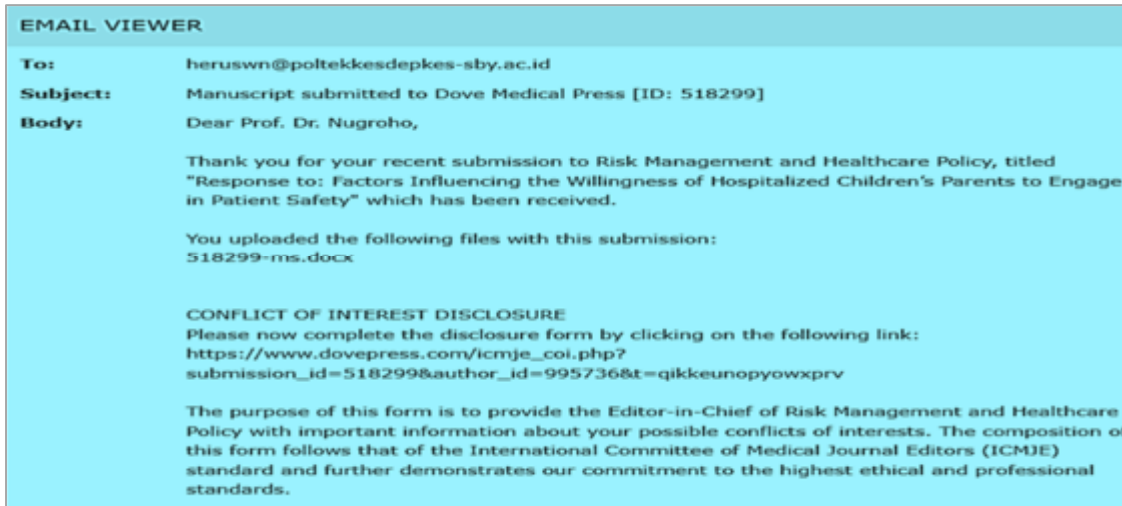


Figure 1. Process of submission (source: Dove Medical Press)<sup>(13)</sup>

- 2) The second is to observe the submission and review process. Ghost shoppers can pay attention to how the article submission process is carried out, how quickly articles are reviewed, and how the communication between authors, reviewers, and editors is.

Email History		
Sent date	Subject	
2020-06-22 07:08:55	Manuscript submitted to Dove Medical Press	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-06-22 07:45:36	Form for Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest [ID 268814] Completed	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-06-30 15:13:03	Manuscript submitted to Risk Management and Healthcare Policy ID 268814 - Compliance Requirements	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-07-02 17:57:01	Manuscript Update Risk Management and Healthcare Policy [Sub ID 268814]	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-07-06 01:30:01	Manuscript submitted to Risk Management and Healthcare Policy [ID: 268814] IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-07-08 01:30:21	Manuscript submitted to Risk Management and Healthcare Policy [ID: 268814] IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-07-10 01:30:17	Manuscript submitted to Risk Management and Healthcare Policy [ID: 268814] IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-08-02 13:36:42	Manuscript Update Risk Management and Healthcare Policy [Sub ID 268814]	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-08-02 14:37:19	Manuscript Update Risk Management and Healthcare Policy [Sub ID 268814]	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-08-17 14:30:03	Submission to Risk Management and Healthcare Policy [ID: 268814] IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-08-18 08:53:51	Your manuscript has been sent to the Editor-in-Chief [ID 268814]	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-08-19 16:42:57	Manuscript submitted to Dove Medical Press - Response Required	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-08-19 17:35:32	Dove Medical Press - Confirmation of Revision Period	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-08-31 14:04:01	Your revised files have been successfully submitted [268814]	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-09-02 12:21:09	Risk Management and Healthcare Policy - Revised Manuscript Corrections	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-09-02 16:35:40	Your corrected files have been successfully submitted [ID: 268814]	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-09-03 08:04:47	Risk Management and Healthcare Policy - Revised Manuscript Corrections	<a href="#">View</a>
2020-09-03 17:48:33	Your corrected files have been successfully submitted [ID: 268814]	<a href="#">View</a>

Figure 2. The communication between author and editor (source: Dove Medical Press)<sup>(13)</sup>

- 3) The third is to assess the quality of feedback. Ghost shoppers can evaluate the quality of feedback provided by reviewers and editors. In this case, it can be assessed whether the feedback is constructive, clear, and helps authors to improve their articles?

**RESPONSE TO PEER-REVIEW 1**

1. In general, how do you rate the degree to which the paper is easy to follow and its logical flow? **Fair**  
**Response: Clear**

2. Do the title and abstract cover the main aspects of the work? **No.**  
**For the purpose of literary form, I would suggest that the Title not begin with an acronym. Hence my suggestion for the Title would be: Quadrant of Difficulty-Usefulness (QoDU) as new method in preparing for improvement of e-learning in health college**  
**Response: We agree with the suggested title changes**

3. If relevant are the results novel? Does the study provide an advance in the field? **Yes.**  
**According to the authors, e-learning is fraught with difficulties in measuring outcomes. Thus the scheme presented seems to afford a reasonable approach.**  
**Response: Clear**

4. Did the study gain ethical approval appropriate to the country in which the research was performed if human or animal subjects, human cell lines or human tissues were involved and is it stated in the manuscript? **No.**  
**Does the paper raise any ethical concerns? No.**  
**Please note that I am not equipped to answer Question 4 because I am not familiar with the authors' countries' scientific/ethical regulations in publishing.**  
**Response: We recognize that ethical approval is mandatory for research involving humans and animals as the object of research. Therefore, we have included information about ethical approval and letter number in the method section.**

5. If relevant, are the methods clear and replicable? **Yes**  
**Response: Clear**

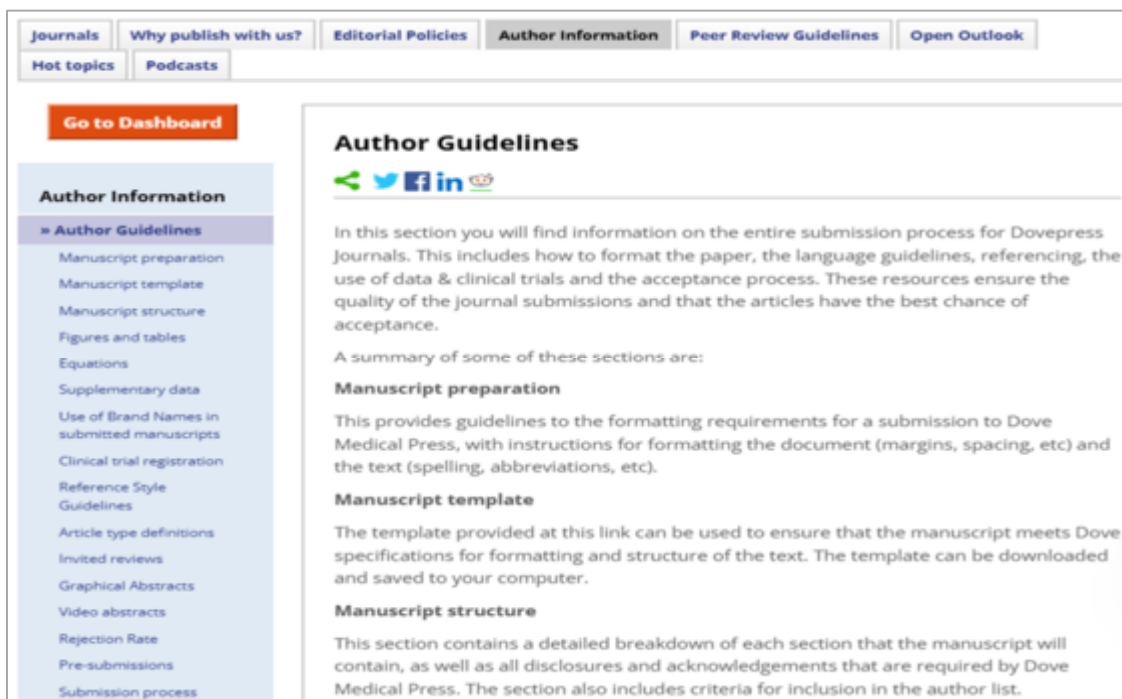
6. If relevant, do all the results presented match the methods described? **Yes**  
**Response: Clear**

7. If relevant, is the statistical analysis appropriate to the research question and study design? **NA.**  
**Please see answer to question 8 (below)**  
**Response: Clear (This study only used descriptive statistics, so there was no statistical analysis for hypothesis testing).**

8. If relevant, is the selection of the controls appropriate for the study design. Have attempts been made to address potential bias through analytic methods, eg., sensitivity analysis. **NA.**

Figure 3. Quality of review (source: Dove Medical Press)<sup>(13)</sup>

- 4) The fourth is to evaluate availability and accessibility. Ghost shoppers can check how easy it is to access journal information, author guidelines, and editorial policies.



The screenshot shows the Dove Medical Press website navigation menu with options like Journals, Why publish with us?, Editorial Policies, Author Information, Peer Review Guidelines, and Open Outlook. The 'Author Information' section is expanded, showing a list of links including Author Guidelines, Manuscript preparation, Manuscript template, Manuscript structure, Figures and tables, Equations, Supplementary data, Use of Brand Names in submitted manuscripts, Clinical trial registration, Reference Style Guidelines, Article type definitions, Invited reviews, Graphical Abstracts, Video abstracts, Rejection Rate, Pre-submissions, and Submission process. The 'Author Guidelines' page is displayed, featuring social media icons and introductory text about the submission process. It includes sections for 'Manuscript preparation', 'Manuscript template', and 'Manuscript structure', each with a brief description of the guidelines provided.

Figure 4. Access to information (source: Dove Medical Press)<sup>(13)</sup>

It is expected that ghost shopping will have significant positive impacts on the development of the journal publication system in the future. Several predictions of developments towards positive trends are certainly highly expected by scientific journal publishing managers. The first is increased transparency, because with ghost shopping, journal publishers can identify and fix various problems in the publication process.<sup>(14,15)</sup> This will automatically increase transparency and author trust in the publication system.

Another positive prediction is the achievement of higher service standards. If ghost shopping is carried out periodically, then this becomes a continuous evaluation that can encourage journal publishers to continue to improve their service standards.<sup>(10)</sup> The standards in question can be in terms of the speed of the review process or the quality of feedback given by the editorial team to the author.

The next positive prediction is the progress of innovation in the publication process. Ghost shopping can provide more detailed and specific instructions on areas that require innovation.<sup>(15)</sup> For example, publishers can develop new technologies to speed up and/or facilitate the review process.<sup>(16-18)</sup> Publishers can also make innovations that enable more effective communication between the editorial team and authors.<sup>(19)</sup>

Ghost shopping also allows for increased satisfaction of authors and reviewers in the future. By identifying problems through ghost shopping, accurate improvements can be made regarding these problems. Thus, journal publishers can improve the satisfaction of authors and reviewers, which in turn can improve the reputation of the journal and attract more quality contributions.<sup>(20,21)</sup>

Finally, ghost shopping is continuously useful for efforts to develop better policies and procedures in the future. The detailed and specific results of ghost shopping can be used to develop policies and procedures that are more focused on current specific information.<sup>(10)</sup> Of course, this will help publishers to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the journal publication system.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the overall explanation above, it can be concluded that ghost shopping is an effective tool to improve the quality of service, transparency, and satisfaction of authors and reviewers in the scientific journal publication system; which is then useful for future journal development efforts.

## Ethical consideration, competing interest and source of funding

-The ethical approval: not applicable.

-There is no conflict of interest related to this publication.

-Source of funding is authors.

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