THE IMPACT OF JOURNAL RANKING SYSTEMS ON EMERGING JOURNALS AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM: HOW SHOULD ACADEMICS RESPOND?

DENNIS TOURISH *
Royal Holloway, University of London, UK

ABSTRACT

Pressure on academics to publish articles in ‘top’ journals continues to grow. In consequence, we have seen a proliferation of journal rankings, purporting to provide a guide to the quality of journals. As editors become more preoccupied by the ranking of ‘their’ journal, they also exercise performative power over authors, by setting standards for publication that exclude many while compelling those that are published to adapt to the styles, priorities and imperatives of editors. One result has been a ceaseless quest for novelty, expressed in an insistence that each paper must make a ‘distinctive’ theoretical contribution. This is producing an environment in which scholarship is increasingly mechanised and industrialised, while rendering its outputs more arcane and inaccessible non-specialists. It also means that academics are becoming ever more complicit in their own subordination to performative processes that we frequently criticise when observing them in the outside, ‘real’ world of management practice. We are therefore seeing more barriers to entry for both authors and new journals – unless both conform to norms that bear an orthodox but often sterile imprint. I consider the implications of these issues for emergent journals and academic freedom, while also suggesting how academics should respond.

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