

The Formation Mechanism of Trust between Editors and Authors of Academic Journals from the Perspective of Symbolic Interaction Theory

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Abstract: Building trust is a prerequisite for effective interaction between academic journal editors and authors. Only when trust is formed and consolidated can editor-author relationships be formed around academic creation and academic dissemination. The interaction between editors and authors is the transmission and reception of symbolic information. Positive information is conducive to the formation of a harmonious and trusting relationship between the two parties, while negative information causes the two sides to produce "text-induced loss of trust" "comparison-induced loss of trust" "attitude - induced loss of trust" "authority & responsibility"-induced loss of trust" in the interaction. By reflecting on the problems that arise in the symbolic interaction between academic journal editors and authors, it is believed that both editors and authors need to change their cognitive modes and deepen their identity recognition through positive information symbol transmission. This will enable them to establish a harmonious relationship and build an effective trust mechanism, thereby achieving the value enhancement of academic publishing work.

Keywords: trust formation; symbolic interaction; editors and authors; academic journals

1. Introduction

In the process of submitting articles, the editor of academic journals forms a host-guest relationship with authors, where the editors take the leading role in handling the articles, and authors receive feedback information. The final academic achievement is the process of idea resonance and cooperation between the editor and the author (Song, 2012), in which the establishment of trust is the basis for the editor and the author to work together. Previous studies have shown that earning the trust of authors can enable editors to establish mutually respectful and harmonious relationships with them (Ge & Zhao, 2009; Guo, 2015); highlight the personality strength and comprehensive quality of editors, and have a demonstration effect on authors (Gong, 2005; Li, 2020); help to stabilize and expand the number of authors (Chen, 2016); establish a steady supply of manuscripts and promote the healthy development of academic journals (Chen, 2023; Dai, 2024).

The communication between editors and authors is an information interaction mediated by symbols. The information transmitted by both parties is perceived and interpreted as a medium of trust and perceived trust. At present, many studies have discussed the importance of editors gaining the trust of authors, but the understanding of how the trust is established is limited. From the perspective of symbolic interaction theory, this study discusses the formation logic of trust between editors and authors and its influence on editing practice.

2. Concept Interpretation

2.1 Trust and Perceived Trust

Trust has a broad meaning, and there is no consensus on its definition (Husted, 1998). In a broad sense, trust can be understood as confidence in a person's expectations. Some believe that trust refers to trustor's subjective belief that trustee will behave reliably under uncertain circumstances in order to maximize entrusted benefits. It is based on trustor's experience accumulation of trustee's past cognition and judgment of a given situation (Cho, Chan, & Adali, 2015). Dowell et al. think that trust has a

multidimensional structure and individuals form cognition based on their existing knowledge and establish emotional bonds through time accumulation (Dowell, Morrison, & Heffernan, 2015). Some scholars also point out that trust is fragile and takes a long time to build, while once it is destroyed, it takes a long time to rebuild (Slovic, 1993). Some studies have demonstrated the relationship between trust and some elements, indicating that trust is correlated with the qualities of both sides (including competence, honesty, responsibility, kindness and integrity) (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), or trust has an impact on satisfaction, loyalty and institutional reputation (Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010; Sarwar, Abbasi, & Pervaiz, 2012).

Perceived trust is when someone perceives that another person trusts him/her, that is, the "perception of being trusted" (Salamon & Robinson, 2008), which can perceive the degree of trust of the other party. Baer et al. broadly defined "feeling trusted" as "a person perceives that the other person is willing to accept his vulnerability and take risks for it" (Baer, Dhensa-Kahlon, Colquitt, et. al. 2015). Generally, trust transmission can only be achieved when the expectations and intentions sent by one party are perceived and understood by the other party, and this process "affects the formation of individual self-concept and self-cognitive development, and has a guiding effect on mental state and behavior" (Brower, Lester, Korsgaard, & Dineen, 2009). Research confirms that: how employees view the trust of leaders in enterprises depends on their understanding of the trust given by leaders (Baer, Frank, Matta, Luciano, & Wellman, 2021); perceiving the trust of superiors can bring pride to employees, fulfill organizational citizenship behavior, and improve work performance and so on (Wang & Huang, 2019).

In the work of editing and publishing, although there is no employment relationship or superior and subordinate relationship between editors and authors as in enterprises, trust and perceived trust have the same mechanism of action. Only when trust is perceived and understood can editors and authors form trust support, have spiritual resonance, and jointly serve the academic goal community.

2.2 Identity and Identification

Identity relationships are established and acquired through integrating into societies, interpersonal interaction with others, or in a certain work scenario. Academic activity is also a process of identity construction and identification (Hyland, 2002). Through academic delivery, the author forms an identity connection with the editor. They not only maintain identity differences and boundaries, but also hope that the other side can provide empathy and synesthesia, output support and understanding. First, as the producer of academic products, the author pours his knowledge, attitude and idea into the academic achievements, showing his academic identity, in order to obtain reaction and feedback. Secondly, after submission, the author expects to be recognized and appreciated by the editor or predicts to receive "potential criticism" (Thompson, 2008), such as the manuscript is rejected, forming a dual psychological projection. However, editors are associated with authors in their professional capacity and adhere to their professional identity by keeping a check on the authors' manuscripts. On the one hand, the editor should act as the gatekeeper of academic review and distance himself from the author, on the other hand, the editor should jump out of their professional threshold, talking with the author as an empathist and an appreciator, and recognize the author's academic work. Both sides seek opposition and unity of identity in establishing and breaking.

According to Puusa, the self-image and identity of social members are largely defined by how an individual is perceived by others, interpreted by others, and perceived by others (Puusa & Tolvanen, 2006). The identification of self-image and identity in the eyes of others through information interpretation, which is a process of information transmission and interpretation loaded in symbols. In this process, personal identity is deepened and recognized, which lays the foundation for the subsequent establishment of trust and perceived trust. It can be argued that being identified helps build trust.

2.3 Symbol Interaction

The symbolic interaction theory holds that facts are based on and guided by symbols, and pays attention to "what symbols and meanings are generated in the interaction between people" (Aksan, Kısac, Aydın, & Demirbuken, 2009). The theoretical representative, Mead, believes that symbols can develop people's minds and serve as a means of thinking and communication in social interaction (Ashworth, 2012). Mead focuses on how people interact with symbols in daily life and how meanings are corrected through social interaction (Mead, 1934). Another representative, Blumer, believes that meaning is loaded and generated in symbols transmitted by objects, events, phenomena, etc. (Blumer,

1969). In symbolic interaction, individuals predict the behavior of others and guide their own actions according to the potential reactions of others (Blumer, 2004). Meaning, language and thinking are the three core principles of Blumer's symbolic interaction theory. Language is a kind of symbol, which provides interpretable meaning, while thinking changes people's interpretation of symbols.

Previous studies have shown that trust relationship is generated and established through the interaction between the trusting party and the trusted party (Konecki, 2019; Gawley, 2007). Dionysion and Tsoukas believe that the theory of symbolic interaction can better explain the process and function of the formation of trust and being trusted (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013). The communication between the editor and the author is based on the transmission and interaction of symbolic information, and both parties interpret the information as a basis for follow-up action. The symbolic interaction theory can also explain the formation mechanism of trust in the interaction between editors and authors.

3. Problems Related to the Formation of Trust Between Editors and Authors

Due to the differences in identity, way of thinking and ability of empathy, editors and authors interpret the meaning of symbols differently, and both sides are faced with several problems in the process of establishing trust and perceiving trust.

3.1 "Text-induced Loss of Trust": Negative Emotions in the Context of Manuscript Rejection

Symbolic interaction theory regards individuals as social beings who can read, interpret, judge and act. One party takes action based on the meaning of symbols transmitted by the other party, that is, the meaning or value of symbols is based on the result of understanding of people who use them. The submission of an academic paper to an academic journal is carried out on the network platform and is operated in accordance with certain process. The editor and author take a "space dialogue" via texts only. The editor almost feedbacks the review comments to the author in the form of text through the network system, and there is little communication between the two sides in other ways. The "text" becomes the main bridge of communication, and the quality of the information it contains affects the establishment of trust. The number of scientific researchers in China is huge, with an average annual growth rate of more than 7% since the 13th Five-Year Plan, from 3.878 million in 2016 to 5.092 million in 2020 (Ministry of Science and Technology of the People's Republic of China, 2021). The output of academic papers is far greater than the number of journals, that is, the supply of manuscripts exceeds the demand, so the papers submitted by authors are usually rejected for publication. Due to the large number of papers submitted and the complicated review process, the author usually has along time to wait for the reply from editor, and it's difficult for the editor to give a manuscript rejection explanation to so many authors, only the rejection template is used instead, and the "rejection" is simply informed. The reply text with only a few words will inevitably make the author feel despised and perfunctory, and then question the impartiality and openness of the manuscript review. In addition, editors may also give a hasty rejection of authors' academic papers because they do not have a deep understanding of a certain professional field and have insufficient value judgment on the papers submitted, which aggravates the author's disappointment and deepens the psychological estrangement between authors and editors, resulting in "negative emotions such as uncontrollable, isolation and failure" (Xiao, 2018). Too simple expression of rejection opinions often makes it difficult to establish trust, leading to subsequent estrangement and damaging the authors' academic enthusiasm.

3.2 "Comparison-induced Loss of Trust": Strategic Choices for Self-strengthening

Comparison is a universal psychology of human beings. Studies have shown that individuals' perception and evaluation of themselves are obtained by comparing with the surrounding reference frame (Xing & Yu, 2005), and the stronger the similarity with the reference object, the more significant the comparative psychology. In specific comparison, when the focus is dominated by self-reinforcement, individuals will think that others are worse than they are and less capable than themselves, that is, they tend to compare themselves with those who are worse than themselves (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & LaPelle, 1985). When the desire to improve oneself is dominant, individuals will admit that others are better than themselves, that is, they tend to compare themselves with those who are excellent than themselves.

Similarly, from the perspective of the journal author, the author will naturally hold a comparative mentality, especially when their submissions are rejected or fails to be accepted, the author will pay

attention to papers that have been published in the same journal, find articles that are similar to their type and topic and examine with a comparative perspective, and evaluate the value of the other published articles. Some authors can find something suitable for their own reference from the published articles, while some authors will think that other people's articles are "no more" than their own articles have more academic value. Because the review process is operated by the journal editor and is not open to the public, the author can only accept the review result. When the author makes a comparative judgment, and finds that the same quality articles were published, he/she will inevitably have doubts about the fairness of the review, and thus lose trust in the editor and the journal. The author's self-strengthening psychology is a protective strategy, which is also a reflection of potential self-esteem. Moreover, academic corruption also exists in reality (includes operating guanxi manuscripts). Even if there is no "underhand operation", editors should give more reasonable and specific rejection suggestions for unacceptable manuscripts to bridge the author's psychological need for fair, otherwise it will easily lead to a crisis of trust under this comparative psychology. Or else, the professional image of the editor and the reputation of the journal are reduced, and the trust relationship between the two sides is difficult to establish.

3.3 "Attitude -induced Loss of Trust": Polarization in Communication Conflict

Attitude is the identification or dis-identification of persons or things. It is a kind of cognitive psychology, which occurs based on the feedback of other people's words and behaviors. In order to improve the quality of a manuscript, the communication between the editor and the author is usually repeated many times, and the discussion on the revision of the manuscript is like a "tug of war", in which different editors and authors show different patience and attitudes. As for the authors, some authors do not agree with the revision opinions given by editors and reviewers, and do not spend full energy to revise. However, the editor holds the purpose of improving and producing more excellent products, requiring the author to repeatedly improve the content and format of the article, which is prone to lead to burnout of author. Some authors may not submit their revisions on time, affecting the progress of editing and publication, and editors need to repeatedly urge them.

There are also academic dissents between the author and the editor, resulting in friction in communication. On the editors side, they need to be more patient and tolerant of authors who are "difficult to communicate". In addition, editors also need to discover some potential authors and stimulate their motivation of academic contribution, which requires more efforts from editors. There are also some authors who withdraw their manuscripts without any reason, which creates a passive situation for the editing work. During the whole process from selection, appointment, revision, to finalization, "the editor devoted a lot of effort and fought against fatigue" (Chen, 2023), and showed the author a positive attitude while hiding negative emotions. Of course, there are also editors who interact with the author in a condescending attitude, lack patience and care and rough treatment of the author's doubts or opinions, resulting in communication interruption and loss of trust. The attitude and position of both sides are the support for the establishment of trust, which determines whether to continue the cooperation. In the running-in process, the two sides may go their separate ways due to divergence, or they may reach follow-up cooperation. Only a positive attitude can build trust and promote further development of academic achievements.

3.4 "Authority & Responsibility"-induced Loss of Trust: Inefficient Operation Under Boundary Imbalance

Identity enables people to enjoy certain rights, but also attach corresponding responsibilities, rights and responsibilities are intertwined opposites. Editors implement the right to review manuscripts to be responsible for the quality of journals, and authors enjoy the right of publication to ensure that the content of their works is true and original. The right and responsibility of editor and author have a clear line, but in reality, the right and responsibility are often unclear and fuzzy. Some editors magnify their own rights, refuse to negotiate and communicate with the author when revising the manuscript, do not listen to the author's voice, but require the author to revise the manuscript according to what they say, or "take the initiative to modify the author's text according to their own views" (Lei, 2007), which changes the author's creative design.

There are also some editors who do not use the "gatekeeping power" within their duties to shut out high-quality manuscripts, and publish acquaintances' manuscripts by underhand operation, which is contrary to justice. In the performance of their duties, some editors show burnout or slack in their work, carelessly check the work of reviewing and proofreading, or thrown back some proofreading back to

the author and let the author do it, evade their own responsibility, resulting in publication editing errors, which damage the image of the journal. Also, some authors failed to fulfill their due responsibilities, such as trying to deliver a paper to a few journals at the same time. There are also authors in the pursuit of fame and profit, withdrawn their paper to other journals, wasting the human resources and material resources. Some authors plagiarize, fabricate data, and find others to write articles for them, which violates academic ethics and blasphemes the rights of themselves. With proper use of rights and responsibilities, editors and authors can establish a clear and equal relationship, accelerate the establishment of trust, and make the editing work smooth and efficient. The imbalance of power and responsibility will lose mutual trust and hinder academic innovation.

4. The Construction Strategy of Editors-Authors Trust

As the gatekeeper of academic submission and the maintainer of journal quality, editors take it as their duty to discover outstanding academic talents and publish high-quality research achievements. Journal authors are committed to the production of high-quality academic works. With editing and publishing work as the domain and symbolic information transmission as the link, they outline a harmonious and vivid picture of mutual trust.

4.1 Editors: Presents the Complexity Behind the Working Program

Editing work seems to be a process operation, but in fact, editing work is not a streamlined operation, but a process that requires high knowledge and high emotional intelligence. Journal editors need to face up to and correct some negative views of others on themselves, so that authors can see the complexity of editing work behind the academic stage through the surface of editing work, narrow the distance between editors and authors, and make academic publishing more humane.

4.1.1 From Authority to Negotiation

When the output of papers is much greater than the number of journals, the "competition" for article publication is intensified, and editors who are familiar with the operation mechanism of journals take the initiative in manuscript selection and recruitment, which makes the editorial authority invisibly elevated. In the communication with the editor, the author often follows the editor's instructions in order to obtain the opportunity to publish. Editors are also easy to show professional authority as a conductor. Text production is actually a triangular process in which editors, authors, and texts should all be equally involved, with collaboration at the core (Greenberg, 2018). It is difficult to form a relaxed and equal dialogue atmosphere when the editor takes the leading position and the author takes the second place, and the author may choose to reduce his submission or submit his paper to another journal in the future. When a journal loses its attractiveness to the author, the source of high-quality manuscripts will be reduced, and the quality of the journal is difficult to guarantee. Therefore, whether subjectively or unconsciously, editors should reduce the "ego" attitude of the author and instead make the author feel heard and supported. However, editors should be an example of abiding by the review rules, abiding by the standards of manuscript use, and safeguarding academic fairness and justice. Listen to the author's voice, move the author with temperature and patience, and activate the author's academic return to the journal. From the authority to the negotiator, the editor and editors and authors can understand each other's intentions, so that the author feel the professional image and personality charm of the editor from multiple angles and sides.

4.1.2 From Invisible to Visible

From the author's submission to the publication of the achievements, the editor has paid auxiliary, suggestion, creativity and proofreading work behind the scenes. However, the process of text improvement and revision is relatively closed, only between the editor and the author, and it is not easy for outsiders to know. The highlight in the foreground is usually the author, and the public pays less attention to the value of the editor. Therefore, the editor's work has a certain "invisibility", which can be described as the "hero behind the scenes". Editors should first put an attitude, be willing to be a behind-the-scenes "consigliere" and consider assisting authors in revising their articles and improving journal quality as the ultimate value. Second, "invisibility" is not a disregard for the editor's efforts, but the editor is not easy to become the center of attention compared to the author. While an excellent editor always leads the direction of scientific research with invisible wisdom and perceptiveness. A good column planning and topic selection planning show the vision and horizon of the editor, many famous columns and journals are also created by the editor, the popularity of the famous column and the well-

known journal drives the cohesion of the author group, and the harmony and trust between the editor, the author and the publication are enhanced. When editors approach their work with an non-utilitarian mindset, investing their heart and soul into it, their "behind-the-scenes" efforts will be recognized on the "front stage."

4.1.3 From Abstraction to Concreteness

Editors and authors are living individuals in common space and time, but in the editing work, both sides communicate back and forth on the online platform space, and both sides only establish working relationship in the virtual space. The author does not know who is handling his manuscript, and he/she only receives reply through the network review system. It's difficult for author to obtain other ways to communicate with the editor more directly. Due to the indirectness of communication in cyberspace, the communication between the two sides is limited. In addition, it takes a certain amount of time for the review process and the reply to be obtained, the sense of space and time barrier will be generated, and the author inevitably develop a sense of alienation and estrangement towards editors, which further widens the psychological gap between them. The process of reviewing on online platforms turns the author's perception of editors into abstract professional symbols rather than vivid, tangible individuals. In terms of journals and editors, the strangeness caused by network distance should be minimized, and more communication channels should be set up to allow authors and editors to further communicate and express authors' ideas. In addition to "setting up various interaction ways with application tools such as smart phones, computer devices and mobile internet" (Xing & L, 2023), targeted opinions should be given to authors' rejected manuscripts as much as possible to avoid template reply. It is possible to convene authors for face-to-face training sessions, meetings, seminars, etc., to eliminate the psychological distance brought by cyber space, and build a bridge of trust through tangible and perceptible interactions.

4.2 Authors: Weakening the Color of "I" to Establish a Sense of Collaboration

Authors enjoy the halo effect brought by authorship, but the author's work can be published and enjoy academic reputation, which is not unilateral talent, but the result of collaboration with editors. The author should weaken the "I" color and promote mutual trust with collaboration.

4.2.1 Co-creation of Intention

The author's creative intention occurs at the very beginning of the cooperation with the editor and is part of the development of the cooperation (McGann, 1992). In the process of knowledge production, the author is the initiator of academic creation, and the editor is the promoter of academic sublimation. Whether the two are broken or harmonious depends on whether they can cooperate, communicate and trust. Before entering into academic creation, the author should negotiate with the editor about the intention of creation, and judge whether the direction of article writing matches the scope of the journal's admission and whether it matches the arrangement plan of the journal's manuscript. The coincidence of intention lays the foundation for subsequent cooperation. After entering the stage of submission and revision, the author's creative works is still completed under the editor's "intervention". The editor's intervention is not the denial of the author's autonomy, but the collision and negotiation of two identity consciousness and subjective discourse. The editorial work is always accompanied by the stimulation of each other's intentions, trust increases accordingly and academic thoughts are sublimated, and high-quality academic achievements are born.

4.2.2 From Ideal to Reality

Academic creation involves both mental and physical labor, and authors tend to have idealized expectations about their own positioning and academic creation, hoping that the uniqueness and value of their academic achievements will be recognized. "Self-certainty and self-maintenance" (Li, 2004) make authors stubborn about peer review, editorial opinions, etc. (Ge & Zhao, 2009), and easy to adhere to their own opinions. And it is easy for authors to produce negative psychological emotions when in face of article rejection. It is common for authors to encounter multiple rejections or multiple rounds of revisions, and authors who with idealized colors should rationally treat the setbacks of submission and receive reasonable opinions given by others, so that their ideal can return to reality. The author should start with understanding the stylistic rules, type and column style of the journal, earnestly absorb the revision opinions to revise their manuscript seriously, pay attention to the improvement of the manuscript quality, negotiate and communicate with the editor with reasonable idea, enhance the consensus and deepen the trust in the in-depth interaction with the editor, and finally produce more excellent research achievements.

4.2.3 Tension and Self-discipline

Whether the academic "products" produced by the author can be "published and circulated" must go through the "quality inspection" of editors and reviewers. On the one hand, the author holds academic initiative and creative freedom, that is, the author is the original creator of academic achievements, without the author's academic creation activities, the journal has no available manuscript source. In addition, authors have the initiative to choose which journals to submit their academic papers to and their willingness to publish them. On the other hand, the author is also subject to the constraints of academic norms, academic ethics and journal regulations, and must produce research achievements under the framework of the statute and maintain self-control and self-discipline. The authors who are not self-disciplined easily show certain behaviors such as arbitrariness and violation of academic norms, for example, without paying attention to the requirements of manuscript format, not paying attention to the way of communicating with editors, not being rigorous and meticulous in manuscript revision, and plagiarizing others' achievements. These undisciplined behaviors are difficult to be accepted and recognized by editors. To release the creative initiative based on self-discipline is the author's due act. It is the author's due action to release academic freedom based on self-discipline, and authors should be passionate about academic research, submitting high-quality papers to journals, which helps gain the trust of editors and promotes academic progress in a win-win situation.

5. Conclusion

Trust is the key element of interpersonal relationship (McGann, 1992), and it enables the communication sides and their organization to gain intangible competitiveness. Editing and publishing is a systematic project. Editors and authors are opposing yet unified entities in the system, and the establishing of effective trust relationships between them promotes the smooth operation of all elements within the system. The relationship of mutual trust can enable journal editors and authors to build consensus, and the whole chain of academic publishing can be promoted smoothly and make due contributions to the development and progress of science and technology. The communication between editors and authors depends on symbolic carriers such as text and language, and the transmission of positive symbolic information is conducive to the positive interpretation, acceptance and recognition of the other side, thus facilitating mutual acceptance and trust between the two parties. The negative symbolic information transmitted by inappropriate language and emotion will break the establishment of mutual trust. Editors and authors should respect and identify with each other's identities, explore more diverse interaction channels, strengthen the positive significance and beneficial outcomes of symbolic communication, interact in trust, thereby endowing academic editing and publishing work with a profound humanistic foundation and spiritual core.

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