

# Editors publishing in their own journals – a systematic review of prevalence and a discussion of normative aspects

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## **ABSTRACT**

Journal editors are the main gatekeepers in scientific publishing. Yet there is a concern that they may receive preferential treatment when submitting manuscripts to their own journals. The prevalence of such self-publishing is not known, nor the consequences for reliability and trustworthiness of published research. This study aimed to systematically review the literature on the prevalence of editors publishing in their own journals and to conduct a normative ethical analysis of this practice. A systematic review was performed using the following databases: Medline, PsycInfo, Scopus, and Web of Science. Articles that provided primary data about editors publishing in own journals were included. We identified 15 studies meeting inclusion criteria. There was large variability of self-publishing across fields, journals, and editors, ranging from those who never published in their own journal to those publishing extensively in their own journal. Many studies suffered from serious methodological limitations. Nevertheless, our results show that there are settings where levels of self-publication are very high. We recommend that editors-in-chief and associate editors who have considerable power in journals refrain from publishing research articles in their own journals. Journals should have clear processes in place about treatment of articles submitted by editorial board members.

### **Key points:**

- There is concern that editors submitting papers to their own journals may receive preferential treatment
- Our results show that the prevalence of editors publishing in their own journals varies greatly among journals
- Our systematic review does not show that compromised review practices benefitting editors publishing in their own journal are widespread
- It is important that journal guidelines include clear information about the handling procedure for submissions authored by editors
- Overall, it is preferable that at least editors-in-chief strive to avoid publishing research papers in their own journals

**Keywords:** authorship; bias; conflict of interest; editors; editorial boards; publication ethics

## INTRODUCTION

Publication in scientific journals is a primary mode of research communication as well as a currency of merit for individual scientists. Therefore, mechanisms to determine what gets published have major impact on the quality and trustworthiness of the scientific literature as a whole and on individual scientists' careers.

Editors of scientific journals are the main gatekeepers in scientific publishing. Typically, a decision to accept a research article for publication is preceded by peer review, which is intended to ensure that work of low quality is less likely to be published (although the efficacy of peer review for this purpose has been debated (e.g. Smith, 2006). However, conflicts of interest may challenge the impartiality of editorial handling (Radun, in press). Since most editors are active researchers, they not only evaluate others' academic work, but produce their own (Bedeian et al 2009; Pardeck & Meinert 1999; Zdeněk & Lososova 2018). One potential conflict of interest arises when an author of a research article at the same time is an editor of the journal. Such a conflict of interest may exist even if the manuscript is handled by another editor of the journal.

Some journals publish original work contributed by their own editors, while others do not (Graf et al 2007). There have been remarkable examples of editors with a massive output of research papers in their own journals. In an extreme case from theoretical physics, an editor is claimed to have published nearly 60 papers in his own journal during one year (Schiermeier 2008).

Risk of bias, favoritism, and conflicts of interest are central themes brought up by critics regarding editors publishing in their own journals (Bošnjak et al. 2011). Favorable treatment may include different facets such as selection of reviewers known to be friendly, a higher likelihood of acceptance, and faster handling. For instance, Scanff et al. (2021) reported that in a set of journals (n=98) with a high proportion of papers from particularly prolific authors, "the most prolific author was part of the editorial board in 60 cases (61%), among whom 25 (26% of the 98) were editors-in-chief", and that papers by these authors were more likely to be accepted for publication within 3 weeks of their submission. Very short lag times between submission and publication were observed for some papers authored by journal editors, calling into question whether these papers were peer reviewed in any meaningful sense.

Publication by editors in their own journals nevertheless finds its defenders, in several guidelines and journals and in science-related social media (see discussion below). In order to judge the potential severity of problems relating to editors publishing in their own journals, knowledge about the prevalence of this practice is essential.

This study aimed firstly to investigate the prevalence of editors publishing in their own journals by means of a systematic review, and secondly to discuss normative issues relating to editors publishing in their own journals.

In what follows, we first describe the empirical methods used and the results from the literature survey of empirical studies about editors publishing in their own journals. Then we present recommendations of some well-established guidelines on the matter and summarize arguments identified in the literature and in social media. Thereafter, we provide our own analysis of arguments in favor of and against editors publishing in their own journals, as well as regarding what restrictions and regulations that need to be in place for such practice to be defensible.

## **METHODS**

A systematic search of the peer-reviewed literature was performed on 30 December 2020. The following databases were used: Medline, PsycInfo, Scopus, and Web of Science. Articles that provided primary data about editors publishing in own journal were included. The search was performed jointly by one researcher (IR) and an information specialist at the Helsinki University Library (for the full search strategy, see Appendix I). Duplicates were removed by two methods: automatic removal of duplicates in EndNote and manual removal. Both methods produced an almost identical result. Two researchers (IR & JR) independently screened titles and abstracts, resulting in 44 relevant articles. After full text screening, the final sample included 15 articles (for the Prisma flow chart, see Appendix II). The same two researchers then independently read the selected articles, discussed each study, and extracted information on (a) sampling frame: journals, editors, years, and types of publication; and (b) main findings – and agreed upon the final extracted data. Methodological limitations and considerations were noted in a separate column. None of the 15 papers has been retracted according to the publishers' websites (October 24, 2021). The full list of search results is available on <https://osf.io/dtcsp/>.

In the normative part of this study, we have included argumentation from the excluded 29 articles which were nevertheless read in full. However, this extraction was not done in a systematic manner. In addition to this material, argumentation found in social media discussing these practices was also included. These sources have not been searched systematically.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF SYSTEMATIC REVIEW**

Table 1 lists included studies, their extracted information, and our comments on their methodology. Out of the 15 studies, 10 were focused in scope on a particular scientific field or subfield (e.g. finance, public administration, surgery, urology), while 5 were focused in scope to a particular country or set of countries.

The prevalence of self-publishing by editors was highly variable between the included papers, ranging from zero to publishing extensively in their own journal, with some editors publishing only in journals where they are editors. In some journals the majority of the articles have been contributed by their own editors (Rösing et al., 2014).

### **Methodological considerations**

There was large variability in employed methods and rigor limiting interpretations. First, not all studies carefully considered when editors took on their role as editors. If we are to learn from studies whether or not editors receive preferable treatment in their own journals, then it is crucial to know exactly when they took on that role. One promising approach would be to compare editors' number and proportion of publications in their own journal between pre-editorial and editorial periods (and, perhaps, between editorial and post-editorial periods for still active researchers). In this respect, Mani et al. (2013) is a unique study.

Another methodological issue relates to the type of publications included in analyses. In some studies (e.g., Goudra et al., 2018; Hardin et al., 2008) all types of articles were included, also editorials. However, it blurs the picture if editorials are counted the same as original papers and systematic reviews in the analysis. Editorials are expected to be written by editors, and to reflect their views in the editorial role. If these article categories are not disaggregated, then no clear conclusions can be drawn regarding whether or not editors are favored when it comes to having substantial research articles accepted.

A final methodological issue is that in many studies all editors were grouped together without acknowledging differences in power between editors in chief, associate editors, and editorial board members. This is perhaps the key issue if we consider favoritism as one of the main arguments against self-publishing. For example, if a journal has a large number of editorial board members, it is possible that editors in chief/associate editors who primarily deal with submissions do not even know whether a given author is in the editorial board of their journal. On the other hand, everyone working with the journal knows the editor in chief and associate editors who have the real power in the journal. Here the problem of preferable treatment is a real issue. For example, an associate editor who works closely with the editor in chief might not reject their submission regardless of its quality.

### **Interpretation and conclusion**

The papers we have reviewed reveal a complex set of motivations for editors to publish in their own journals. Not only can editors potentially benefit from using their position to gain publications as a currency of merit; also journals can benefit from well-known scientists in editorial roles submitting important work to increase the journal's visibility, quality, and citation rates (Dose & Huber, 2009; Goudra et al. 2018). Thus, there may exist an interplay between editors and journals in the prestige economy of science, where reputation and influence can be exchanged for mutual benefit (Kwiek, 2020).

Our systematic literature review shows that knowledge about publication practices of journal editors is still limited. The material identified in the survey is quite meager, and the methods used have considerable limitations. More needs to be learnt about editors' practices of publishing in their own journals.

## **NORMATIVE ANALYSIS**

### **Ethical guidelines on editors publishing in their own journals**

Following this presentation and discussion of our systematic literature review of editors' practices of publishing in their own journals, we turn to some highly influential organizations to see what they say on the matter: the Council of Science Editors, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), the Committee On Publication Ethics (COPE), and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME).

The Council of Science Editors (CSE) write the following on editors' roles and responsibilities in their *White paper on publication ethics*, under "Conflicts of interest":

Also, editors should submit their own manuscripts to the journal only if full masking of the process can be ensured (e.g., anonymity of the peer reviewers and lack of access to records of their own manuscript). Journals should have a procedure in place to guide the handling of submissions by editors, associate editors, editorial board members, and colleagues/students of any of these to allow for peer review and decision making that avoids any conflict of interest. Editorials and/or opinion pieces are an exception to this rule.

Two messages are implicit in this brief statement: first, that CSE does not advise against editors publishing in their own journals and, second, that CSE recommends that they should only do so if listed requirements of an unbiased evaluation procedure can be fulfilled.

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) write in their *Recommendations for the conduct, reporting, editing, and publication of scholarly work in medical journals* that

"[e]ditors who make final decisions about manuscripts should recuse themselves from editorial decisions if they have relationships or activities that pose potential conflicts related to articles under consideration. [...] Journals should take extra precautions and have a stated policy for evaluation of manuscripts submitted by individuals involved in editorial decisions."

This is consistent with the CSE position but less far-reaching. Apart from these remarks, the *Recommendations* refer to COPE. The Committee On Publication Ethics (COPE) explicitly asks whether or not editors can publish in their own journal in their document *A short guide to ethical editing for new editors* and provides the following answer:

While you should not be denied the ability to publish in your own journal, you must take extra precautions not to exploit your position or to create an impression of impropriety. Your journal must have a procedure for handling submissions from editors or members of the editorial board that will ensure that the peer review is handled independently of the author/editor. We also recommend that you describe the process in a commentary or similar note once the paper is published.

In other words, the COPE message here is: you can publish in your own journal, but do it with caution and use a procedure with safeguards against preferential treatment that you should openly describe. COPE does not bring the topic up in their *Best practice guideline for journal editors*, except in a response to a question:

The issue here basically revolves around whether it is acceptable for editors to publish their own work in their journals; if it is, then the review process must be made as transparent and rigorous as possible.

COPE adds that it would be suitable for the journal to add a short statement in connection with the publication informing about the procedures undertaken in the review of the paper. It is clear that there are occasions when COPE finds it acceptable for editors to publish in their own journals, namely (as they put it) “where the choice of journals is limited”. It remains unclear if this is understood to be the only permissible exception, and how limited the choice of journals has to be for submission by editors to their own journal to be permissible. In the absence of detailed clarification, it nevertheless seems clear that COPE expresses the view that editors’ sending manuscripts to their own journal should be the exception. Such a restriction is not mentioned in the COPE guidelines for new editors quoted above.

The World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) states, in their 2009 document *Conflict of interest in peer-reviewed medical journals*:

When editors submit their own work to their journal, a colleague in the editorial office should manage the manuscript and the editor/author should recuse himself or herself from discussion and decisions about it.

Hence, on WAME’s view, a careful procedure when editors publish in their own journal involves a strict hands-off approach from the submitting editor.

To sum up, the attitude manifested in some of the leading publication ethics guidelines is that editors may publish in their own journal, but there must be a procedure in place to show that they are not given any undue advantages in the review process. And it may be preferable that they do not submit articles to their own journal when there are adequate alternatives.

### **Arguments from the literature**

Hamilton et al. (2020) asked 322 editors of journals in ecology, economics, medicine, physics, and psychology, among other things, about their views on publishing in their own journal. The majority (79%) responded that they found it acceptable under certain conditions (such as independent editing and reviewing) while a minority stated that this would not be acceptable for any editor (13%) or for the lead editor (8%). Of main interest in what follows are the arguments in favor of either position regarding editors publishing in their own journal. The literature on this specific topic is so far limited. We here present the arguments we have found, starting with criticism, followed by defense of the practice and specification of conditions that need to be fulfilled to make such practice defensible.

### ***Arguments against editors publishing in their own journals***

One argument against the practice concerns undue influence over the evaluation of submitted manuscripts. The editor's own manuscript may be more likely to be published, even if it has quality issues. As phrased by Richard Smith, editor of BMJ: "The argument against is that they [editors] will have undue influence over the process and possibly be able to get inferior work published" (Smith 2002). Rosenblum (2020) takes the reasoning further by arguing that "knowingly [...] bypassing the peer-review process to self-publish constitutes editorial misconduct". Even if editors do not pressure journal colleagues to accept their work, or decide on their own about their own manuscript, favoritism may still lead to easier acceptance of submitted papers (Luty et al. 2009). Also reviewers may contribute to this favoritism in the sense that they may be less inclined to criticize and value the manuscript on its merits alone if the review is not blinded (Sen-Crowe et al., 2020). Even if none of this happens, the mere possibility that editors submitting manuscripts to their own journal receive a more favorable treatment than other researchers may be harmful to the perception of both journal and editor (Walters 2015).

### ***Arguments in favor of editors publishing in their own journals***

Some of the arguments in defense of editors publishing in their own journal are general and apply equally to all kinds of journals, while some arguments are more specific and apply to more specialized journals or small research fields only. General arguments defending a practice where editors publish in their own journals claim that

- it would be unfair to editors not to have the opportunity to publish in their journal (Hamilton, 2020; Smith, 2002).
- it would risk deterring potential editors if they would not be able to publish in the journal for which they became editor, which threatens to lead to less competent persons taking on the job (Rosenblum, 2020; Hamilton, 2020).
- such restrictions would also have negative, and unfair, effects on collaborators of researching editors, since their options are also affected for their joint papers (Hoey, 1999; Hamilton, 2020).

Some arguments particularly concern specialized journals or small research fields, such as:

- It would be bad for the readers and the field if they missed specialized content suitable mainly for a specialized journal, if editors in the field were not allowed to publish in their journal (Rosenblum 2020). It has been suggested that some original research may be of main interest to the reader of that specific journal – arguably one should try to publish where the material is most relevant (Hoey 1999; Smith 2002; Youk & Park 2019, Zdenek & Losova 2018).
- It would be bad for the journal to miss the opportunity to publish editors who research and who may very well have been selected as editors for their skill in the field, and whose paper is very much suited for the readership (Smith 2002; Hamilton 2020).
- It would be particularly unfair to editors if they are not able to publish in what might be the best journal, or one of the most relevant ones, in their special area of competence (Smith 2002).

As remarked by Walters (2015), it is not entirely clear what editors and editorial board members would like to do, since there is an attraction of publishing in the “right” journal, but also criticism against publishing in one for which one is editor:

It seems reasonable to assume that authors will send their papers to the journals that best match their interests, which are presumably the same journals for which they are most likely to serve as board members. At the same time, board members may avoid sending manuscripts to their own journals in order to avoid any real or perceived conflict of interest.

## **Proposed conditions and restrictions regarding editors publishing in their own journal**

Several voices friendly to the idea that editors publish in their own journal nevertheless express that this practice requires precautions to deal with the problems critics tend to point at.

Editors can legitimately publish a peer-reviewed article in the journal they edit as long as the manuscript undergoes peer review that is as thorough as all other manuscripts, and the member of the editorial board overseeing the peer review does his or her best to ensure that any bias in the assessment of the manuscript is minimized (Young, 2009).

One proposed precaution, also found in the guidelines discussed above, is that editors submitting manuscripts to their own journal should be excluded from all aspects of the review process, in order to guarantee an unbiased peer review-based procedure that they do not influence. This needs to be an established mechanism in place that is automatically applied whenever relevant (Hoey 1999; Graf et al. 2007; Mani et al. 2013).

It has also been suggested, also in line with the guidelines discussed above, that when such publications occur, there should be a short statement in the journal explaining the process used to make the editorial decision on the paper (Graf 2007). This would include, for example, a name of the associate editor acting as the handling editor even if names of handling editors are not typically mentioned along published articles. Here is an example of such conflict-of-interest statement: “Both authors serve as editorial assistant and editor, respectively, of *Cognitive Development*. Neither author was involved in the editorial process for the manuscript and appropriate steps were taken to ensure that both authors were blind to the review process” (Caporaso & Marcovitch, 2021).

Some authors note that measures to promote and protect an adequate review process also in the case of editors publishing in their own journal “cannot absolutely prevent all editorial favoritism”, but they are still meaningful since clear communication to the scientific community of a stable procedure for handling this type of situations “might help to maintain and improve journal reputation” (Mani et al., 2013).

## **Arguments advanced in social media**

Arguments we have identified in social media both support and criticize that editors publish in their own journals. In summary, counter arguments say that the evaluation of the papers can be

questioned, and that such situations should be avoided, especially when papers may or may not be found good enough and favoritism therefore might tip the balance. It has also been pointed out that the practice of editors publishing in their own journal might reflect negatively both on themselves and on their journals. Publishing in one's own journal might suggest that one does not dare to face open competition and hopes to be given advantages in the review process; for the journal, its high standards might be questioned by inviting the doubt of due procedure when they accept papers from their own editors. Those defending editors publishing in their own journals particularly stress that this ought not be questioned for high-quality papers, especially for editors with a strong publication track record. Others say it is generally acceptable, on the condition that the journal's review process maintains its integrity. Some suggest special procedures to guarantee this, like a panel of reviewers to make what is otherwise typical editorial decisions. Another kind of defense for editors publishing in their own journal on social media is that sometimes there are no equally good journal alternatives, either because of the unique fit between the kind of paper and the focus of the journal or because the intended readers strongly focus on the concerned journal. In such cases, the argument goes, it is not reasonable to ask of the editor to publish elsewhere.

All in all, these arguments very much reflect the arguments found in the literature, although they also include many personal experiences and calling out 'bad' practices of particular journals and editors.

### **Analysis and discussion of arguments**

Summarizing the arguments favoring editors publishing in their own journals, they mainly point to the fair opportunity for editors to have access, like everyone else, to their journal as a possible place to publish papers. Against this, the main counter arguments relate to conflicts of interest and the risk that the submitted papers from editors undergo a biased process before getting accepted – in other words, that they get preferential (hence unfair) treatment. Scientific journals are generally assumed to verify and improve the quality of submitted manuscripts through editorial and peer review, but there is a risk that work by the journal's own editor would be favoritized and that editorial and peer review would be less stringent, in a manner not transparent to readers. Preferential treatment could also include e.g. faster handling of the submission. It is

worth stressing that the risks identified are probably much higher in relation to editors-in-chief compared to editorial assistants and members of the editorial board.

Since the weightiest arguments against letting editors publish in their own journals are that there is a risk that they will be treated favorably, or will be suspected to be treated favorably regardless of whether or not that actually happens, a relevant question to ask is if these risks can be mitigated. In fact, there are several mechanisms that could potentially mitigate these risks:

- Transparency in the review process allows readers to inspect and appraise the process. Thus, interested readers would be able to form their own opinion about the stringency of review.
- A preset “protocol” for such occasions should be available in the journal’s information to readers and potential authors, and should be applied to each such case.
- Editors submitting to their own journals should be entirely excluded from any formal influence over the decision-making regarding their own papers.
- The interaction in relation to the paper should also be such that it minimizes informal influence on the handling of the paper.
- Editors and reviewers with a perceived conflict of interest should be left out of the process of evaluation. An editor without such conflict of interest (if such exist) should initiate the protocol.
- To guarantee as far as possible that the assessment of the paper is not influenced by knowledge of who is assessed, evaluation and acceptance/rejection decisions would need to be made by persons who do not know the identities of the authors of the paper, i.e., peer reviewers and remaining journal editors alike. This is feasible in relation to peer review, unless the research field is too small to realistically keep the authors secret, and unless the journal’s peer review practice is such that hidden identities would deviate from standard procedure and therefore potentially signal what is at stake. Anonymity at an editorial board level may be difficult to achieve if decisions remain in the editorial group normally handling manuscript decisions, not least unless there are other procedural reasons for stepping away from the decision regarding a particular manuscript with reference to conflicts of interest.

A radically different approach to the one pointed out above, concerning editors-in-chief, would be to let the editor assume full responsibility and publish the paper without review. This makes very clear who is responsible for the content and the decision to publish. On the other hand, the lack of peer review may be perceived as a failure to gain canonization into the scientific literature. Also, this is not an acceptable solution for those thinking that the main disadvantage with letting editors publish in their own journal is that some may add to their publication merits by potentially facing a lower entry bar than the rest.

None of these solutions provide a fully feasible and effective strategy for mitigation, and readers may still suspect favoritism. Since downsides remain, we recommend that editors-in-chief and perhaps associate editors do not publish original scientific work in their own journal. The cost of not permitting editors-in-chief and associate editors to publish research articles in their own journals will be minimal for the editors themselves and for the research field when equivalent journals are available for the editors. In cases where a journal is uniquely attractive for a certain kind of research content or with reference to a certain community of readers, the decision is more delicate. The benefit-to-cost ratio of a submission ban may also be different for associate editors compared to editors in chief, where the former sacrifice as much but gain less in form of prestige. This is even more true for editorial board members.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

According to our findings, the prevalence of editors publishing in their own journals varies greatly among journals. However, except for some clear cases, it is difficult to conclude that compromised peer review for the benefit of editors publishing in their own journal is widespread and therefore would represent a serious threat to the scholarly community.

Nevertheless, risks of bias, or perceived bias, in appraisal of submitted manuscripts should and can be reduced by strict standards for treating papers submitted by editors. Since the risk cannot be eliminated entirely, the cost of maintaining a practice where editors are allowed to publish in their own journal, in terms of reliability and trust, will then have to be weighed against the loss of not permitting this. For exceptions, a strong argument is needed relating to the specific case or circumstances. What to do depends on exactly what is in the balance. In any case, it is of utmost importance that the journal's guidelines include clear information about the procedure planned for submissions authored by editors. In conclusion, given the evidence of

previous misuse, and suspicion thereof, it seems preferable that at least editors-in-chief strive to avoid publishing research papers in their own journals.

### **FUNDING AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

This study received no specific funding. IR, who is a member of editorial board of journal Transportation Research Part F: Psychology and Behaviour, humbly reports he had published three research papers (first author in all of them) in the journal during six-year period before he took the role in this journal in 2015 and six papers (first author in five of them) during six years while serving as a member of editorial board. Other authors report no conflicts of interest.

### **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

Conceptualization: G.H., G.N., and I.R.

Systematic review: I.R. and J.R.

Writing of original draft: G.H.

Writing: review and editing: all authors.

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Table 1. How often editors publish in own journals

Study	Sample/Methods	Main results	Comments/notes
Bosnjak et al., 2011	<p><b>Journals:</b> 180 Croatian journals (167 indexed in Croatian database HRCAK &amp; additional 13 indexed in Web of Science or Scopus)</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> 256 (172 EiCs &amp; 84 associate, executive, or junior editors) of 167 journals and 13 editors of 13 journals</p> <p><b>Years:</b> 2005–2008</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> All types and “publications relevant for official requirement for academic promotion”</p>	<p>256 editors published 887 publications in own journals; 332 publications “were relevant for official requirement for academic promotion.”</p> <p>Regarding these relevant publications: 45% of all editors (N=269) did not publish in their own journal; 6.6% published 5 or more articles in their own journal. Only 2 editors exclusively published in own journals</p> <p>None of the journals had “a policy on the manuscript submissions by journal editors;” however, one journal “had a statement on the restrictions of published articles from authors, including editorial members.”</p>	<p>The authors concluded that the majority of editors “did not misuse their own journals for scientific publishing and academic promotion.”</p> <p>They were, however, concerned about the lack of transparency regarding submissions by editors.</p> <p>It was unclear when the editors were editors during the whole 4-year period.</p> <p>Some inconsistency in reporting (e.g., in abstract it says that there were 256 editors of 180 journals; however, in the text the number is 269)</p>
Goudra et al., 2018	<p><b>Journals:</b> Top 5 (according to IF) journals per fields of anesthesiology and gastroenterology</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> First 5 editorial board members in each journal in 2015</p> <p><b>Years:</b> Previous 5 years</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> All types</p>	<p>Across journals, editors were more likely to publish in their own journal in comparison to any of the other four journals.</p>	<p>It is unclear to us when the editors took the role. It could be that these people became the editors because they had extensively published in the journal before taking the editorial role.</p> <p>Some journals might expect from their editors to write editorials – unclear why they were included.</p> <p>Apparently, the data collection lasted 6 months.</p>
Hardin et al., 2008	<p><b>Journals:</b> Editors of top 5 finance journals (according to some previous study); but publications from these 5 and additional 16 finance journals were analyzed.</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> Editorial board members (N=167) from first issue of years 2000 and 2005.</p> <p><b>Years:</b> 1990–2004</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> All type of articles</p> <p><b>The purpose of study:</b> editors’ research productivity, the focus was not solely on self-publishing</p>	<p>For one of the journals, the authors wrote: “For Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis, only 59.6% of its same board members have at least one appearance in the journal.”</p> <p>For the other journal, Financial Management, the rate was 50%.</p> <p>The authors write “In short, as was generally found with the other journals, editorial board members do publish more in the journals on which they serve as an editorial board member when compared to other board members.”</p>	<p>The main output was how often EBMs from top 5 finance journals publish in top 21 finance journals. We were not able to extract more info about self-publishing than noted in our results column.</p> <p>Furthermore, editors were selected by using the first issue of the journals for the years 2000 and 2005 – while the publications were from 1990–2004, which makes it impossible to draw any conclusions regarding our aims.</p>
Luty et al., 2009	<p><b>Journals:</b> 20 (4 per 5 medical subspecialties).</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> Members of the editorial board (or editorial advisory board)</p> <p><b>Year:</b> 2006</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> Research publications (N=4460)</p>	<p>7.7% of the publications were authored by the journal’s own editorial board.</p> <p>2.8% of the publications were authored by “one of the three rival journals’ editorial boards within the specialty.”</p> <p>“There was a statistically significant</p>	<p>Because “each of the journals had similar impact factors within their field” the authors pointed out that this “raises the possibility that editorial procedures are selectively biased in favor of members of their own editorial board.”</p>

		excess of publications from the journal's own editorial board in 14 of the 20 journals ( $p < 0.05$ )."	
Mani et al., 2013	<p><b>Journals:</b> Five leading (according to IF) urologic journals</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> 65 editorial board members who were elected in 2006</p> <p><b>Years:</b> 2001–2010</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> all original reports</p> <p><b>The comparison:</b> pre-editorial period (2001–2005) vs. editorial period (2006–2010)</p>	<p>Editors published in total 1800 articles during their pre-editorial period and 2845 during the editorial period; however, the proportion of publications in their own journal did not differ between periods.</p> <p>An analysis on a journal level showed that in 3 journals there were no changes in the rate of self-publications; in one there was an increase (from 20% to 36%) and in one decrease (from 80% to 30%).</p> <p>The only journal showing a significant increase in self-publications had an increase in the impact factor from 2.3 in 2001 to 8.8 in 2010.</p>	<p>The authors have discussed the possibility that self-publishing in a journal with high IF might be tempting for editors. Illegitimate impact factor boosting has also been discussed.</p> <p>The editorial boards for all journals were changed in 2006 providing a unique opportunity for before vs. after comparison.</p>
Mazov et al., 2018	<p><b>Journals:</b> 19 top Russian geological journals</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> Editors-in-chief, deputy editors-in-chief, associate editors, managing editors, and secretaries of the editorial board/executive secretaries (N=434); advisory board members were excluded</p> <p><b>Years:</b> "A 3-year period from 2012 to 2015"</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> type unclear</p>	<p>Across journals, editors published 10–29% of their own papers in their own journal, making 12/19 of journals the first choice where they publish.</p>	<p>Advisory boards members were excluded because "they are not mandatory and do not exist in all journals. In addition, this body is advisory in nature and does not play a decisive role in editorial policy making."</p> <p>Out of 434 people, "27 people are members of the editorial boards of two journals and 5 work for three journals."</p> <p>Not clear what kind of publications were included, e.g. whether editorials were excluded.</p>
Reaee-Zavareh & Karimi-Sari, 2020	<p><b>Journals:</b> "All Iranian medical journals located in the Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE)"</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> "Chairperson, editor-in-chief (EIC), or director in charge of each included journal"</p> <p><b>Years:</b> Period 1: 2015–2019; Period 2: all years in the database until end of 2019</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> articles and reviews</p>	<p>The median number of publications in one's own journal was "17.72 (51.31–30.55) and 19.05 (2.63–36.33) until the end of 2019 and in 2015–2019 respectively."</p> <p>"On average, Iranian editors have published 18.90% (standard deviation [SD] = 15.03) and 24.98% (SD = 27.45) of their papers in their own journals until the end of 2019 and in 2015–2019 respectively."</p>	<p>The authors "did not consider the period that a researcher had been a journal editor," which makes it almost impossible to interpret this study.</p>
Rosenblum et al., 2020	<p><b>Journals:</b> 13 generalist journals in public administration</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> "All editors (including editors-in-chief and co-editors)"</p> <p><b>Years:</b> 1997–2016</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> Empirical articles categorized before, during, and after editorship</p>	<p>193 observations among 185 editors (some editors had roles at more than one journal).</p> <p>Self-publishing frequency was related to the author's overall productivity and the length of editorial service.</p> <p>"The journals with the highest rates of self-publishing are among those with the highest impact factors."</p> <p>80/193 editors self-published and 9 of them more than 5 times.</p>	<p>The authors concluded that self-publishing is not a universal problem, it is "more of a product of certain journals and individuals."</p> <p>The authors noted that the final publication date was used which might have led to misclassification in some cases because articles were possible in review before an editor took the</p>

			role.
Rösing et al., 2014	<p><b>Journals:</b> Top ten (IF) journals under “Dentistry, Oral Surgery &amp; Medicine” subject category</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> editorial board members</p> <p><b>Years:</b> 2010–2012</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> Original research reports</p>	<p>The proportion of articles published by editors in their own journal ranged from 3.8% to 50.3% across journals. Only two journals had a rate below 10%.</p> <p>The number of self-publications was positively related to the journal’s IF, number of editorial board members, and total number of articles published in a journal.</p>	<p>“Each published issue and article was evaluated manually by one of the authors.”</p> <p>The editorial board members list from 2013 was used for all years.</p>
Sen-Crowe et al., 2020	<p><b>Journals:</b> 10 journals randomly selected from 200 peer reviewed surgical journals with the highest number of publications</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> Editorial Board Member (EBM; N=80) or Associate Editor (AE; N=721).</p> <p><b>Years:</b> 2016–2019</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> “Peer-reviewed”</p>	<p>For most journals and years, there was an association between the editors’ overall productivity and the number of their self-published articles.</p> <p>The proportion of self-publishing for editors (# of articles in own journal/total # of articles editor published) varied from 2.3% to 27.8% across journals.</p> <p>The only journal with zero significant association “adheres to a double-blind review process”.</p>	<p>Editors were identified on the journal’s website at the time of data collection.</p> <p>The authors discussed the potential of the double-blind review process in reducing the bias.</p> <p>The main discussion in the paper is around the association between the editors’ total productivity and the number of self-published articles; however, this is of marginal interest if the actual ratio is low.</p>
Shamsi-Gooshki et al., 2020	<p><b>Journals:</b> Iranian scientific journals approved by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (N=408)</p> <p><b>Years:</b> first issue in year 2018</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> only EiCs?</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> letters to the editor, editorials, corrections and abstracts were excluded</p> <p><b>The purpose of study:</b> to analyze articles for various “general and specific indicators related to ethics in publishing research articles”; self-publishing was one of these indicators</p>	<p>6.6% of articles were authored by editors.</p> <p>The proportion was lower for Persian-language journals than in English-language journals.</p>	<p>Unclear whether only EiCs were included – the authors write in discussion: “Although this cutoff also includes editorial board members who have not been investigated in our research...”</p> <p>The authors note that according to the National Guidelines for Publication Ethics “journal editors and officials are allowed up to 20% authorship in their journal articles.”</p>
Walters, 2015	<p><b>Journals:</b> “30 well-known library and information science journals” – selected using several criteria</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> Board members who served at any time from Jan 2007 through Dec 2012 (N=1079)</p> <p><b>Years:</b> 2007–2012</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> All peer-reviewed contributions: “research articles, research notes, review articles, and theoretical/conceptual papers”)</p>	<p>Percentage of articles written by board members varied from 1% to 25% across journals with the average of 8%. Overall, 17% of all articles were authored by board members.</p> <p>“The correlation (r) between number of board members and percentage of articles written by board members is 0.44.”</p> <p>By using harmonic weighting and standardization procedure (editors’ publishing in own journal/their total publications and other authors’ publications in the journal/their total publications), the authors reported that “36% of the 1079 board member authors have actual values higher</p>	<p>“Harmonic weighting was used to assign credit for coauthored articles” – this was done based on the number of authors and the author’s place in the byline.</p> <p>One of the most advanced methodological approaches; however, it is unclear when each editor took their role and for how long they served during the six-year period.</p>

		than their expected values; the rest are especially unlikely to publish in their own journals.”	
Youk & Park, 2019	<p><b>Journals:</b> 17 journals published by US National (NCA) and the International Communication Association (ICA)</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> Editors and editorial board members (1063 individuals; 261 of them had multiple roles leading to the total number of 1287 observations).</p> <p><b>Years:</b> 2007–2016</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> empirical vs. non-empirical</p>	<p>During 10 years, an editor/EBM had on average 1.10 (SD = 1.94) publications in own journal. More than half of the editors/EBMs have not published in their own journal.</p> <p>When self-published articles were written alone, more papers than expected were non-empirical and fewer papers than expected were empirical papers. For the co-authored articles, the pattern was reverse.</p>	<p>The authors did not account for when the editors/EBMs took their positions – ten years is a long period. However, this is not a problem for self-publishing because the overall rate was low.</p> <p>On the other hand, it raises the question about why one becomes the editor/EBM in a journal where they had rarely published before they took the role.</p> <p>Journals had large number of editors, on average 76. It is expected that non-research papers (e.g., editorials) are more often written alone.</p>
Zdenek, 2018	<p><b>Journals:</b> Six Czech and Slovak Journals indexed in the Journal Citation Report, categories: Business; Business, Finance; and Economics – also 6 randomly selected journals with similar IF</p> <p><b>Years:</b> 2012–2015</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> editors, editors in chief, executive editors, consulting editors, co-editors, associate editors, members of executive and advisory board and other editorial board members without specified function.</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> research articles</p>	<p>The average share of articles, where an editorial board member is the author or co-author, ranges from 0.6% to 17.5% across journals. In some years for some journals, this share reaches 25%.</p> <p>Across journals, editors publish from 8% to 71% of their articles in their own journal.</p> <p>Across journals, the proportion of editors publishing only in own journal ranges from zero to 86%.</p>	<p>“The composition of editorial boards was taken from the first issue of the year.”</p> <p>If an EBM published an article in the journal before becoming a member, this article was not counted as in their own journal.</p>
Zdenek & Lososova, 2018	<p><b>Journals:</b> Ten out of 17 Journals indexed in the Journal Citation Report (category: Agricultural Economics and Policy) were randomly selected</p> <p><b>Years:</b> 2012–2016</p> <p><b>Editors:</b> same as in Zdenek (2018)</p> <p><b>Publications:</b> research articles</p>	<p>The average share of articles, where an editorial board member is the author or co-author, ranges from 1.3% to 21.1% across journals, with an overall average of 7.7%.</p> <p>3 out of 10 journals have an average rate above 10%.</p> <p>The average share of EBMs publishing in their own journal is 14.6%, with the range of 6–22%.</p> <p>Across journals, editors publish from 3.3% to 43.6% of their articles in their own journal, with an overall average of 10.1%.</p> <p>Across journals, the share of EBMs who do not publish at all (according to Web of Science) or publish only in their own journal ranges from 6.1% to 72.7%.</p>	<p>“The composition of editorial boards was taken from the first issue of the year.”</p>

## APPENDIX 1: SEARCH STRATEGY

### Scopus

( TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "editorial board member\*" OR "editorial board\*" OR "journal editor\*" OR "editor\* publish\*" ) ) AND ( TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "own journal\*" OR "self-publish\*" OR "preferential publication\*" OR "conflict of interest\*" ) )

**Hits: 364**

### Medline and PsycInfo

Ovid MEDLINE(R) and Epub Ahead of Print, In-Process & Other Non-Indexed Citations, Daily and Versions(R) 1946 to December 29, 2020, [Database Field Guide] APA PsycInfo 1806 to December Week 3 2020

▼ Search History (8)					<a href="#">View Saved</a>
#	Searches	Results	Type	Actions	Annotations
1	▶ ("editorial board member*" OR "editorial board*" OR "journal editor*").mp. [mp=ti, ab, ot, nm, hw, fx, kf, ox, px, rx, ui, sy, tc, id, tm, mh]	7084	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More</a> ▼	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	▶ ((editorial or editor) adj2 (journal or publish*)).mp. [mp=ti, ab, ot, nm, hw, fx, kf, ox, px, rx, ui, an, sy, tc, id, tm, mh]	2452	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More</a> ▼	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	▶ ("own journal*" OR "self-publish*" OR "preferential publication*" OR "conflict of interest*").mp. [mp=ti, ab, ot, nm, hw, fx, kf, ox, px, rx, ui, an, sy, tc, id, tm, mh]	15162	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More</a> ▼	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	▶ 2 and 3	34	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More</a> ▼	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	▶ 1 and 3	239	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More</a> ▼	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	▶ 4 or 5	253	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More</a> ▼	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Hits: 253**

### Web of Science

**TOPIC:** ("editorial board member\*" OR "editorial board\*" OR "journal editor\*" OR "editor\* publish\*") **AND TOPIC:** ("own journal\*" OR "self-publish\*" OR "preferential publication\*" OR "conflict of interest\*")

**Hits: 127**

### SUMMARY

Scopus: 364 hits

Ovid (Medline & PsycInfo): 253 hits

Web of Science: 127 hits

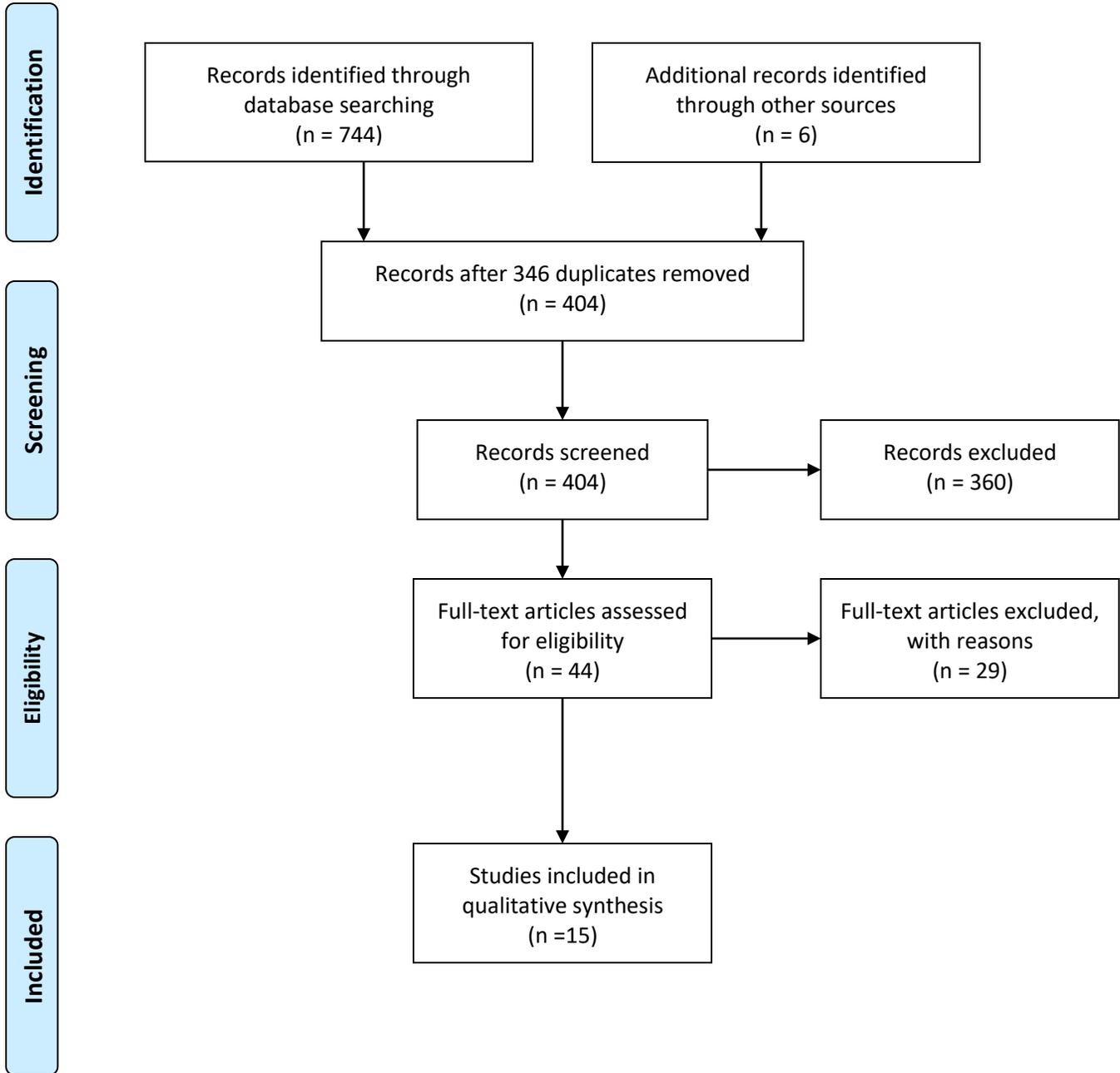
Own library: 18 articles (6 not identified in the above searches)

All together 364+253+127+6 additional from own library

744+6->750 (see attached Prisma flow diagram)



## APPENDIX 2: PRISMA (2009) Flow Diagram



From: Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, Altman DG, The PRISMA Group (2009). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement. PLoS Med 6(7): e1000097. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed1000097

For more information, visit [www.prisma-statement.org](http://www.prisma-statement.org).