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Authorship requirements are highlighted in numerous disciplines, particularly health science fields. However, few studies have focused on the content of author guidelines. Additionally, differences in the disciplinary culture among disciplines are prevalent. Therefore, we studied the differences in authorship criteria across disciplines. As few studies have explored the authorship definitions of social sciences journals, this study explored them based on journals from seven disciplines, namely business, economics, law, sociology, political science, education, and library and information science (LIS). This study investigated authorship definitions listed on 1,065 journal websites, representing seven social science disciplines.

The results showed that 51.3% of the journals do not have an established authorship definition. Journals with high impact factors do not necessarily have an established authorship definition. Up to 81.1% of law journals lack authorship definitions, whereas the lowest proportion of journals having no authorship definitions was identified in the business domain.

Authorship definitions were mostly accessible through hyperlinks embedded in the “instructions for authors” section of the journals’ websites. Only 3.8% of the journals directly listed authorship definitions in the instructions for authors section.

A total of seven types of requirements were identified for authorship. Most journals examined in the present study adopted the authorship criteria of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), including current and prior versions. The interdisciplinary influence of the authorship criteria developed by the ICMJE has expanded to the social sciences. The current version of the ICMJE authorship criteria was abided by 32.9% of the journals. In addition, acknowledgments are highly associated with author bylines. Contributors excluded from being authors are listed in the acknowledgment section. The most prevalent requirement for listing contributors in the acknowledgment section was established by the ICMJE. Violation of authorship definitions involves inappropriate authorship,

including gift, ghost, and honorary authorship. Statements for gift and ghost authorship were highlighted in 63.8% of the 1,065 journals.

Authorship definitions

Authorship definitions	Business		Economics		Education		Law		LIS		Political science		Sociology		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
No authorship definition	36	35.3	177	61.2	87	37.7	103	81.1	34	44.7	66	52.8	43	37.4	546	51.3
1	20	19.6	56	19.4	17	7.4	3	2.4	12	15.8	3	2.4	6	5.2	117	11.0
4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	2.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.2
5	12	11.8	3	1.0	5	2.2	0	0.0	9	11.8	1	0.8	2	1.7	32	3.0
12	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.2
13	2	2.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	0.3
123	1	1.0	3	1.0	4	1.7	1	0.8	1	1.3	1	0.8	2	1.7	13	1.2
1234	31	30.4	50	17.3	116	50.2	20	15.7	17	22.4	54	43.2	62	53.9	350	32.9
Total	102	100.0	289	100.0	231	100.0	127	100.0	76	100.0	125	100	115	100.0	1065	100.0

Note: 1 refers to “Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work;” 2 refers to “Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content;” 3 refers to “Final approval of the version to be published;” 4 refers to “Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved; 5 refers to “A substantive contribution.”

Authorship definitions stated by journals primarily originated from those set by editorial associations and other professional associations. However, inconsistent authorship definitions were noted between journals published by the same publishers. As journal websites are essential communication platforms that link journals and researchers, authorship definitions should be made easily available on journal websites. The submission area listing manuscript formats and submission processes is the most suitable area to place authorship definitions.