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An Evaluation of Some Expected Key Attributes of Standard Journals Published in Developing Nations

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ABSTRACT

There is no gain saying the fact that research, especially in modern times, is the underbelly of technological and industrial development. Research results, which are normally written in the form of papers (or articles), are only meaningful, utilitarian and useful for further studies when they are easily and widely circulated. A leading medium of publicizing non-trivial research results is a journal, which belongs to a category of publication called serial publication. Although several journals have been in circulation from time immemorial and new ones continue to spring up, it is important for them to meet certain attributes so that their contents can be reliable. The long term negative effect of unreliable results appearing in journals may be likened to the effect of fake, adulterated and counterfeit drugs. All journal publications are mandatorily required to register and be issued with a unique International Standard Serial Number (ISSN). This registration is otherwise referred to in this paper as primary database (PD). Since the primary registration only establishes legal legitimacy of a publication, many other databases, herein called secondary databases (SD), have sprung up for the purpose of measuring the quality of journals, and by extension, the quality of their papers. Examples of these are SCOPUS, Google Scholar etc. Despite the noble efforts of the initiators of these SD, the process is subject to human errors. While some relatively high quality journals are omitted from the database, some relatively inferior ones are included. Thus, the inclusion of a journal in a SD may be considered as a means to an end and not an end in itself. It is therefore important to evaluate from first principles the attributes which ought to be the basic consideration in determining a worthy journal from an unworthy journal. The eleven attributes considered in the paper are genuine existence of a journal, uniqueness, patent issue, creativity, as well as existence of a standard journal model. Others include sustainability, marketability, currency of publication, scalability, global relevance and the pedigree of the promoters. Although the discussion in the paper is focused on developing nations, the contents are indeed applicable to all journals irrespective of the nation or geographic region where they are published. Conclusively, the authors suggested, among others, that journals that are hitherto not captured in SD may strive to be included while those that are presently included need not rest on their oars.

Keywords: *Journals, Attributes, Developing Nations, Publication, International Standard Serial Number.*

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1.   INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that journals and related media play significant role in the socio-econo-technological development of any nation due to the fact that findings/results of development-oriented research are normally primarily disseminated via journals and the like. Generally, (academic) journals published in developing nations and globally fall into different categories. These include (a) Journals published by independent (professional) societies (b) Journals published by academic units within a university or other educational institutions e.g. journals published by an academic department, faculty or by the university as a whole (c) Journals published by individuals, companies, centres and similar corporate organizations.

This paper is an attempt to study the key attributes/characteristics expected of journals in general, and especially those published in developing nations and Africa in particular.

Any consumer goods and services, such as food and drugs, are required to meet a minimum standard so that they are not classified as fake or counterfeit. In like manner, every journal is expected to meet certain minimum standards. With respect to foods and drugs, for instance, the organization responsible for setting the standard in the USA/internationally is the Food and Drug Administration (FDA); the equivalent agency with jurisdiction over a developing nation such as Nigeria is National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) (Amusa and Oluwade, 2019). For international products, specific standards are set by organizations such as the International Standards Organization (Oluwade, 2008). A fake or counterfeit journal is said to be a predatory journal (www.beallslist.net).

A basic question is: Is journal production a good or a service? The answer may go either way depending on the perspective from where one is looking at it. A journal edition, as a product, may be classified as a good. However, processes leading to its production (such as review and editorial works) are services. The basic standard of recognition of a journal is registration with the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) organization which issues a registration number (https://issn.org). This standard is described in this paper as primary database (or primary registration or primary standard) (PD). However, the minimum requirement needed to meet this standard is not sufficient to adequately describe the (expected) quality of a journal.

Therefore, several efforts are increasingly put in place in practice to assist in maintaining some modicum of standards. These include additional registration/standard/metrics, called secondary database (SD) in the present paper, by independent organizations. The metrics include SCOPUS, Clarivate Analytics, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), CrossRef, Google Scholar, g-index measurement, h-index measurement, Web of Science, Citation index, and Beall's list of potential predatory journals and publishers (Aina, 2013; https://scopus.com; https://doaj.org; https://webofknowledge.com; www.beallslist.net; https://clarivate.com; https://crossref.org; https://scholar.google.com). An ultimate goal of these standards/metrics is to promote visibility of research results and assure readers and (funding) agencies of the reliability of the contents of the journals recognized by the respective organizations.

Laudable as these secondary databases or standards are, they are not sufficient to describe the quality of a journal. This is due to the fact that the motivation of some of the SD organizations may be primarily for commercial interest. Besides, there are journals which are included in the organizations' list of recognized journals which have been empirically found to be substandard while there are others not included which are not necessarily inferior due, for instance, to possible politics involved in registration. Thus, it is important to clearly delineate guidelines which further assist in recognizing good quality journals. This is the basis of the present paper.

Furthermore, let X and Y be two arbitrary paper publications. The fact that more people are doing further research on the theme arising from X and thereby citing it more does not necessarily mean that the quality of X is better than that of Y. The best that can be inferred is that more persons are interested in the research of X and its theme than Y. That is, from a logical/philosophical perspective, that more people are working within the research area of X as against Y is not absolutely or necessarily synonymous to its (relative) quality, significance or importance over Y. One can only simply infer that the research in X is more popular than that of Y. In some cases, though, popularity may be synonymous to quality.

In essence, organizations which register journals under the SD arrangement ordinarily ought to be guided by the attributes described in the present paper, with respect to (short) listing, evaluating and selecting journals for recognition. However, due to imperfection inherent in human-initiated process

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(i.e. human error), there is a tendency for some journals to be wrongly included in the recognition list; while some qualified ones are omitted. It is thus imperative to consider from first principles the attributes which ought to be used in evaluating the quality of a journal for appropriate recognition.

A goal of the present paper is to encourage the publication of more standard journals in developing nations (especially Africa), whose contents are reliable. The paper is also aimed at providing guidance to authors and scholars, especially the early career ones, on factors which are important in choosing a journal as a publication outlet. Standard attributes of journals which are discussed in this paper include genuine existence, uniqueness, patent, creativity, and existence of a standard model. Others include sustainability, marketability, currency, scalability, global/societal relevance, and pedigree or qualification of promoters. In particular, the strength of a journal review process, as incorporated in the model being used, is an important contributory factor to the quality of a journal.

The paper dwells essentially on the expected attributes of a journal and not necessarily on the drivers (promoters, editors etc) of the journal or the superficial rating of the quality of a journal. That is, the paper examines the fundamental issues in the sustenance of a journal. It is thus not focused on secondary factors like measuring the impact of a journal using metrics such as g-index and h-index. It is the belief of the present authors that the above metrics are means to an end and not an end in themselves. They are therefore not expected to be the primary target of the managers of a journal, lest the temptation to unethical practices in meeting pre-determined index. It is also the authors' belief that a good journal will eventually excel once there is diligence and conscious effort to keep to sound professional rules of journal management.

As case studies, an evaluation, based on the attributes stated in this paper, is performed on two journals in which the authors are actively involved. These are African Journal of Computing and ICT (https://afrjcict.net), which has been in operation since 2008, and African Journal of Management Information System (https://afrjmis.net) which started operation in 2019. Each of the two journals has both print-ISSN and electronic-ISSN.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, some literatures relating to global journal management are reviewed.

Aina (2013) discussed critical factors in journal management which aid the success of a journal. These factors include the pedigree of the editorial board (EB), commitment by the EB, peer review mechanism, promptness in decision making (on acceptance or rejection of manuscripts) and funding capability/structure.

In Mabawonku and Aina (2005), the authors studied the characteristics of twelve Library and Information Science journals published in West Africa, specifically, Nigeria and Ghana. The authors carried out the study from the perspective of four factors which are: profile of journals and editors, editorial management, quality indicators and inhibitions to sustainability. Among others, the authors established that the journals are generally inadequately funded and recommended that some of the journals be merged for effective performance.

In an earlier paper, Aina and Mabawonku (1996) carried out an evaluation of the performance of African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science five years after its establishment in 1991. During the period, a total of 236 manuscripts were received from fifteen countries. The authors argued that sustainable journals could only be produced in Africa if they depend mainly on foreign subscriptions and advertisements.

Anderson (2020) briefly compared scholarly journals, industry magazines and popular newspapers/magazines using ten attributes. These are cover, appearance, inside appearance, purpose and audience. Others include the type of authors, advertisements, editing process, its pros and its cons. He thus provided what may be called a basic comparison guide.

In Tenopir et.al. (2010), the authors examined and measured the relative values of selected research publication characteristics to scientists and scholars. The paper is based on the fact that readers of an article may not know the intrinsic value of the article by reading it. Thus, they must use other clues to judge the article's quality and to estimate its value to them. In the paper, over 400 faculty members and researchers from 12 countries responded to a designed questionnaire to ascertain article characteristics, reading choices and reading patterns.

The subject matter of Wang and Zhao (2013) is the exploration of the rational development and scientific management methods of university journal information resources. 10 basic features of university journal information resources, just as other social information resources, were identified.

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These are practicality (i.e. the information resources meet the demands of teaching and research staff and readers), scarcity and rarity, selectivity (i.e. the purpose and direction of the use of literature information can be selected), dependence (i.e. inseparability of its carrier) and conversion (i.e. information resources have the basic characteristics of the conversion, processing and transfer vector). Other features include sharing (i.e. information resources can be enjoyed by all people), effectiveness, infinity (i.e. information resources are inexhaustible) and value-adding (i.e. information resources investment add value).

In Akkaya and Aydin (2018), the authors carried out a semi-structured interview of 30 academics from different cities and universities in Turkey by examining the characteristics of academic writing based on the views of the academics who create it. In the results, among others, participants reported that they encounter the highest number of errors in the 'methodology' section. This was followed by errors in formal standards, spelling punctuation/expression and academic style.

Dadkhah et.al. (2016) presented characteristics of hijacked journals and predatory publishers which are seemingly less known.

In Salau and Oluwade (2016), the authors carried out a survey in a Federal University of Technology in North central Nigeria to obtain the opinion of scientists and science educators on the notion of e-publication. It was shown, among others, that majority of the staff subscribe to e-publication, especially e-journals.

Abduldayan et. al. (2013) examined the role of the system network (internet) in sustaining effective library services by comparing the network infrastructure of three Nigerian federal universities. The peculiarities of each of the universities were thereby stated.

The need to maintain academic integrity by avoiding predatory publishing is the focus of Jimenez and Garza (2017) while Dadkhah et. al. (2017) examined the influence of cyber-attack on academic publishing.

3.   TWO JOURNALS PUBLISHED IN AFRICA AS CASE STUDIES

In this section, focus is on two African publications, which are representatives of journals that have been striving for excellence and quality. These journals are *African Journal of Computing & ICT* (abbreviated as Afr. J. Comp. & ICT) (https://afrjcict.net), which has been in circulation since 2008, and *African Journal of Management Information System* (Afr. J. MIS) (https://afrjmis.net), which started publication in 2019.

3.1   AFRICAN JOURNAL OF COMPUTING & ICT

The maiden edition of *African Journal of Computing & ICT*, i.e. Volume 1, Number 1, was published in June 2008. Initially, two editions of the journal were published in a year, June and December. Currently, four editions of the journal are published, in March, June, September and December. The aim, objectives and scope of the journal are clearly summarized in the Editor-in-Chief's introduction in the maiden edition (Oluwade, 2008):

"Computing and ICT no doubt form important pillars in the present day global modern technological processes and development. Although Africa can be said to have improved substantially in the quest for knowledge in this age, much structural advancement and progress in the larger part of the continent have not been noticed. This can be partly ascribed to the relatively meager investment and financial commitment to providing infrastructure for sustainable research. The effect of this is that the technological state and needs of the general African continent are not the same as those of the developed world. As such, research output which may be important for the present socio-econo-technological state of the continent may not quite appear useful in the developed world, and are thus usually not considered fit for their journals. Apart from this, there are relatively few journals based in the African continent that are devoted exclusively to papers on computing and ICT. It is in the light of the above that the African Journal of Computing & ICT is born for the purpose of publishing non-trivial relevant research results in the fields of computer science/engineering, information technology (IT) and allied fields. The journal welcomes papers from African scholars and also from non-Africans whose papers address important issues that are relevant to Africa. Every submitted paper is reviewed by at least two appropriate referees for quality and accuracy."

Afr. J. Comp. & ICT is basically a research journal which highlights methodologies and results from both the academia and industry. Virtually all areas of computing and ICT are covered by the journal. Apart from Nigeria, authors from other countries have patronized the journal over the years and their papers have been published in it. Such countries

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include, among others, South Africa, Ghana, India, United Kingdom, Pakistan, Lesotho, USA, and Iran. The total number of (co)authors by country in Afr. J. Comp. & ICT, as at 2015, is shown by the pie chart in Figure 1. In Table 1, the number of papers published in the journal yearly, as at March 2020, is presented. It needs be noted that between 2016 and 2017, the journal undergone some changes in management structure which slowed down publication efforts. Hence, a relatively few number of papers were published within the period. Earlier, between 2011 and 2015, a relatively higher number of papers were published due to certain peculiarities, including the publication of many special editions.

3.2 AFRICAN JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

African Journal of Management Information System is a relatively new journal whose maiden edition was published in January 2019. Four editions of the journal have been published from the beginning, in January, April, July and October. The goal of the journal is summarized below:

"The journal focuses on themes relating to management, leadership and governance using the instrumentality of information technology (IT). That is, the journal deals with the examination, in all their ramifications, of the traditional 5Ms of (scientific) management as expounded by management theorists such as Peter F. Drucker (1909 – 2005). These Ms are men, material, money, machine and method. It is hoped that the journal will contribute to effective practical management globally. Thus, it is envisaged that the journal will, among others, serve as a platform for sorting out leadership-related challenges confronting Africa in particular… Just as with *Afr. J. Comp. & ICT*, *Afr. J. MIS* is an open access quarterly journal whose overall goal is to promote rapid socio-economic and technological development of Africa, in particular, and the world, in general. The new journal will serve as a supplement to the earlier journal by, among others, allowing more quality papers to be published within the shortest possible time" (https://afrjmis.net).

Afr. J. MIS is increasingly patronized across the world. Table 2 shows the number of papers published in the journal yearly so far, as at April 2020.

4. COMPARATIVE DISCOURSE ON THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE TWO JOURNALS USED AS CASE STUDIES

In this section, the authors present a comparative examination of the attributes of the two journals used as case studies in this paper. These journals are African Journal of Computing and ICT, and African Journal of Management Information System. The comparison is compactly done in Table 3.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper has presented an evaluation of basic attributes which standard journals that are published in developing nations are expected to possess. Although the presentation is tailored towards developing nations, the contents are actually applicable irrespective of the developmental status of a nation. Two fairly widely accepted journals published in Africa are used as case studies. These are African Journal of Computing and ICT, published since 2008, and African Journal of Management Information System, whose maiden edition appeared in January 2019.

The paper distinguishes between two categories of standard/database/registration for journals, namely primary database (PD) and secondary database (SD). The primary database is a fundamental standard or requirement and is essentially the registration of a journal with the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) organization. This comes with the issuance of a unique ISSN to a journal for its print publication, electronic publication or both. Since the primary standard is just a legal standard which does not necessarily measure the quality, secondary standards tend to spring up, whose focus is to assist in measuring the quality of journals.

Despite the noble effort of the latter, empirical observation has shown that the existence of SD is a means to an end and not an end in itself. This is due to the fact that good quality journals are sometimes omitted in the database of the secondary standard while some relatively inferior journals are included in the database as a result of human or related error. It is thus important to study the attributes/characteristics of good journals from first principles. This will permit self-evaluation of the quality of journals by informed readers and scholars, such that certification of a journal is not exclusively dependent on the opinion of a cartel of publishers or organizations.

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The authors opined in the paper that the effect of poorly managed journals arising from poor quality review of papers and related factors may be likened to the effect of fake, adulterated and counterfeit drugs/products. Just as consumers eventually know the good drugs suitable for specific ailments, with or without any elaborate (commercial) publicity by drug manufacturers, the informed readers and users of journals within a particular field should ultimately be able to sieve the wheat from the chaff with respect to the actual 'potency' of a journal. That is, ultimately, the true 'colour' (or potency in terms of quality) of a journal would reveal itself over a period of time, just as a bad drug for an ailment will do.

Nevertheless, it may be profitable for publishers (authors) whose journals (papers) are hitherto not included in secondary databases to make effort towards inclusion, for enhanced global acceptance and visibility. On the other hand, publishers (authors) whose journals (papers) are presently included in secondary databases (i.e. secondary recognition list) may not rest on their oars but strive to meet the attributes discussed in this paper. Perhaps the only exception, at least to a certain extent, may be papers published in the top journals, say, 10% of the total within a field.

Finally, irrespective of the category which a journal presently belongs, the ultimate target by all publishers and authors should be quality, as fundamentally defined by the attributes examined in this paper.

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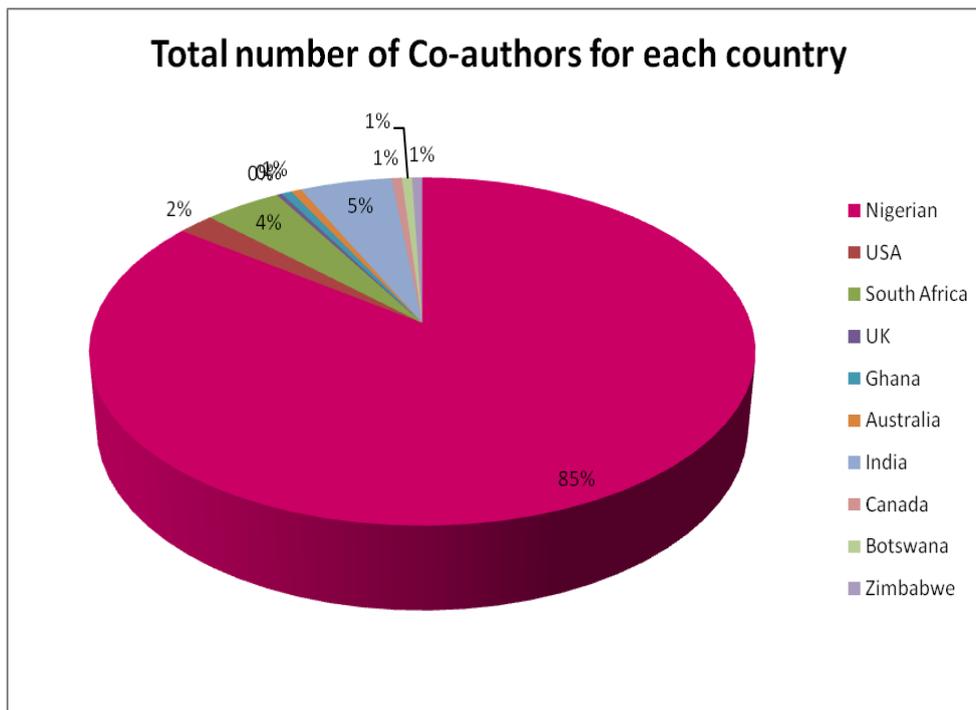25. https://scholars.google.com <last accessed in June 2020>

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Figure 1: Total Number of (co) Authors by Country in African Journal of Computing
and ICT, as at 2015

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Table 1: Number of Papers Published Yearly in African Journal of Computing and ICT from the Maiden Edition in June 2008 Up till March 2020

Year	Number of Papers Published per Year
2008	10
2009	8
2010	5
2011	33
2012	94
2013	101
2014	82
2015	165
2016	4
2017	4
2018	22
2019	30
2020 (as at March 2020)	15

Table 2: Number of Papers Published Yearly in African Journal of Management Information System from the Maiden Edition in January 2019 Up till April 2020

Year	Number of Papers Published per Year
2019	23
2020	10

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Table 3: Comparative Evaluation of the Attributes of Afr. J. Comp. & ICT and Afr. J. MIS

S/N	ATTRIBUTES	LAYMAN'S DEFINITION	*AFRICAN JOURNAL OF COMPUTING & ICT (AFR. J. COMP. & ICT)*	*AFRICAN JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (AFR. J. MIS)*
1	Genuine Existence	This attribute describes whether a journal actually exists in print or electronically. That is, it examines whether a journal has a real or fake existence.	The first edition of the journal was published in June 2008. Hardcopies of various editions of the journal are available. Electronic editions are also available at https://afrjcict.net	The maiden edition of the journal was published in January 2019. Both hardcopies and electronic editions (https://afrjmis.net) of the journal are available.
2	Uniqueness	This attribute refers to the special attraction and distinctness of a journal.	This journal is one of the oldest surviving and leading privately-initiated computer/ICT based journals in Nigeria.	It is a journal which addresses a fundamental and peculiar immediate challenge facing African nations, namely lack of effective leadership, governance and management. The journal uses the instrumentality of information technology as a tool.
3	Patent	This describes whether a journal has received the basic approval as a serial publication, as evidenced by a unique name and a	The journal is registered with the ISSN organization, with a Print-ISSN 2006-1781 and Electronic-ISSN 2672-4278.	The journal is registered with the ISSN organization, with a Print-ISSN 2714-5174 and Electronic-ISSN 2714-4429.

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		unique International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) from the international organization responsible for issuing this number.		
4	Creativity	This describes the novelty, ingenuity and innovativeness of a journal.	This journal has been built up from scratch to fill the vacuum created by lack of enduring high standard privately-initiated refereed journal within the area of computer science, ICT and associated areas, especially in Nigeria.	The journal addresses an important specific area of research need of the society, using information technology as a bedrock.
5	Existence of a Standard Publication Model	This refers to an attribute in which a journal follows clearly defined standard policy on paper submission, review and acceptance/rejectio n.	The journal is known for a consistent thoroughness of its review and other processes, as well as courteous communication with authors and other stakeholders. A summary of the editorial policy of the journal may be found at https://afrjcict.net/faq	The journal is known for a consistent thoroughness of its review and other processes, as well as courteous communication with authors and other stakeholders. A summary of the editorial policy of the journal may be found at https://afrjmis.net/faq
6	Sustainabili ty	This attribute describes the ability of a journal to continually be in operation over a long period of time	The journal has in place a structured system, such that the primary managerial responsibility falls on the Editor-in-Chief	The journal has in place a structured system, such that the primary managerial responsibility falls on the Editor-in-Chief and

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		despite possible militating factors.	and the Managing Editor, with support of the editors/Editorial Board. The Editorial Office periodically carries out (informal) general correspondences with all editors with respect to review and other relevant issues pertaining to the journal. In addition, the journal's management is tied to a not-for-profit intellectual society – Society for the Advancement of ICT and Comparative Knowledge – for sustainability.	the Managing Editor, with support of the editors/Editorial Board. The Editorial Office periodically carries out (informal) general correspondences with all editors with respect to review and other relevant issues pertaining to the journal. In addition, the journal's management is tied to a not-for-profit intellectual society – Society for the Advancement of ICT and Comparative Knowledge – for sustainability.
7	Marketability	This refers to the acceptance of a journal in the research and general market.	The journal is self-sustaining as an open access publication, with pending efforts to generate revenue from sources such as advertizing. There is increasing volume of paper submission and recommendation by informed readers/end users from across geographical locations both within and outside Africa.	The journal is self-sustaining as an open access publication, with pending efforts to generate revenue from sources such as advertizing. There is increasing volume of paper submission and recommendation by informed readers/end users from across geographical locations both within and outside Africa.
8	Currency	This attribute describes whether a journal is published up to	The journal editions are normally published as at when due, save for	The journal editions are normally published as at when due, save for unforeseeable

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		recent times.	unforeseeable developments such as the effects of recent COVID-19 pandemic.	developments such as the effects of recent COVID-19 pandemic.
9	Scalability	This refers to the ability of a journal to be changeable in scope, size, concept, membership of editorial board etc	There is room to publish more papers in each edition and also improve the publication interval from quarterly to, say, monthly, in view of the patronage by authors.	There is room to publish more papers in each edition and also improve the publication interval from quarterly to, say, monthly, in view of the patronage by authors.
10	Global Relevance	This refers to the necessity and justification for the journal in the contemporary world of social, economic and technological development.	Papers are frequently received for possible publication in the journal from virtually all continents of the world. Also, papers published in the journal are well-cited in (other) publications.	Papers are frequently received for possible publication in the journal from virtually all continents of the world. Also, papers published in the journal are well-cited in (other) publications.
11	Pedigree of Promoters	This refers to the academic and/or professional qualifications or experience of the promoters of a journal with respect to journal management and individual/group research publication.	The promoters of this journal are seasoned scholars with several years of diverse post-doctoral academic and industrial experience.	The promoters of this journal are seasoned scholars with several years of diverse post-doctoral academic and industrial experience.