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Country names in journal titles: shaping researchers' perception of journals quality

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Abstract

Numerous academic journals incorporate geographic names, including countries and regions, in their titles. This practice is not uniform, as some journals opt to internationalise by omitting these affiliations. To gauge the impact of country names in journal titles on researchers' perceptions of journal quality, 408 researchers in sociology, psychology, environmental sciences, and physical chemistry in Brazil, Canada, Germany, Malaysia, Nigeria, and the USA were surveyed. The study reveals that most researchers believe that a journal's association with a specific country influences their perception of its quality (74.6%) and international readership (76.8%). Consequently, researchers tend to avoid journals with country-specific titles, suspecting limited readership or a predominant focus on papers from that country. However, exceptions exist, primarily in terms of perception, especially for American journals, which are often perceived as indistinguishable from mainstream international journals. Disciplinary variations emerge, with subject matter influencing perceptions. Subjects such as sociology, closely tied to local and national issues, exhibit a more (compared to e.g., chemistry) significant tendency toward recognising national journals. The inclusion of the term "international" in journal titles elicits mixed opinions, with some associating it with low quality or predatory journals, a perception that stems from the proliferation of predatory journals in some Asian and African countries. This study offers insight into researchers' preferences and underscores the important role of journal titles in shaping researchers' perceptions of journals' scope, quality and readership. In a challenging metric-driven research and publishing landscape, it is important to strike a balance between internationalisation and fostering diversity in scholarly journal publishing.

Keywords Scholarly journals · Journal titles · Journal publishing · Journal quality · Journal readership · Journal ranking

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Introduction

The title of a journal is part of its identity. Many researchers have familiarity with journals in their field of researcher, especially prominent or well-regarded journals. However, for researchers without prior knowledge of a journal (e.g., perhaps many early career researchers), titles give the first impression about the scope of a journal. Titles, directly or indirectly, might influence researchers' opinions about the quality of a journal and their decision to submit their manuscripts to journals. Two small studies (Giles, 2011; Schreuder & Oosterveld, 2008) showed that high-impact journals have shorter titles. It is unlikely that journals are more impactful simply because of their shorter titles, but short titles are easier to remember, and they help establish the brand and reputation of journals. Titles are also important for other decisions such as the evaluation of promotion or recruitment of candidates. Picard et al. (2019) highlighted that for unfamiliar journals, some academics, assessing candidates for external funding, perceive quality solely from journal titles or journal review policies.

Besides topical scope, titles sometimes also indicate journals' association with a location or an institution, as some journal titles include geographic or institution names (e.g., *the Iranian Journal of Medical Sciences*). In fact, of 23,702 active journals indexed in Scopus that publish articles in English, 3398 (14.7%) titles include a geographic name and 60.4% of these names are country names, followed by continent (20.9%), city or university (10.2%), and regions (8.5%) (Jamali & Peimany, 2024). We need to bear in mind that there are thousands of journals (25k+) that are published on Open Journal Systems (OJS) outside the mainstream scholarly publishing industry and mostly absent from Scopus and Web of Science, and many of these journals belong to countries other than the UK, the USA or Western Europe where major publishers are based (Khanna et al., 2022).

Moreover, one of the functions of a journal is dissemination that is done by "communicating the findings to its indented audience usually via brand identity of the journal" (Ware & Mabe, 2015, p. 16). We know from research in areas such as marketing and psychology that country of origin has an impact on brand perception (Iacob, 2016). Country images are formed primarily based on stereotypes (Ingenhoff et al., 2020) and country stereotypes may play a role in how people derive meaning from names (e.g., journal titles) (Olavarrieta, 2016).

Journal publishing has become increasingly challenging with the rise of various business models and an increasingly competitive sector, especially for journals published by small publishers and not-for-profit institutions such as universities and associations. The pressure for internationalisation is one of the challenges, especially for local and national journals (Koch & Vanderstraeten, 2021). Local and national journals play many roles including supporting local scholarship and education system (Jamali et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c; Larivière, 2014). However, they are also more at risk. For instance, Australia which publishes about 650 journals with more than 200 of them having 'Australia' or 'Australian' in their titles, has had 140 journals cease publication in the last decade (Jamali et al., 2022b).

One of the reasons for the discontinuation of journals is the publication drain in a metric-driven culture (Jamali et al., 2022b). Researchers in many countries are encouraged to publish in highly ranked journals and as a result, journals want to be indexed in major citation databases (e.g., Scopus) (Koch & Vanderstraeten, 2021). Moreover, the more journal from a country is included in such databases, the better the share of that country in the global research output as measured in scientometric reports (Basu, 2010; Leta, 2012)

which in turn might have implications for the international prestige of a country's research. Getting indexed in databases might affect the national orientation of journals (Moed et al., 2020) as they become more open to international authors. A side-effect of internationalisation and ranking is that some journals change their names hoping to attract more (international) authors and part of such changes might be removing country names from titles. For instance, the *Korean Journal of Urology* removed 'Korean' from its title to, in the words of its editor, "open doors for more international authors and readers" (Park, 2016). The use of geographic names decreased by 40% among Scopus journals that had a change of title in the past (Jamali & Peimany, 2024).

There has been little research on journal titles in general and on the effects of including geographical affiliations in journal titles in particular. Therefore, this article aims to generate new knowledge about how journal titles, especially when they include country names, might influence researchers' perception of journals' quality. The paper seeks to answer these questions:

- How do researchers perceive the quality of journals whose titles include a country name?
- What are the opinions of researchers about journals associated with individual countries?
- When do researchers tend to submit their articles to English journals of their own country?

Method

Participants and sampling

Brazil, Canada, Germany, Malaysia, Nigeria and the USA were chosen for the study. They were chosen to include both English (US, CA) and Non-English-speaking countries (BR, GE, NI, MA). They also include countries that are at different levels of scientific and technological advancement. Judging by the overall rank in the Global Innovation Index (2022), the USA (2), Germany (8) and Canada (15) are among the top countries while Malaysia (36), Brazil (54), and Nigeria (114) have lower ranks. These also include countries where the concept of national journals exists (e.g., Canada, Larivière, 2014) and countries such as the USA where such a concept might not be as important or relevant, for many international publishers are based in the USA.

Four disciplines were chosen to represent different types of sciences including physical and biological (physical chemistry and environmental sciences) and social sciences (psychology and sociology). They also represent sciences that are at different points in the continuum of complexity and softness (Fanelli & Glänzel, 2013) including soft (e.g., sociology) and hard sciences (physical chemistry). The other rationale for choosing these four disciplines was to include disciplines in which research is more likely to have local and national significance (sociology and environmental sciences) and disciplines in which research is less likely to have any particular local or national significance (physical chemistry and psychology). Research that has particular local/national significance is considered better suited for local/national journals whereas, in disciplines such as chemistry, research does not have a particular local aspect and can be published in any journal. These subjects were also chosen for a pragmatic reason as they are distinct subject categories in the Web

Table 1 Number of invitations sent and responses received by subject and country

Country	Chemistry	Environmental sciences	Psychology	Sociology	All subjects
Brazil	459 (20)	427 (15)	279 (18)	162 (13)	1327 (66)
Canada	408 (10)	345 (13)	300 (15)	250 (26)	1303 (64)
Germany	730 (19)	366 (12)	295 (21)	258 (27)	1649 (79)
Malaysia	500 (11)	499 (7)	189 (19)	27 (13)	1215 (50)
Nigeria	107 (18)	293 (24)	105 (6)	29 (13)	534 (61)
USA	472 (14)	341 (14)	311 (25)	315 (35)	1439 (88)
Total	2676 (92)	2271 (85)	1479 (104)	1041 (127)	7467 (408)

of Science and therefore, it was possible to obtain the list of papers published specifically in journals categorised under these subjects from the database.

For each of the six countries, searches were conducted in November 2022 in the Web of Science Core Collection for articles published in 2022 and categorised under the four given subject categories where at least one author was affiliated with the given country. The results were downloaded. In most subjects the total number of articles published in 2022 for the given country was less than 1000 (e.g., sociology papers from Brazil) and all were downloaded. In a few cases (e.g., US papers in physical chemistry) where the number of papers in the subject category for that country was more than 1000, then the 1000 records that had been added most recently to the database were downloaded and from which a random set of papers were selected. The web of science provides the email address of the corresponding author. Papers whose corresponding author was not affiliated with the given country were discarded. Then the email addresses were used to send personalised invitation emails to authors using SurveyMonkey to participate in the study. The response rate was different for different subjects and countries. The first batch of invitation emails were sent to up to 250 emails for each subject-country. After a week the number of responses were checked and in cases where the number of responses received was very low and more corresponding email addresses were available to use, a second batch of invitations were sent to receive more responses. In total, the survey was sent to 7467 researchers, about 342 emails bounced, some 451 respondents went to the survey, of which 8 were pushed out of the survey after answering the screening question (see below) and 35 responses were faulty or too incomplete to use. In the end, 408 responses were used for the analysis and therefore, the response rate was 5.5%. Table 1 shows the number of invitations sent and the number of responses received (in brackets) for each subject and country.

About two-thirds of participants were men (67.6%, $N=276$), 30.6% ($N=125$) were women, and two (0.5%) preferred not to say or used another term, and the rest (1.2%, $N=5$) did not answer the gender question. In terms of age, 122 (29.9%) were 35 or younger, 257 (63%) were 36 or older and the rest (7.1%, $N=29$) did not answer the age question.

Questionnaire

An online survey hosted on SurveyMonkey was used for data collection (15 Nov–10 Dec 2022). It started with a screening question about the country in which participants were based as a researcher. The question listed the six given countries plus an option for 'none

of the above'. Those who chose none of the above (8 did so), were pushed out of the survey with a thank you note.

The survey was sent to a few information science researchers to check its validity and then it was pilot tested with a few participants.

Apart from a few demographic questions, the short questionnaire had six questions. The first two questions of the survey presented a list of seven fictional journals to participants and ask them to assume that these fictional journals are in English language, published by a reputable publisher, and indexed in citation databases. They were also told to "suppose X is the name of your research field". The seven journals were:

- American Journal of X
- Brazilian Journal of X
- Canadian Journal of X
- German Journal of X
- International Journal of X
- Malaysian Journal of X
- Nigerian Journal of X

Then in the first question, they were asked "How do you perceive the following journals in terms of quality? Please rank them from high (1) to low (7)." And in the second question they were asked "How do you perceive the following journals in terms of the likelihood of acceptance of your average paper? Please rank them from high (1) to low (7)".

The journal list was randomised so they were presented in a different order to each participant to avoid pre-order bias.

A third free-text question asked them about the rationale behind their ranking.

Question 4 was an opinion question that presented a few statements about journals with country names in their titles and asked for their level of agreement/disagreement with the statements.

Question 5 was a checkbox question about when they tend to submit their articles to English journals published by their own countries.

The final free-text question asked them "what aspects of a journal's title are important to you, if any at all, when deciding to submit your manuscripts and why?"

The survey had ethics approval from Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project #: 22364) and implied informed consent was obtained from all participants by presenting the consent statement on the first page of the survey and asking them to choose either "I agree" or "I do not agree". Those who did not agree with the consent left the survey. No question (except for the screening question) was mandatory and respondents could skip any question they did not want to answer.

Data analysis

The data were analysed using simple frequency and percentage and some non-parametric tests. Given the type of variables (mostly ordinal) and because the data were not normally distributed for any of the variables, sample sizes were not equal for different subjects and countries, and because conditions such as homogeneity of variances were not met in most cases, non-parametric statistics were used. The Kruskal–Wallis H test was used to make country and subject comparisons. When statistically significant differences existed, Dunn's post hoc tests with Bonferroni error correction were used for pairwise comparison. For

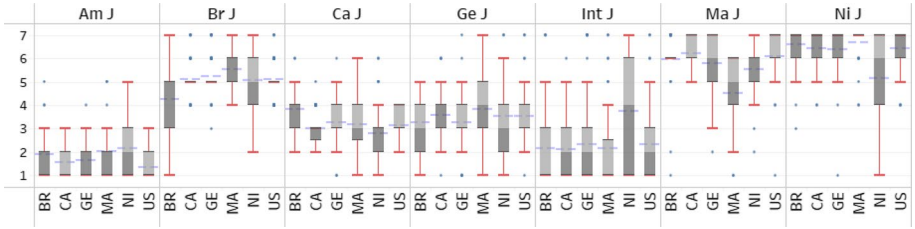

Fig. 1 Ranking of journals based on perceived quality by country

effect size, epsilon-squared (ε^2) was used which is usually interpreted as below (Rea & Parker, 1992). Chi-squared was used for the crosstabulation tables.

0.00 < 0.01—Negligible.
0.01 < 0.04—Weak.
0.04 < 0.16—Moderate.
0.16 < 0.36—Relatively strong.
0.36 < 0.64—Strong.
0.64 < 1.00—Very strong.

Free-text comments were analysed thematically. Where quotations from comments are presented in the findings section, the subject and country of respondents are mentioned in brackets.

Results

Ranking journals' quality

The boxplots in Fig. 1 show the ranking of the perceived quality of the seven journals by respondents of each country. The dashed blue lines in all boxplots indicate mean (average) values. Kruskal–Wallis H tests showed that country differences for all journals were statistically significant at least between two countries except for the *German Journal of X* where there was no significant difference at all. Most of the significant differences were between the respondents affiliated with the country of the given journal and other countries. Respondents from the country of the journal considered their journal of higher quality than respondents from other countries did. For instance, in the case of the Brazilian journal, the main differences were between respondents from Brazil (BR) and other countries including Germany, Malaysia, Nigeria and the USA. The pairwise significant differences were:

- American Journal: ($H_{(5)} = 39.56$, $P < 0.001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 088$); pairwise differences (US-BR, US-MA, US-NI, BR-CA, BR-GE).
- Brazilian Journal: ($H_{(5)} = 63.42$, $P < 0.001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.126$); pairwise differences (BR-CA, BR-GE, BR-MA, BR-NI, BR-US).
- Canadian Journal: ($H_{(5)} = 38.55$, $P < 0.001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.094$); pairwise differences (NI-GE, BR-CA, BR-MA, BR-NI, BR-US).
- International Journal: ($H_{(5)} = 13.81$, $P = 0.017$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.041$); pairwise differences (NI-CA, NI-MA).

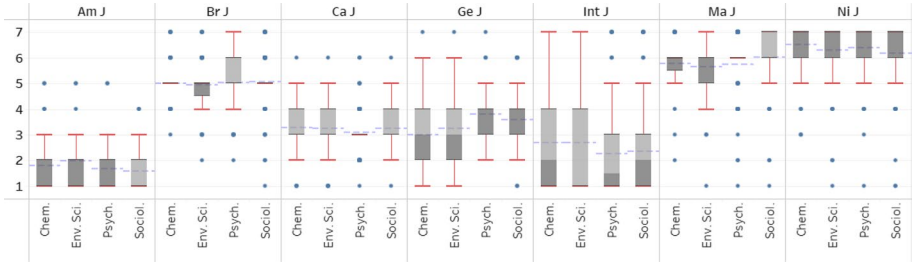

Fig. 2 Ranking of journals based on perceived quality by subject

- Malaysian Journal: ($H_{(5)}=63.52$, $P<0.001$, $\varepsilon^2=0.181$); pairwise differences (MA-BR, MA-CA, MA-GE, MA-NI, MA-US, NI-CA, NI-US, BR-CA)
- Nigerian Journal: ($H_{(5)}=35.07$, $P<0.001$, $\varepsilon^2=0.104$); pairwise differences (NI-BR, NI-CA, NI-GE, NI-MA, NI-US).

Subject differences in ranking of the quality of the seven journals are presented in Fig. 2. Kruskal–Wallis H tests showed no significant differences for Brazilian, Canadian, Nigerian and International Journals. But the other four journals had statistically significant differences between subjects, which are listed below. If we ignore the outliers, the rankings for some journals such as the American journal are more similar across the four subjects. The American journal was ranked consistently as high quality and the Nigerian journal was ranked consistently as low quality. The ranking of quality for Malaysian and Brazilian journals was better than the Nigerian Journal but worse than the German, and Canadian journals. The International journal had less consensus in terms of quality as researchers' understanding of what an international journal is might be different.

- American Journal: ($H_{(3)}=12.14$, $P=0.007$, $\varepsilon^2=0.033$); pairwise differences (Socio-EnvSci).
- German Journal: ($H_{(3)}=31.82$, $P<0.001$, $\varepsilon^2=0.092$); pairwise differences (Chem-Socio, Chem-Psych, EnvSci-Socio, EnvSci-Psych).
- Malaysian Journal: ($H_{(3)}=13.85$, $P=0.003$, $\varepsilon^2=0.037$); pairwise differences (Chem-Socio).

Ranking the likelihood of getting acceptance

Respondents were also asked to rank the seven journals in terms of the likelihood of acceptance of their average papers. The result is presented in Fig. 3. Statistical tests showed significant differences for the Brazilian, Canadian, German and Nigerian journals with pairwise differences listed below. Overall, compared to the quality ranking, the range of ranking for each journal for this aspect was larger as evidenced by the size of boxes and whiskers. The American journal was ranked low which indicates that respondents conceived it difficult to get papers accepted in that journal. On the other hand, the ranking for journals such as Nigerian, and Brazilian were higher indicating respondents thought it was more likely to get acceptance from those journals. The ranking for the international journal covered the entire range (from 1 to 7) and the average across countries was similar (around 4).

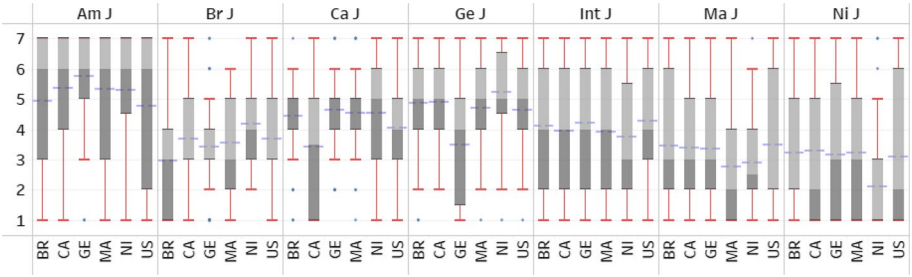

Fig. 3 Ranking of journals based on the likelihood of getting acceptance for articles by country

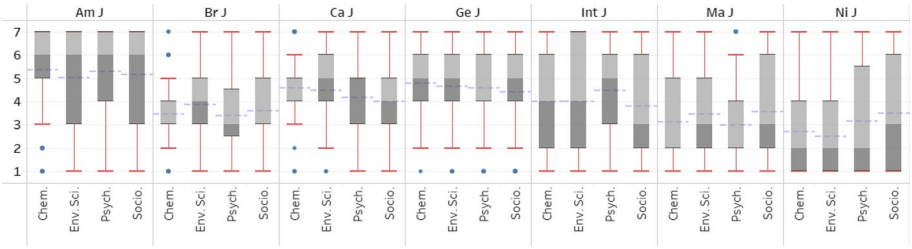

Fig. 4 Ranking of journals based on the likelihood of getting acceptance for articles by subject

- Brazilian Journal: ($H_{(5)} = 12.15$, $P = 0.033$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.050$); pairwise differences (BR-NI).
- Canadian Journal: ($H_{(5)} = 16.52$, $P = 0.005$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.051$); pairwise differences (CA-GE).
- German Journal: ($H_{(5)} = 33.28$, $P < 0.001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.096$); pairwise differences (GE-BR, GE-CA, GE-MA, GE-NI, GE-US).
- Nigerian Journal: ($H_{(5)} = 14.46$, $P = 0.013$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.034$); pairwise differences (NI-BR).

Subject differences in the likelihood of getting acceptance are presented in Fig. 4. The only statistically significant difference belonged to the Nigerian journal ($H_{(3)} = 10.07$, $P = 0.018$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.031$), and the difference was only between environmental sciences and sociology ($P = 0.029$).

Ranking journals from own country

Figure 5 shows how respondents from each country ranked the journal associated with their own country (e.g., how respondents from Brazil ranked the *Brazilian Journal of X*) in terms of perceived quality (A) and the likelihood of getting acceptance (B). In the case of perceived quality, there were statistically significant differences ($H_{(5)} = 193.99$, $P = 0.000$) between countries with a strong effect size ($\varepsilon^2 = 0.576$). Pairwise comparisons showed that significant differences existed between all pairs of countries, except between Canada and Germany, Malaysia and Brazil, Brazil and Nigeria, and Malaysia and Nigeria. American respondents clearly ranked the American Journal of X the highest in terms of quality and they were more uniform in terms of their opinion (judging by the spread of their ranking, i.e., the length of the box). Researchers in Nigeria ranked their journals on average the lowest, but they were more different in terms of how they perceived the quality of their own

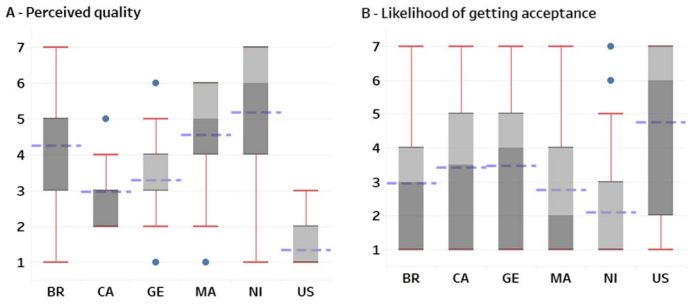

Fig. 5 Perceived quality and likelihood of getting acceptance from own country's journal by country

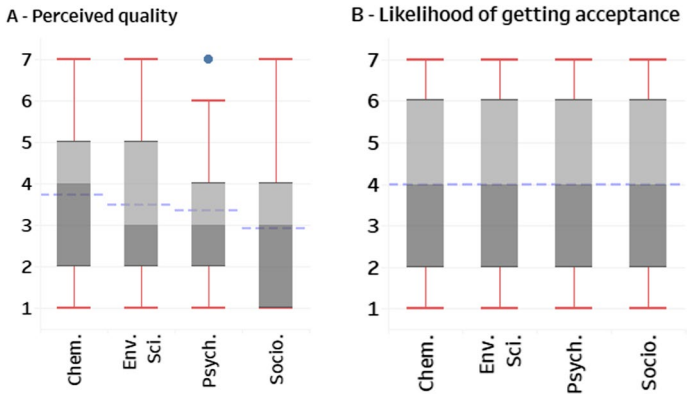

Fig. 6 Perceived quality and likelihood of getting acceptance from own country's journal by subject

journal. Canadians and Germans ranked their journals on average as the third journal in terms of quality and the range of their rankings was not very large.

Regarding the likelihood of getting acceptance from own country's journal, there were significant differences among countries ($H_{(5)}=48.26$, $P<0.001$) with a small effect size ($\varepsilon^2=0.146$). Dunn-Bonferroni tests showed that statistically significant differences existed only between the USA and all other countries, and between Nigeria and three countries of the USA, Canada, and Germany. US respondents' ranking was statistically different from all other countries and on average they ranked the journal from the USA the lowest (indicating it was more difficult to have their papers accepted). But the interquartile range (the length of the box) was larger than others' which shows their views were more spread out. Views by respondents from Brazil, Canada and Germany were relatively close to one another, ranking the journal from their country on average between 3rd and 4th in terms of the likelihood of getting acceptance.

Subject differences for ranking of the journal for own country are presented in Fig. 6, both for perceived quality (A) and for the likelihood of getting acceptance (B). In the case of perceived quality, the Kruskal–Wallis test ($H_{(3)}=10.06$, $P=0.018$, $\varepsilon^2=0.030$) and pair-wise comparison showed that there was only a statistically significant difference between chemistry and sociology ($P=0.014$). There were not any statistically significant differences between different subjects for the likelihood of getting acceptance.

Rationale for ranking

A free-text question asked respondents about the rationale behind the ranking they did and 303 left a comment. About a sixth of respondents (56) stated that the ranking was based on their experience and by this, they meant their past interactions with other similar journals, the peer reviews they have done for journals from different countries, papers they have read, and submissions they have made. There were a large number of respondents who did not explicitly mention experience, but their comments indicated that their ranking was based on their knowledge of and familiarity with journals from different countries, including their knowledge of rigour and peer review of journals (15), age and how well-established journals from different countries are (5), their acceptance rate (10), how likely they are to have good metrics (9) or have good reach (2) and visibility (1) and so on. About 45 respondents stated, in one way or another, that American journals were better in terms of quality, and 43 said journals from western, European or developed countries (some also used terms such as 1st World, Global North, or wealthier nations) have better quality.

I am often less comfortable with journals associated with specific countries. One exception was the United States since many high-quality journals specify their association with American societies. (Chemistry, USA).

On the other hand, a few (6) mentioned that journals from developing countries are less likely to have high quality. While some of the rankings were based on experience, some others were based on the knowledge of (or assumption about) countries' research standing. About a sixth (52) of respondents linked their ranking to the research reputation of countries. Countries that have better research output or productivity, fund more research or fund the type of research that respondents considered more important, have a better state of science education, have more prestigious universities, societies, and associations (that are sometimes also reputable publishers such as American Psychological Association or American Chemical Society) were thought to have better journals. In the case of the USA, several respondents (9) mentioned that US-based research dominates their field and therefore, they expected American journals to have high quality. The language of countries (8) was also considered to play a role as journals from English-speaking countries might receive more submissions which means more competition between authors which makes it harder to publish in those journals.

International journals were disputed as 79 who commented on them had different opinions. Some considered them to have high quality (21), especially if from the USA or Europe (2) or from certain fields (2), or considered them to be difficult to publish in (5), be cited more (4), or be more competitive. On the other hand, some others associated the term with predatory journals (11) or thought they could be questionable (5), have lower quality (6) especially if they are from Asia or Africa (1), are easier to publish in (3), and are less competitive (1). Twelve respondents thought international journals tend to be more open in terms of their scope and audience as well as editorial board and reviewers, but one thought they favour papers from the USA and are not interested in research that is location-related. Six simply said they prefer journals with the term international to journals with a country name in their titles.

Twenty-two respondents mentioned predatory journals, nine of them said journals from certain parts of the world (African and Asian journals) or certain countries (Nigeria) are more likely to be predatory and 11 associated international titles them with predatory journals.

Many African and Asian journals are predatory open-access journals. (Psychol-

ogy, Brazil)
Many of the local journals in my country Nigeria are predatory and for a journal to carry such name, I might be forced to ignore it if I don't have an opportunity to see whether they are indexed by Scopus, Scimago, Thompson Reuters, etc. (Sociology, Nigeria)
I've seen a lot of spam journals (not peer-reviewed, for-profit, predatory) with "international" in the title, so I distrust those somewhat. (Environmental Sci., USA)
I think there is a sense that journals based outside of the UK/US/EU are more likely to be predatory. (Sociology, Malaysia)

While a few respondents clearly said that the country name in titles is "irrelevant to" them and what matters to them is "the reputation" of a journal, several respondents explicitly stated that they have an implicit bias against certain parts of the world or countries. Comments below are a few examples:

(a) I would assume that racist ideas exist in the community, and therefore more people try to get into "Western" or "International" Journals rather than into journals from the Global South. And if more people try to get their research into those journals, they will have more good-quality submissions to choose from. (b) I'm fairly sure I have some racist and stereotypical ideas about research in countries of the Global South as well. (Psychology, Germany)
I think I have an implicit bias against the journals that are based in the global south as being less rigorous. (Psychology, Canada)
Prestige and reach are important in choosing a journal. My implicit bias played a role in how I perceived prestige and reach. I found myself thinking, "important research isn't coming out of developing countries like Nigeria or Malaysia." While we live in a very global world, it is difficult not to think this way, at least for me. (Psychology, USA)
I am very stereotype-driven as I associate higher-quality journals with western countries. Furthermore, s a German researcher, I would assume that it is easier for me to publish in German journals than in other western countries. US journals have a reputation to reject more papers compared to other (western) countries. However, I have only published in European Journals so far. (Psychology, Germany)
There is certainly some systemic bias embedded in my perceptions and rationale of high-quality journals - although I try not to publish in journals with any country in the title. (Sociology, Canada)
I mostly do not look at journals with "[Location] Journal of Psychology"-type names because the scope is unlikely to be of interest to me, so if these are real journals, I really have no context for them. But there are certainly "American Journal of Whatever" and "International Journal of Whatever" journals that I know *are* fine in quality (although sometimes "International" can indicate predatory journals). I am not sure if I have ever read a German, Malaysian, or Nigerian journal but I have seen some country-specific journals that are more in the predatory range-- e.g., I get invitations to submit to Nigerian journals sometimes that are 100% outside of my scope. I think Brazilian journals tend to be open access and without fees-- to my understanding-- and that is a positive thing. (But largely, the journals I actually read are about topic-specific content.) (Psychology, USA)

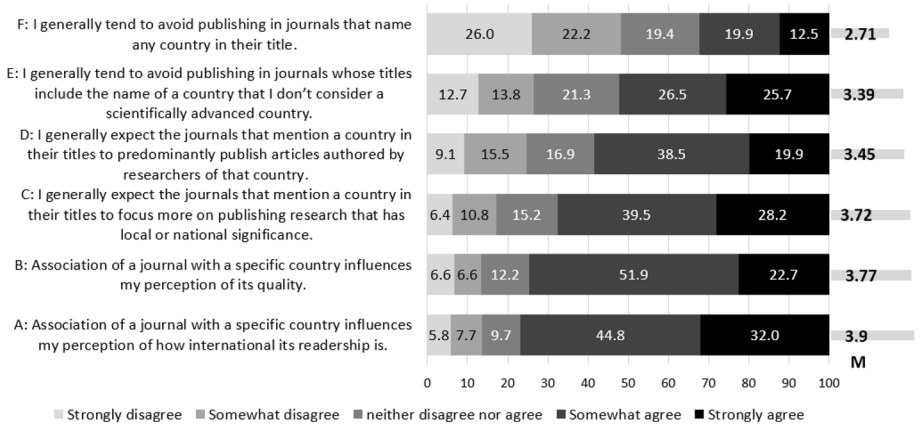

Fig. 7 Opinions about journals' association with individual countries

Table 2 Country differences for opinions on journals' association with individual countries

Country	BR	CA	GE	MA	NI	US	*H*	*P*	ε^2
A	4.0	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.5	4.1	4.40	0.493	–
B	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.3	3.9	6.90	0.228	–
C	3.4	4.1	3.7	3.5	3.5	4.0	16.18	0.006	0.045
D	3.6	3.8	3.3	3.5	2.7	3.7	22.64	0.001	0.063
E	3.3	3.7	3.6	3.4	2.9	3.4	9.57	0.088	–
F	3.1	2.5	2.7	3.0	2.5	2.6	9.04	0.107	–

Journals with country names

Participants were asked to express their (dis)agreement with a few statements about journals associated with specific countries. Figure 7 shows the percentage value of responses as well as the mean value of the Likert scale that was calculated based on the numeric value of options (from 1 strong disagreement to 5 strong agreement). While overall there were agreements with the first five statements (A–E) as indicated by mean values and percentages of agreements, the last statement (F) had more disagreement than agreement. This indicates that respondents' decision whether to publish in a journal whose title includes the name of a country depends on which country is named in the title. If the named country isn't perceived as a scientifically advanced country, they would avoid publishing in that journal (at least 52.2% said they would do so). These are aligned with the majority's agreement (76.8%) with the first statement (A) which says the association of a journal with a specific country influences their perception of how international its readership is. It is also aligned with statement B which indicates association with a country would influence their perception of a journal's quality. Most respondents also expected journals that name a country in the title to publish more papers from that country and focus on research with national/local significance (statements C and D).

Looking at country differences for this question, as Table 2 shows mean values for each country, the results of Kruskal–Wallis (*H*), *P* values, and epsilon squared effect size.

Table 3 Subject differences for opinions on journals' association with individual countries

Subject	Chem	Env Sci	Psych	Socio	H	P	ε^2
A	3.83	3.91	3.92	3.91	0.103	0.952	–
B	3.85	3.69	3.88	3.69	0.786	0.502	–
C	3.09	3.84	3.87	3.96	10.79	0.001	0.086
D	3.19	3.32	3.64	3.54	2.43	0.065	–
E	3.81	3.38	3.39	3.1	4.45	0.004	0.037
F	2.87	3.04	2.82	2.27	6.15	0.001	0.051

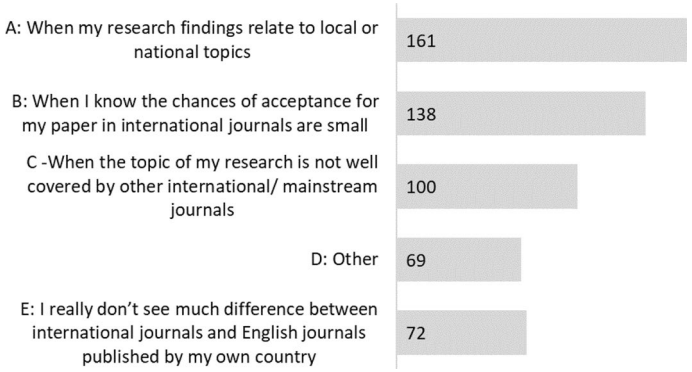

Fig. 8 Reasons for submitting articles to journals published by own country in English language

There were significant differences for statement D (between NI-BR, NI-US, and NI-CA). Although the overall P value for statement C was significant ($P<0.05$), pairwise comparison after Bonferroni error correction did not identify any pairwise difference.

Table 3 shows subject differences in agreement with the statements and there were statistically significant differences for statements C (between chemistry and all three other subjects), E (between sociology and chemistry) and F (between sociology and all three other subjects).

Submission to own country's journals

To better understand when researchers decide to publish in journals that are published by their own country, a few reasons were offered to them to choose from in a checkbox question (see Fig. 8). There was an 'other, please explain' option as well. The last option (I really don't see much difference…), chosen by 72, functioned like a 'none of the above' option and if they chose this one, they could not choose any other option because that statement indicates that in their view, they do not differentiate their own country's journals form other international journals. The most common reason ($N=161$) for when they might submit their article to journals of their own country was when their research findings related to local or national topics. This is aligned with their agreement with statement A in the previous question and it means that they see a role for such journals to serve as outlets for publishing research that has a local significance.

The second common reason was that their papers have fewer chances of getting accepted by international journals ($N=138$). This indicates that national journals might attract papers that are considered of less quality. The third common reason was when the topic of the paper is not well-covered by international journals ($N=100$). This statement is aligned with the first one as it indicates in their view national journals do play a local/national role in supporting local scholarship.

Sixty-nine respondents chose the 'other' option and used the text box to specify. Eight of them said they would never publish in such journals. Some (11) said when their paper is a good fit for the journal, and they mentioned various factors for determining fitness including the scope and theme of the journal, previously published articles, or if papers from the journal are cited in the manuscript. A few (6) said they would only publish by invitation and a few others (3) said they might publish when there is a special issue in which they are interested. The fee was a factor for five respondents as a local currency creates affordability for some countries. Readership was another deciding factor for some (4) and they mentioned for instance that some theories might be more suitable for a certain audience. Gaining visibility was another factor (4) especially for those who were thinking about future employment because publishing in such journals is important for visibility in the local job market. Other factors and reasons that were mentioned for publishing in such journals included when there is a lack of international journals for the research area (2), when papers are rejected by higher-ranked journals (2) or the authors consider the paper to be of lower quality (2), when local journals are highly ranked or have high impact factor (2) or they are indexed in prestigious citation databases (2), when the paper has training implications (1), simply to support local journals (1), to contribute to the debate in the local community (1), or papers written early in the career that function as an entry point to publishing and finding a way to more prestigious journals. A few (5) mentioned that they would only specifically publish in American journals as they were the best or the stage at least for their field. A few sample comments are presented below.

> …my early articles which prepared me towards publishing in reputable journals in developed countries. (Sociology, Nigeria)
> I do not publish in English in my own country, even though some journals do publish in English. I prefer to publish in English in journals outside my country, to have better international promotion. (Sociology, Brazil)
> I do not see much merit in directing research investment for local and minor issues. (Environmental sciences, Brazil)
> I live in the US, so this question is irrelevant. (Sociology, USA)
> I submit when I have work that is of good quality but yet not good enough to deserve the widest international audience. (Chemistry, Canada)

Looking at country differences (Fig. 9), there were some statistically significant differences ($X^2=104.3$, $df=25$, $P<0.001$). Numbers in bars in Fig. 9 are frequencies. The most notable difference is that Americans were most likely to say they don't see any difference between journals published by the USA and international journals. Interestingly this figure was lowest for Canadians (and Brazilians). Although Canada is an English-speaking country and is scientifically advanced, many journals are named Canadian, and they are different from international journals. Americans also had the lowest percentage of submitting to their own journals if they see less chance of getting acceptance from international journals. This figure was highest for Malaysia, Brazil, Nigeria and Canada.

There were also subject differences as shown in Fig. 10 ($X^2=29.9$, $df=15$, $P=0.012$). Chemists were most likely not to differentiate between journals published by their own

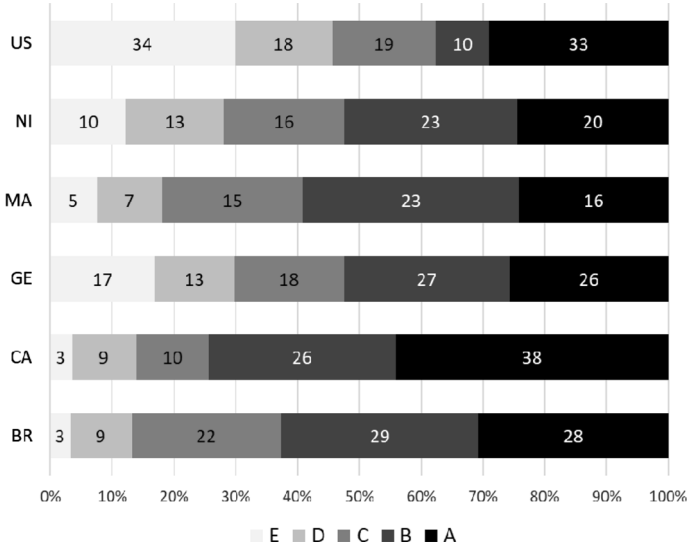

Fig. 9 Country differences for when to submit to journals published by own country

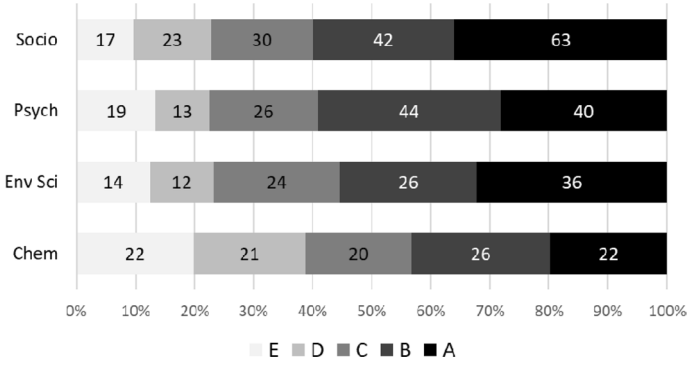

Fig. 10 Subject differences for when to submit to journals published by own country

country and other journals that are considered international. This makes sense as physical chemistry is a hard science, and topics investigated in this subject are least likely to be considered local topics. On the other hand, for fields such as sociology and environmental sciences where research topics are likely to be of local or national significance, larger numbers of respondents chose options A and C. These two options indicate that they submit to their journals when their topics fit them. Psychology researchers were most likely to choose the option of submitting to their own journals when they see less chance of getting acceptance from international journals.

Journal titles

Some 294 respondents answered the last free-text question that asked them "what aspects of a journal's title are important to you, if any at all, when deciding to submit your manuscripts and why?".

Many responses indicated that titles per se are not important in deciding on submitting to a journal, and respondents mentioned several factors that are important to them for submission decisions. Some of these factors are not related to journal titles including metrics (inducing impact factor) (27), reputation (26), being indexed in databases (16), readership (14), familiarity (10), who else publishes in journal (7), publisher's reputation (7), prestige (7), quality (5), speed of editorial processes(5), quality of editorial board (4), whether the author reads the journal (4) or cited it in the manuscript (4), journal's age (4), acceptance rate (4), fees (4), the rigour of peer review (2), and publication frequency (1).

However, respondents also mentioned factors that are somewhat related to journals' titles. The most frequent reason was the topical scope of the journal (184). Although the scope is defined by the editorial board and is usually available on the journals' website, respondents expected titles to clearly indicate the scope of the journals and several respondents mention topical words that they would expect to be present in titles (e.g., catalysis). There was no consensus in terms of whether researchers prefer journals with a narrow scope or broad scope. While most of the respondents who commented on this, preferred journals that are specialised and have a rather specific focus, there were also a few respondents who preferred journals with broader scope hoping it would mean their research would get a broader reach.

The other factor related to the title was local or international coverage of the journal (30). Most of the respondents who commented on this were against naming a location (e.g., a country) in journal titles and they said they would avoid submitting to such journals. Examples of comments related to locations are:

> … I also expect that there would be more international readers for articles published in journals that mention countries in North America than other places, especially compared to the global south. (Psychology, Canada)
> The title should be clear about the research area, without naming the country, because this gives me the impression that the target readership is limited to certain regions, from my point of view the more my paper is read the better. (Sociology, Germany)
> Those that are not attached to a particular country tend to have wider acceptance globally as authors are sourced globally and not limited to any particular country. (Chemistry, Nigeria)

A few respondents thought journals that are named American or are associated with north America are exceptions, perhaps because they are the "main producer areas" or "centres" of research in certain fields (e.g., sociology). While most researchers want journals to be international in terms of their coverage, there was disagreement about the connotation of the term "international". Some associated the term with low quality and some thought otherwise. For instance, an environmental scientist from the USA stated that "I think having any specific mention of a country OR the word 'international' throws me off", or a Canadian sociologist said, "I avoid journals with 'international' in their name because that term usually signals a low-quality journal". On the other hand, an environmental scientist from Brazil said "my perception of stronger journals have titles with broad research concepts but on a larger scale, usually with "Global" or "International" on the title".

Respondents also mentioned terms that they would want in titles (usually topical terms related to their field of research) and terms that they would avoid in titles. An example is:

> I would avoid any journal with "Universal" or "Global" in the title, as these appear to be predatory or low-quality. The same goes for journal titles that include too many disciplines (e.g., International Journal of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences). My work is at the intersection of psychology, linguistics, and education, but because I don't want to be known as an education researcher, I avoid journals with "education" or "teaching" in the title and am drawn to journals with words like "psychology," "language," or "cognition" in the title. (Psychology, USA)

Another location-related aspect was whether a journal is associated with an institution (e.g., a university or learned society or association). Three who commented on this indicated there are institutions that they trust, and they would welcome such association with institutions in titles.

The length of the title was mentioned by eight respondents and all of them preferred shorter titles. As a German psychologist stated, "I like short and succinct titles and titles that immediately 'tell me' which topics the journal covers". Only one respondent mentioned the attractiveness ("catchiness") of journal titles.

Some appreciated that titles are more important for journals about which researchers "lack other contextual information" (Sociology, USA) and it "can have heuristic value at the stage of journal finding" (Psychology, Germany) because it indicates the scope of the journal.

They would say they were less likely to publish in journals from countries perceived to be "less technologically advanced" (Chemistry, Canada), one reason might be because they "tend not to be indexed" (Psychology, Malaysia).

> I'm more likely to submit to a journal when: ... The title doesn't include hyperbolic words like "Breakthroughs in Field X". (Chemistry, USA)
> If a country's name appears in the journal title, then the journal likely emphasizes research from that country, even as there are exceptions, particularly with journals from wealthier countries… (Sociology, Canada)
> I tend to avoid journals whose titles include terms that refer to geographic locations (countries, continents, universities) or that include differentiators such as letters and numbers (e.g., Journal of Physical Chemistry C). Journals with very vague names (e.g., Journal of Applied Sciences) are also usually ignored. (Chemistry, Brazil)

Discussion and conclusion

This was the first survey to examine researchers' opinions about journal titles, their reaction to the presence of country names in titles, and their perceived quality of journals merely based on titles. Journal titles per se might not be a critical factor in researchers' decision whether to publish in a journal. There are many other factors that researchers take into account for such decisions. Some of the more common factors include topical relevance, reputation or prestige, peer review, speed of publication and editorial processes, and open access publication (for a review of studies on these factors see Rowley et al., 2022). There is also an abundance of information available on the Web (and in databases) on each journal that researchers can consult to learn about a journal before submitting. While title is not a direct factor in the authors' decision, this study showed that it can contribute to

researchers' perception of a journal as it can convey information about the topical scope and geographical coverage of a journal, and it can also trigger implicit biases researchers might have. It might be unfortunate but understandable why some journals in the process of internationalisation remove country names from titles. For instance, *the Korean Journal of Hematology* changed its title to *Blood Research* in 2013 to internationalise the journal. Five years later the editor examined the metrics and concluded that "since the title change, *Blood Research* has progressed rapidly on the international scene in terms of journal metrics" (Huh, 2018).

Researchers' knowledge or perception of a country's scientific and technological advancement seems to play a role in how they perceive the quality of that country's journals. American, German and Canadian journals were on average perceived as being of higher quality than journals from Brazil, Malaysia and Nigeria. Of course, respondents' past interactions with other journals from a country might've influenced their perception too. The quality of each country's journal was ranked higher by the respondents from that country compared to how respondents from other countries ranked the same journal. This might be because respondents from the given country have better knowledge of the journals published in their country or might be because of positive bias they might have.

We know from past studies about articles that mentioning specific country names in article titles is a predicting factor for poor citation (Jacques & Sebire, 2010, Abramo et al., 2016, Mongeon et al, 2017, and Heßler & Ziegler, 2022). Most respondents in this study about journal titles also agreed that the presence of country names in titles would influence their perception of a journal's quality and readership. The majority also tend to avoid submitting to journals with geographic names in their titles as they think those journals are limited either in their reach and readership or in their authorship portfolio. However, some thought that there are exceptions, namely America, and to a less extent North America and West Europe. This probably has to do with the scientific position of these countries and the fact that currently the majority of mainstream journals are published by or originated from these countries. Some in the past argued that journals from the USA or the UK are more likely to be perceived as international journals while other journals (even those titled "the Canadian Journal of…" would be perceived as more national or regional journals (Rowlands, 2005, p. 301). There were indications in the data that this is not too far from the current view of many researchers. Country stereotypes and cultural context might play a role in researchers' perception of journals. The association of stereotypes and cultural context with perception of journal quality is a complex issue and merits further investigation.

Apart from the presence of country names, other aspects of journal titles can also influence authors' perception, including the presence of certain terms (e.g., global and international) or how broad or specific, and clear or vague a title is. The rise of questionable journals and publishers (also known as predatory journals) has left a mark on how researchers react to journal titles. One of the criteria suggested in the past for detecting questionable journals was their "lofty titles" (Beall, 2012). Such instructions have found their way into many academic libraries' Libguides about journals[1] suggesting that broad titles and broad or strange combinations of scopes might be a sign of questionable journals. This and the many spams researchers receive on a daily basis form such journals are among the reasons why some respondents commented about their avoidance of broad or vague titles, or the

[1] An example: https://libguides.sun.ac.za/c.php?g=742976&p=5571650

presence of certain words. There was no consensus on the term international, but some people associated it with low quality and predatory journals.

Apart from differences between countries, there are disciplinary differences as well. Scholarly communication and journal publishing have disciplinary differences. In a hard science such as physical chemistry, research topics are least likely to be associated with a specific location. Therefore, chemists were less likely to consider journals as being local or national. On the other hand, research in sociology is bound to be related to the issues of certain societies and communities, and therefore certain locations. Although any research might have global implications and applications, the concept of local or national journals might be more relevant to sociology than to chemistry. However, local orientation is important in these areas. As Sivertsen (2016) stated humanities and social sciences "would lose their raison d'être by disconnecting from the surrounding culture and society and by mainly communicating in international journals that are only read by peers abroad" (p. 358).

The fact that many researchers submit their papers to the journals of their own country when their research has national or local significance is aligned with the roles of those journals. Local or national journals play many roles, and one is to provide a venue for research that has local significance but might not be well-received by international journals (Jamali et al., 2022b). However, it is detrimental to national journals that some researchers consider publishing in them when their papers are rejected by journals that are more highly ranked or only publish their second-grade articles in them.

This study has some limitations. The sample included only a few countries and they are not representative of the entire diversity of research and scholarly publishing systems that are in place in different countries. The journal names used in the ranking questions were fictional but that was necessary as the intention was to focus on the title itself and not on other information researchers might have about real journals such as their experience of interacting with journals as readers, authors, or reviewers. The focus here was on English journals but we know there are thousands of non-English scholarly journals that are not presented in databases (Khanna et al., 2022). The choice of language also had implication for the sample as there are fewer sociologist from countries like Brazil, Nigeria or Malaysia that publish in English (as illustrated in Table 1).

Overall, the study shows that journal titles and their characteristics including the presence of country names in them do have an influence on researchers' perception of journals' scope, quality and readership. Perception has a subjective and dynamic nature, and it can change over time or because of various factors. Nevertheless, understanding the influence of title on perception is still important if we want to take measures to address the publication drains that some local and national journals face (Salager-Zeyer, 2015) and maintain some diversity in scholarly journal publishing. However, it is clear that while some journals may choose to internationalise by removing country names from their titles, embracing diversity in journal titles is equally important. This study highlights the need to strike a balance—to recognise the influence of titles on researchers' perceptions while preserving the unique identities of journals. To address this issue, we can explore strategies for increasing awareness about the diversity of journals and their roles within the scholarly ecosystem. Instead of unnecessary standardisation, we should celebrate the distinctiveness of journals and support local and national journals, enhancing their sustainability in a globalised research landscape.

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Conflict of interest The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article. The author, however, is a member of the journal's Distinguished Reviewers Board.

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