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Strategies for visibility and positioning of open access scientific journals: challenges and opportunities in Latin America

Estrategias para la visibilidad y posicionamiento de revistas científicas en acceso abierto: desafíos y oportunidades en América Latina

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Abstract

The visibility of scientific production is essential to ensure its academic and social impact. However, many scientific journals, particularly in Latin America, face significant barriers to being included in international indexes such as Scopus and WoS due to strict requirements and biases toward publications in English and hard sciences. This limits their capacity for dissemination and citation. The objective is to identify effective strategies to improve the visibility and positioning of open-access scientific journals. A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted based on articles published in Spanish between 2011 and 2021. The texts were analyzed using a content matrix to identify strategies across hierarchical levels: institutional, journal specific, author-level, editorial teams, and cross-cutting strategies. The strategies identified include creating institutional portals, strengthening open repositories, collaborating with media outlets, developing optimized digital platforms, and training editorial teams. At the author level, the creation of academic profiles and the standardization of author names stand out. Improving the visibility of scientific journals requires coordinated efforts to overcome indexing barriers and expand their social impact. This includes ensuring rigorous editorial processes, increasing the quality of articles, and promoting the transfer of knowledge to society. Implementing these strategies will enable regional scientific journals to competitively position themselves in the global academic landscape, contributing to the development of knowledge in Latin America.

Keywords: Scientific journals, open access, scientific visibility, academic production, bibliographic indexing, editorial management.

Resumen

La visibilidad de la producción científica es esencial para garantizar su impacto académico y social. Sin embargo, muchas revistas científicas, especialmente en América Latina, enfrentan barreras significativas para alcanzar índices internacionales como Scopus y WoS debido a requisitos estrictos y sesgos hacia publicaciones en inglés y ciencias duras. Esto limita su capacidad de difusión y citación. El objetivo es Identificar estrategias efectivas para mejorar la visibilidad y posicionamiento de las revistas científicas de acceso abierto. Se realizó una revisión sistemática de literatura (SLR) basada en artículos publicados entre 2011 y 2021 en español. Los textos se analizaron mediante una matriz de contenido para identificar estrategias según niveles jerárquicos: institucional, de revista, de autores, de equipos editoriales y estrategias transversales. Se clasificaron estrategias que incluyen la creación de portales institucionales, el fortalecimiento de repositorios abiertos, la colaboración con medios de comunicación, el desarrollo de plataformas digitales optimizadas, y la capacitación de equipos editoriales. A nivel de autores, destaca la creación de perfiles académicos y la normalización de la firma científica. La mejora de la visibilidad de las revistas científicas requiere esfuerzos coordinados para superar barreras de indexación y ampliar su impacto social. Esto incluye garantizar procesos editoriales rigurosos, incrementar la calidad de los artículos y fomentar la transferencia de conocimiento hacia la sociedad. Implementar estas estrategias permitirá a las revistas científicas regionales posicionarse competitivamente en el entorno académico global, contribuyendo al desarrollo del conocimiento en América Latina

Palabras clave: Revistas científicas, acceso abierto, visibilidad científica, producción académica, indexación bibliográfica, gestión editorial.

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Introduction

"Publishing is not enough: to transcend, it is necessary to be cited" (Portuguez Castro et al., 2019, p. 1). In the current academic context, the visibility of scientific production is crucial to achieving that objective. According to Latindex (2025), there are 22,520 scientific journals in Ibero-America, of which 743 are Ecuadorian. However, many of these publications fail to enter high-impact international indexes such as Scopus or Web of Science (WoS) because they do not comply with rigorous quality standards (Colciencias, 2016). This challenge is aggravated by the growing demand for new journals to meet governmental higher education policies, often managed by universities, research centers, and scientific societies (Redalyc, 2008).

The transition from print to electronic formats and the rise of open access have significantly transformed the publishing landscape in Latin America. However, these trends have also generated challenges, such as information saturation and the need for strategies to make scientific production stand out. In this context, educational institutions and their editorial teams face the challenge of positioning their journals in order to increase their academic and social impact. Visible and high-quality scientific production not only facilitates inclusion in prestigious databases, but also strengthens metrics such as the impact factor (Téllez-Zentelo et al., 2007; García-García, 2018) and citation rates, thereby creating a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement (Corchuelo, 2017; Delgado, 2017).

Within this framework, the present study seeks to identify and systematize strategies that make it possible to improve the visibility and positioning of university scientific journals, especially open-access ones. This analysis will contribute to strengthening the impact of research in the region and to overcoming the challenges posed by a competitive and globalized environment.

1. Literature review

The literature review is organized around the main aspects that determine the context of open-access scientific journals and is structured into five sections: scientific production in academic journals, open access, the visibility and impact of scientific publications, indexing systems, and editorial quality criteria (Redalyc, 2018; SciELO, 2018; Scimago Institutions Ranking, n.d.; Google Scholar, 2021; Scopus, 2021; SJR, 2021). This analysis makes it possible to contextualize the challenges and opportunities of scientific journals in Latin America and their visibility strategies.

1.1. Scientific Production in Academic Journals

Scientific journals constitute the main channel for the dissemination of knowledge, facilitating the transfer of research results and consolidating their role as instruments of academic validation (Pérez-Rodríguez et al., 2018). This role is strengthened through peer review, which ensures objectivity, quality, and relevance in published articles.

Historically, journals have been the ideal medium for building academic communities and providing uniformity in the presentation and distribution of knowledge. However, their transformation into indicators of academic prestige and objects of commodification has generated tensions between their original purpose and the demands of bibliometric systems such as the impact factor (IF) (Alonso-Gamboa, 2017; Borrego, 2017). Although the IF is widely used to measure a journal's influence within a discipline, its limitations, such as the prioritization of citations over real impact, have been questioned (Flecha García, 2018).

En América Latina, las universidades han asumido un rol activo como editoriales científicas, promoviendo la democratización del conocimiento más allá de intereses económicos (Álvarez & Juncosa, 2014). No obstante, los bajos niveles de indexación y la insuficiente calidad percibida de muchas revistas de la región limitan su visibilidad en índices internacionales como Scopus y WoS (Simbaña-Gallardo et al., 2020; Colciencias, 2016).

1.2. Open Access

The open access movement, formally initiated with the Budapest Declaration in 2002, advocates universal accessibility to scientific knowledge, especially in research funded with public resources. This model removes financial, legal, and technical barriers, allowing for greater democratization of knowledge (Open Society Institute, 2002). Subsequent declarations, such as the Berlin Declaration (Max Planck Society, 2003) and the Alhambra Declaration, (FECYT, 2010), consolidated this position at the global level.

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Open access has diversified into routes that offer different levels of access and control over copyright. The gold route (gold open access) ensures free access for both readers and authors (Delgado, 2018), while the diamond route also eliminates article processing charges (APCs) (Fernández & Murillo, 2018). On the other hand, models such as the green route (self-archiving) and bronze offer intermediate options, although with restrictions on the redistribution of content (Ruiz-Corbella, 2018). However, the growth of predatory journals and practices such as APCs has generated ethical and financial challenges for this model.

1.3. Visibility and Impact of Scientific Publications

The visibility of scientific publications is a determining factor in their impact. A visible article is more likely to be cited, which increases both the prestige of the author and that of the journal. However, with the exponential increase in digital content, standing out in a competitive environment requires specific strategies that include indexing in databases and search engine optimization (Colorado, 2018; Abadal Abadal & Alcaraz, 2008).

Scientific impact, traditionally measured by metrics such as the impact factor (IF) and the h-index (Dorta-González & Dorta-González, 2010), has faced criticism for its limited focus on quantitative indicators. These metrics do not take into account qualitative aspects or the social impact of research (Túñez & De Pablos, 2013). In this context, alternative metrics (altmetrics) have gained ground, evaluating impact through mentions on social media, downloads, and references on digital platforms (Ruiz-Corbella, 2018; Ostros & Londoño, 2020). Although these metrics complement traditional indicators, their use requires caution due to their susceptibility to manipulation (Costas, 2015).

In Latin America, the challenges are twofold. On the one hand, there is low representation in international databases due to the predominance of English in scientific publications. On the other hand, the region faces infrastructure problems and limited access to advanced technological tools, which hinders inclusion in high-visibility platforms (Álvarez Muñoz & Pérez-Montoro, 2015; Ayçaguer, 2016).

1.4. Indexing Systems

Indexing systems play a crucial role in the classification and visibility of scientific journals. Platforms such as Scopus and WoS assess journal quality based on criteria such as editorial management, number of citations, and originality of content (Padula, 2019). However, these systems have been criticized for perpetuating inequalities among regions and disciplines, favoring the hard sciences over the social sciences and publications in English over those in other languages (Mejías, 2018).

Alternatively, platforms such as SciELO and RedALyC have positioned themselves as relevant options for Latin America, promoting open access and giving visibility to regional scientific production (Ostros & Londoño, 2020). These initiatives have made it possible to overcome the barriers imposed by traditional indexing systems, although their scope remains limited compared with the major international databases.

1.5. Editorial Quality Criteria

A journal's editorial quality is essential for its acceptance in prestigious indexes and for its reputation among authors and researchers. Factors such as double-blind peer review, metadata management (Latinjournal, n.d.), and compliance with international standards are essential to guarantee its scientific legitimacy (Gracia Guillén, 2005). In addition, access to advanced technologies such as XML and the implementation of the semantic web (Web 3.0) (Téllez-Zentelo et al., 2007; IONOS, 2021) enhance the visibility and accessibility of journals (Mayer & Leis, 2010).

En el caso del acceso abierto, la calidad se relaciona también con la sostenibilidad económica de las revistas. Modelos como el diamante, aunque ideales en términos de accesibilidad, requieren financiamiento externo o institucional para garantizar su continuidad (Fernández y Murillo, 2018). Por ello, las universidades y centros de investigación juegan un papel clave en proporcionar apoyo financiero y técnico para sus revistas.

Scientific journals face significant challenges in balancing quality, visibility, and sustainability (Delgado & Torres, 2013). In Latin America, open access and alternative platforms have enabled important advances, although these remain insufficient in the face of the dominance of traditional indexing systems. In this context, visibility strategies are not only necessary to increase the impact of publications, but also to democratize knowledge and promote scientific development in the region.

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Methodology

The present research adopts a qualitative approach and is based on a systematic literature review (SLR), following the guidelines proposed by Hermann-Acosta & Pérez-Garcías (2019), Portuguez Castro et al. (2019), Salvador-Oliván et al. (2018), and Ramírez Montoya & García Peñalvo (2018). This method makes it possible to identify, analyze, and synthesize the most relevant information available in the existing literature in order to answer the research question: what are the most effective strategies for increasing the visibility and positioning of open-access scientific journals? The SLR was structured in three main stages: planning, execution, and synthesis of results, according to the protocol adapted from Apolo et al. (2018).

The analysis focused on identifying specific positioning and visibility strategies for open-access scientific journals in the Ibero-American context. Articles published between 2011 and 2021, available in Spanish, and addressing at least one of the following topics were considered: visibility of scientific journals, open-access strategies, indexing criteria, and bibliometrics. Non-peer-reviewed documents, presentations, theses, and works focused exclusively on natural sciences or quantitative metrics were excluded. Google Scholar was the main search engine used, given its broad access and its ability to include sources indexed in databases such as Scopus, WoS, RedALyC, SciELO, and Latindex.

Combinations of keywords with Boolean operators were used: visibility AND positioning AND “scientific journals” AND “open access.” In addition, filters were applied to refine the results and ensure thematic relevance. Initially, 2,290 documents were identified. Through the use of exclusion terms such as NOT “natural sciences” and NOT impact, the sample was reduced to 209 articles. After a second round of exclusion based on abstracts and keywords, 23 documents were selected (20 articles and 3 editorials).

The selected texts were systematized in a matrix adapted from Apolo et al. (2018), which included categories such as author(s), title, keywords, objectives, and proposed strategies. A content analysis was carried out to identify patterns, trends, and recurring strategies related to the visibility and positioning of scientific journals. Annex 1 contains the details of the articles selected and analyzed.

The analysis focused on classifying and evaluating the strategies identified according to hierarchical levels of administrative organization in higher education institutions (HEIs): strategies at the institutional level, journal level, author level, editorial team level, and cross-cutting strategies. This categorization facilitated a more structured and practical understanding of the proposals found.

The content analysis included the identification of keywords and relevant phrases, the classification of strategies according to the level of application within the structure of HEIs, and a narrative synthesis to contextualize the strategies within the open-access framework.

The limitations of the research are related to the dependence on sources in Spanish, which may restrict the breadth of the analysis at the global level; the exclusive use of Google Scholar as a search engine, although compensated for by a rigorous selection of articles; and the absence of specific quantitative metrics to evaluate the impact of the proposed strategies. As a strength, the SLR applied made it possible to identify a robust set of strategies for increasing the visibility and positioning of open-access scientific journals. This approach ensures that the conclusions and recommendations derived are relevant and applicable in the Ibero-American context, thereby contributing to the strengthening of scientific production in the region..

Results

Following the systematic review and content analysis, the strategies for improving the visibility and positioning of open-access scientific journals were classified according to the hierarchical levels of administrative organization in higher education institutions (HEIs). The selected articles are listed in Annex 1. These strategies are presented in five organized levels: institutional, journal, author, editorial team, and cross-cutting strategies.

Institution-level strategies

According to García Holgado et al. (2017), the lack of institutional strategies is one of the main causes of the low visibility and positioning of scientific journals. At this level, the following strategies were identified:

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- Active participation in social and academic networks: It is not enough for universities and authors to be present on these platforms; it is essential to encourage interaction through recommendations, comments, questions, posts, and the sharing of relevant content (Ke & Sugimoto, 2017; Sierra & Gómez, 2019).
- Development of an institutional portal: This portal should consolidate all the scientific production of faculty, students, and administrative staff, facilitating its consultation and dissemination (Rozemblum & Banzato, 2012; Sánchez Tarragó et al., 2016).
- Creation of specialized offices in bibliometrics and scientometrics: These offices would be responsible for analyzing and managing the impact metrics of institutional publications, including scientific journals (Ruiz-Corbella et al., 2020; Alperin & Rozemblum, 2017).
- Incorporation of articles into academic bibliographies: Including articles published in the institution's journals in course syllabi as required reading bibliography (Tortosa-Pérez et al., 2019).
- Internal promotion of journals: Disseminating scientific journals in academic activities such as conferences, seminars, and round tables. It is recommended to develop informational brochures with key data about each journal (Rozemblum et al., 2015; Ruiz-Corbella et al., 2020).
- Training in technological tools: Training researchers in the use of software for data analysis, information retrieval, and technological surveillance (Palomares-Perraut & Gómez, 2016; Ruiz-Corbella et al., 2020).
- Strengthening of institutional repositories: Increasing the affiliation of journals with recognized repositories such as CLACSO's repository or directories such as OpenDOAR, thereby enhancing regional and international visibility (Ferreras-Fernández & Vega-Merlo, 2015; OpenDOAR, 2023; Alperin & Rozemblum, 2017).

Journal-level strategies

At the journal level, strategies aimed at improving visibility, editorial quality, and the reach of content were identified:

- Collaboration with media outlets: Journals can partner with newspapers, science news websites, and television channels to disseminate content through interviews, articles, and reports (Pacheco & Hurtado, 2012; González-Sanabria et al., 2020).
- Creation of accessible materials: Developing explanatory videos to disseminate research findings in a way that is understandable to a broad audience (Tortosa-Pérez et al., 2019; Nieto-Bravo et al., 2021).
- Establishment of a solid editorial reputation: Maintaining high standards in peer review, editing, and transparency in editorial processes in order to ensure quality and trust (Rozemblum & Banzato, 2012; Pacheco & Hurtado, 2012).
- Participation in academic and scientific events: Promoting visibility through the organization of conferences, scientific fairs, and digital activities (Ruiz-Corbella & Galán, 2017; Rodríguez, 2019).
- Consortia of specialized journals: Creating strategic alliances among journals to share knowledge, lessons learned, and best practices, thereby amplifying their collective impact (Tortosa-Pérez et al., 2019).
- Interaction with the scientific community: Encouraging dialogue with researchers through forums, online discussions, and active feedback with readers (Alperin & Rozemblum, 2017; Ruiz-Corbella et al., 2020).
- Design of optimized digital platforms: Developing accessible and intuitive websites with additional resources such as thesauri, scientific blogs, and bibliometric tools (Sánchez Tarragó et al., 2016; Ruiz-Corbella et al., 2020).

Author-level strategies

Authors' commitment is key to the visibility of journals. The strategies identified include:

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- Presentation of research at academic events: Participating in conferences, symposia, and other forums that make it possible to promote scientific findings (Palomares-Perraut & Gómez, 2016; Ruiz-Corbella et al., 2020; Sierra & Gómez, 2019).
- Building academic networks: Authors should be part of international academic networks, which facilitates the dissemination of their research and fosters interdisciplinary collaboration (Rozemblum et al., 2015; Nieto-Bravo et al., 2021).
- Creation of academic profiles: Authors should maintain updated profiles on platforms such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Academia.edu, thereby maximizing the visibility of their publications (Tortosa-Pérez et al., 2019).
- Adoption of unique identifiers: Obtaining an ORCID ensures the traceability and uniqueness of researchers, strengthening their digital identity (ORCID, n.d.; Ruiz-Corbella et al., 2020).
- Standardization of the scientific signature: Following guidelines for the standardization of names in scientific publications helps avoid confusion and improves the indexing of their works (FECYT, 2007; Sánchez Tarragó et al., 2016)

Editorial team-level strategies

The role of editorial teams is crucial for the management and dissemination of journals. Among the most prominent strategies are the following:

- Launch of thematic issues: Taking advantage of the release of each issue to organize academic events that promote the published research (Pacheco & Hurtado, 2012; Rodríguez, 2019).
- Participation in media outlets: Disseminating interviews with editors and thematic coordinators to highlight the objectives and findings of each publication (Orduña-Malea & Delgado-López-Cózar, 2018; Ruiz-Corbella et al., 2020).
- Strengthening of the editorial structure: Expanding editorial teams to include specialists in areas such as social media, technological management, bibliometrics, and content translation (Rozemblum & Banzato, 2012; Ruiz-Corbella & Galán, 2017).
- Training in digital tools: Investing in the professionalization of the team through workshops on digital editing, multimedia language, and platforms such as OJS.
- Internationalization of calls for papers: Involving international coordinators and reviewers in order to broaden the diversity and quality of the published articles (Rozemblum et al., 2015; Nieto-Bravo et al., 2021).

Cross-cutting strategies

These strategies require interdepartmental collaboration within HEIs and are focused on maximizing the visibility of journals through joint work among editorial teams, libraries, and communication units:

- Optimization of institutional repositories: Improving the interoperability of repositories and ensuring their visibility on international platforms (Sánchez Tarragó et al., 2016; Orduña-Malea & Delgado-López-Cózar, 2018).
- Segmented dissemination: Designing newsletters and tables of contents adapted to different audiences in order to promote scientific production (Sierra & Gómez, 2019; Alperin & Rozemblum, 2017).
- Fomento de la interoperabilidad tecnológica: Asegurar la compatibilidad de los sistemas internos con estándares internacionales para facilitar la inclusión en redes académicas globales (Ruiz-Corbella & Galán, 2017; Nieto-Bravo et al., 2021).

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- Promotion of technological interoperability: Ensuring the compatibility of internal systems with international standards in order to facilitate inclusion in global academic networks (Ruiz-Corbella & Galán, 2017; Nieto-Bravo et al., 2021).

Discussion

The results obtained in this research highlight the importance of a hierarchical approach to the implementation of strategies aimed at improving the visibility and positioning of open-access scientific journals in higher education institutions (HEIs). The systematization into five levels (institutional, journal, author, editorial team, and cross-cutting strategies) provides a framework of reference that not only allows for a comprehensive view, but also facilitates the identification of specific responsibilities within HEIs.

Strategies at the institutional level underscore the need for organizational commitment to overcome the limitations previously identified by García Holgado et al. (2017), such as the lack of institutional policies to enhance journal visibility. The implementation of specialized offices in bibliometrics and scientometrics is aligned with the need to manage impact metrics efficiently, while the strengthening of institutional repositories through affiliation with recognized platforms represents a key step toward internationalization.

The integration of institutional scientific production into academic syllabi and its active dissemination at academic events reinforce visibility both within and beyond the institution, enhancing the impact of scientific journals within their own educational ecosystem.

At the journal level, the strategies identified emphasize the importance of collaboration with media outlets, the design of accessible digital platforms, and the creation of innovative materials such as explanatory videos. These actions not only broaden the reach of scientific content, but also foster a stronger connection with wider audiences, including those outside academia.

Likewise, participation in consortia of specialized journals and active interaction with the scientific community highlight the value of cooperation among academic actors for the collective strengthening of scientific publications.

The active role of authors in promoting their research is crucial. The creation and maintenance of academic profiles on digital platforms and the adoption of unique identifiers such as ORCID represent essential practices for ensuring the traceability and effective dissemination of their scientific production. In addition, the standardization of the scientific signature responds to the need for proper indexing in international databases, eliminating ambiguities and optimizing the impact of publications.

In the sphere of editorial teams, professionalization through training in digital tools and the diversification of roles within the editorial structure are indispensable for addressing current challenges in journal management. The internationalization of calls for papers and the organization of thematic issues linked to academic events are examples of initiatives that strengthen both the diversity of content and its relevance in the global context.

Finally, the cross-cutting strategies highlight the need for interdepartmental integration within HEIs. Technological interoperability and segmented dissemination are actions that maximize reach and ensure compatibility with international standards, thereby contributing to the positioning of journals in global academic networks.

Taken together, the hierarchical classification of strategies proposed in this research allows for coordinated and effective implementation, avoiding scattered efforts and maximizing the impact of the initiatives. This structured approach not only promotes a better understanding of priority areas, but also lays the groundwork for the design of institutional policies that strengthen open access as a fundamental axis of scientific development in HEIs.

Conclusions

The dissemination of scientific production is one of the essential tasks of academic journals. However, one of the main barriers to its diffusion and visibility is the lack of indexation in the two most relevant international databases: Scopus and WoS. Journals that fail to be recognized by these search engines are excluded from their listings and databases, which significantly limits their reach. This situation is due to several factors: most indexed journals are in English, belong mainly to the hard sciences, and require, as an indexing criterion, the citation of articles previously published on those platforms, thereby creating a vicious circle. In addition, many Ecuadorian universities lack institutional access to Scopus and WoS, which aggravates this problem.

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Another structural problem is the low response to calls for publication, which affects the quality of the content of the articles received. Increasing participation in these calls would contribute to improving the standards of scientific publications. It is also crucial to emphasize that, in the current landscape, the individual article has acquired greater relevance as a unit for attracting citations, displacing the journal as the central entity in this process.

It is not enough to develop strategies for the dissemination, visibility, and citation of articles. Knowledge transfer must transcend the limits of the academic community, achieving a tangible impact on society. This impact should be reflected in the formulation of public policies, as well as in productive, industrial, and technological processes, thereby promoting the democratization of knowledge.

In terms of editorial management, it is necessary to move toward higher quality in editorial processes. Bibliometric analysis should include not only quantitative indicators, but also the evaluation of the social and academic relevance of publications. It is essential to examine the influence a publication exerts on the scientific community, as well as to assess its social and academic relevance on the basis of quantitative criteria. In this context, the editorial team must continuously monitor the behavior of publications in terms of impact, citations, interaction with readers, geographic reach, and social impact.

Adhering or subscribing to bibliographic databases without a clear understanding of their usefulness and benefits is inefficient. For example, Dimensions provides a broad and integrated data infrastructure that makes it possible to explore connections among different types of information, such as grants, publications, data, clinical trials, patents, and policy documents. Unlike traditional platforms, Dimensions classifies information not by journal, but by article, thus expanding the search universe and personalizing it through machine learning algorithms. This capacity represents a significant advance in the accessibility and organization of scientific information.

This paradigm shift not only requires greater rigor in the evaluation of publications, but also the adoption of strategies that foster the visibility and real impact of scientific knowledge in the academic community and in society. It is essential to guarantee strict compliance with article selection and review processes, especially in the face of the proliferation of predatory journals and publishers that compromise the integrity of knowledge creation.

In conclusion, it is expected that efforts to increase the visibility of scientific journals will be strengthened in the future, promoting the advancement of scientific knowledge in the region and positioning these publications as key actors in the construction and dissemination of knowledge.

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Author Contribution

Authors	Contribution
Genoveva Espinoza Santeli Jairo Rivera Vásquez Mariana Lima Bandeira	All authors jointly and equally contributed to the conception, writing of the article, data acquisition, analysis and interpretation, and revision of the article.