

Handy tips on how to publish in a top-tier research journal



Prof. Dewasiri N. Jayantha

The Manipur University (India) has recently concluded a seven-day international workshop on ‘Academic Writing and Publishing’.

The program was conducted in affiliation with internationally renowned publishers across the globe such as Emerald Publishing, Elsevier, Taylor & Francis India, Cambridge University Press Education, Springer Nature Group, Brill, Oxford University Press and Wiley. Professor Dewasiri N. Jayantha from the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka delivered a timely important session on ‘How to publish in a top-tier research journal?’ representing Emerald Publishing, UK. Professor Dewasiri is currently serving as a Brand Ambassador of Emerald Publishing for its South Asian region.

Delivering the session, Prof. Dewasiri emphasised the ways and means of publishing in a top-tier journal, highlighting the secret behind recognised publications. As an experienced Author and Editor, he emphasized a winning strategy for a top-tier publication while achieving sustainable competitive advantages amongst 1000s of submissions for a journal. Given below is the essence of his guest session.

Prof. Dewasiri emphasized that there is no magic and luck in scientific publications. He explained that all your hard work would pave the way towards top-tier publications. He presented a winning strategy for a top-tier publication while enlightening the audience on the practical tips, the content of a good manuscript and the review and editorial process.

Addressing the gathering, Prof. Dewasiri argued that Authors could achieve competitive advantages using similar strategies employed in the industry. He emphasized Porter’s generic strategies such as differentiation and focus and the blue ocean strategy to gain competitive advantages. The Authors can improve the originality and contribution of their study while

opening a room for a top-tier publication through decisive competitive advantages when applying focus and differentiation together.

Moreover, it is possible to achieve the first-mover advantage when you use these two strategies along with innovation. Therefore, Authors need to develop a competitive edge to provide superior value (value proposition) to a specific audience.

Prof. Dewasiri further explained the ways and means of using each strategy in publishing in a top-tier journal.

What to focus?

The question is what to focus on when conducting the research and writing the manuscript. Prof. Dewasiri explained that it is required to focus on a suitable journal when writing the manuscript.

There are specific and unique guidelines for each journal so that the Authors need to focus on one particular journal to reduce the time required for a revision in a later stage. How to select a suitable journal is a question for all the Authors when selecting a journal? Journal Finder is a digital tool that helps you find journals that could be best suited for publishing your scientific article.

Further, you can focus on the aims and scope, impact factor and the published articles by the outlet when selecting the best journal for your manuscript.

The impact factor is calculated by taking the average annual number of citations per article published by a journal. Top-tier publishing outlets have high impact factors or cite scores so that your decision could be straightforward. Further, the Authors should focus on the indexing of the journals when selecting the best outlet. For instance, it is advised to focus on indexing and abstracting such as Scopus, ABDC, Web of Science, ABS when picking the appropriate journal for your manuscript. That is how you can identify a top-tier journal out of 1000s of journals available in your discipline.

Further, he emphasized that it is required to focus on the manuscript's quality than the number of articles (quantity) published in a year. In South Asia, most Researchers focus on quantity than quality. However, Prof. Dewasiri further emphasized that it is better to focus on 2 top-tier publications than 10-12 poor-quality publications a year.

Finally, it is required to focus on the manuscript as well:

Authors have to see whether the manuscripts follow a scientific approach instead of a nonsense approach. Editors see whether the manuscripts focus on recent and contextual literature to differentiate it from other studies in the same phenomenon.

Authors have to re-check whether the manuscripts follow the submission guidelines. Authors must check whether the manuscripts have a clear focus emphasizing originality and implications to the practice/society.

If all answers are “yes”, you can submit your article to a top-tier outlet; otherwise, you have to revise the paper further.

Researchers should not focus on predatory/fake/clone journals that harm their Academic integrity and reputation.

Researchers choose such predatory or fake journals due to a lack of knowledge and quick publications. Prof. Dewasiri recommended a three-step simple plan for Researchers to steer clear of predatory journals that involve ‘doing your homework’ to ensure the journal and publisher’s credibility.

To distinguish legitimate from predatory journals here is a pragmatic approach a Researcher can follow.

First, you have to check whether the journal or publisher is listed in Bealls List. If so, Researchers can avoid the same.

Second, check if the journal is a member of the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), COPE, OASPA, or STM. If the journals claim open access, they should be listed on such databases and if not, you can avoid it.

If the journal has claimed that it is indexed, you have to check with such original indexing databases whether it is indexed or not. You can check it from Scopus, ABDC, Web of Science, ABC and so on.

Third, you can check whether the journal is following ethical practices, including good governance. Here you have to check the journal’s contact information, research the editorial board, take a look at their peer review process and publication timelines, read through past issues of the journal while checking the APC charge.

Here, Prof. Dewasiri highlighted that the APC should be separated from the editorial process.

By following this process, Researchers can avoid predatory journals; Professor Dewasiri suggested that the decision to submit should be based on extensive discussions with the co-authors and experts of the field.

Being an Emerald Editor, Prof. Dewasiri shared some experiences gained by managing the South Asian Journal of Marketing (SAJM). SAJM is a platinum open-access journal published by Emerald Publishing in association with the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing.

He highlighted that 10% of the submissions are out of scope. And 20% of the papers do not follow the submission guidelines when they initially submit the articles.

When a manuscript is sent for revision, there are inadequate responses to the reviewers; sometimes, it takes time to figure out what changes are done and where it is.

Also 10% of the Authors resubmit papers without a revision or slight revision, stating that all the comments have been addressed.

Prof. Dewasiri requested the audience to adhere to the submission guidelines at the first phase. For instance, if the maximum word count allowed is 7000 words, do not proceed with 7001; that one word has an additional cost. Similarly, you have to be fully aligned with the guidelines at the initial submission itself.

It will reduce the effort and time of the reviewers and editors. If you have done some revisions, be specific, state what changes you have done in the response letter highlighting where the changes are made.

How to Differentiate?

Professor Dewasiri also suggested that it is possible to differentiate your manuscript from the other previous studies to create the originality or contribution of your research. For instance, Researchers can proceed with contextual differentiation and methodological differentiation (innovation) and the findings from previous studies. It is possible to gain the first-mover advantage if you apply differentiation, focus and innovation together in a single study. It will pave the way towards achieving definitive competitive advantages for a top-tier publication.

The differentiation can be made through collaboration; the question is with whom to collaborate? Prof. Dewasiri said that the Authors could collaborate with their peer Researchers for a synergistic effort to answer that question.

He emphasized that 1+1 is not equal to 2 since the synergistic approach is there; the answer should be more than two. Further, he explained that the Authors could improve the article based on different expertise; some Researchers are quantitative experts, some are qualitative, some are mixed methods experts and some are experts in their respective disciplines.

If they can collaborate for a common goal of a top-tier publication, that will provide a definitive competitive advantage in achieving the same.

Finally, Prof. Dewasiri argued that a Researcher could achieve definitive competitive advantages in the market only if they employ all strategies mentioned above together. It will pave the way towards publishing in a top-tier academic journal.

Guest speaker's biography

Dr. Dewasiri N. Jayantha is a professor attached to the Department of Accountancy and Finance, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. Recently, he has been accredited as a Fellow Chartered Manager (FCMI CMgr) by the Chartered Institute of Management, UK. Considering his valuable contribution to research and Academia, Emerald Publishing, UK has appointed him as a Brand Ambassador for its South Asian region.