



THE CHRONICLES OF PUBLISHING

With a shift away from citations and towards a paper's impact on the society, researchers are leaning towards open-source journals to maximize exposure, and using social media and mainstream media platforms to inform the public about their work.

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Open-source publishing has long been a point of controversy among academics. Some view it as less prestigious than established high-impact publications, and others argue for the importance of public access to knowledge. But one thing everyone agrees on; open-source publishing is definitely here to stay. And for good reason.

"With the internet and open-access journals, the map of publishing is changing a lot," said Mohammed Yahia, executive editor of Nature Research in the Middle East. "It is really the research that should speak for itself."

With many journals, conferences and online platforms to choose from, it isn't a question of simply publishing for today's researcher. "Publish wisely or perish," said Walid Hassan, head of Consultancy and Client Education Services at Clarivate Analytics.

Yahia advised scholars to first submit to a relevant journal. "Focus on the audience of the journal you're submitting, and be aware that competition is high and refusals may not be due to the work itself that you're doing, but it may well be a language barrier; something many Arabs face," he added.

Experts also advised to look beyond just the impact factor of a journal, and consider other indicators. Hassan argued that in a journal, one can see the citations on an article, but they cannot tell where these citations are coming from, and they may all be coming from the author's own institution, thus inflating the impact factors. Hassan recounted the story of a publisher who

was removed from the Web of Knowledge for being a part of a publishing cycle where the journal pays to get their articles cited. So in choosing a journal to publish in, the author needs to look at all factors involved in assessing a journal.

Going beyond the number of citations for an article or journal, many experts now argue that we also need to look at interest from the general public and the media to assess the impact of a paper. Research shouldn't just be limited to academic circles, to guarantee continuity, funding and a wider impact, a researcher needs to be able to communicate his findings with the general public.

"Now, there is an equally important step to take research forward and make sure the community is aware of this research," said Yahia. "So think about publishing, not only in scientific publications, but even in general-interest magazines." Abdulkareem Abulmajeed, vice president of King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences predicts that impact factor will be replaced by how many visits and clicks the journal or article received in the near future. "Impact factor will slowly become less important and the opinion of society will be more important," Abulmajeed said. He added that researchers should no

longer live in ivory towers, and should instead be engaged with society, informing them and responding to their needs.

"Maybe we can go back to the basics of research; how much do people outside the institution know and care about this research and does it impact them?" said Yahia. "If you're studying the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, for instance, you may not get many citations as it is a regional disease; but the impact here and in the region is huge. Does the research get a lot of citations? No. Is it impactful? Definitely."

Scientists, therefore, need to think more and more of research that impacts society, and not just about publishing in prestigious journals. "Around 50 percent of research is in areas that aren't relevant to society, to the diseases prevalent in the society, and so the literature is crowded with science that is published, but doesn't really have an impact on the society," said Abulmajeed. Yahia

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advised scholars to ensure the relevance of their research and the impact it has on the community.

To develop this ability to communicate with the public, inform them of research and understand their concerns

and needs, experts agreed researchers need to be better-equipped and educated about tweeting, communicating with the media, and speaking in a language the general reader can understand. This can also be done through science journalists, Yahia said, who are able to communicate science in a way that is of relevance to the reader.

"The main reason of research is the core believe that it can help communities and society; if there is a disconnect in that, then something is wrong," Yahia argued. "It is very important to bridge the disconnect between scientists and society. I always say, 'Can you go back home and explain your work to your grandmother?'"