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Faithful and Faithless Research Publications: An Editor's Reflections

Teay Shawyun, Krisda Tanchaisak and Narat Wattanapanit

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FAITHFUL AND FAITHLESS RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS: AN EDITOR'S REFLECTIONS

Teay Shawyun[1], Krisda Tanchaisak[2] and Narat Wattanapanit[3]

[1]*South East Asian Association for Institutional Research*

[2,3]*Ramkhamhaeng University*

ABSTRACT

All universities mandate research, one of the institution's pillars and core mission. Over the last decades, ASEAN nations have been in a rapid transition to motivate and entice their faculty to increase and improve on research productions toward Indexed journals and proceedings. While papers submitted to proceedings have a lower bar in acceptance, Scopus or ISI-indexed journals are something that these institutions strive for, as they are critical to their accreditation and ranking. Unfortunately, journals have mushroomed overnight, and these seemingly suspicious journals collect monetary benefits like reviewing and publication fees to outright fly-by-night research predatory scammers. This has resulted in potential researchers using these and inadvertently sending them to reputable journals. Due to these unfortunate circumstances, this paper aims to support good paper development and submission and dispel beliefs of easy and potentially frustrating efforts. This paper attempts to provide retrospect and reflections on the "frustrations" of an Editor that papers should avoid in a Scopus Indexed Journal. It attempts to identify researchers' innocent or non-intentional practices by providing a set of dos and don'ts that are personalized based on retrospect and reflections of the paper submitted, rejected, and accepted in this Journal. It attempts to share "overlooked" practices that the researchers can use to ensure their papers stand a higher chance of acceptance.

Keywords: Research Dos & Don'ts, Publications Dos & Don'ts, Editor's reflections

Introduction

Research Imperatives and Implications

One pillar of academic institutions is "Research," the holy grail of academic recognition and academic requirement for promotion. It leads to the proliferation of publication by all means. One primary method of disseminating research findings is publishing conference proceedings and peer-reviewed journal articles (i.e., publication output) (Lisée et al.,2008). The rapid and voracious appetite for research has created much debate in the academic corridors about the future of academic publishing, particularly its foundation, the blind peer review process. It includes the proliferation of predatory journals, in-house productions, and backlogs for reputable journals that compounded and complicated the peer-review processes, taxing the capacity and capability of well-established peer-review processes & protocols.

These fundamental problems are artifacts of several global higher education developments in the past half-century massification and the rise of global and national rankings of universities. It led to most academic institutions wanting to resemble the universities at the top of the academic pecking order, thus seeking to become research-intensive. Research publications and conference presentations continue to represent the main mechanisms for disseminating research findings. Presentations are represented in the published research literature as conference proceedings. Published literature is an indicator of scientific activity and global research partnerships. Scientific publications are not merely an exercise of ivory tower academics but a key linkage enabling public use of scientific output (Yin et al. 2021). In addition, there is a growing trend in doctoral education for doctoral students to publish several articles based on their research in academic journals, in effect moving responsibility for evaluating doctoral research from university committees to journal editors and reviewers. These have led to a crisis in academic publishing with too much pressure on top journals, too many books of marginal quality, the rise of predatory journals and publishers that publish low or marginal-quality research, and tremendous pressure on academics worldwide to publish (Altbach and de Wit, 2018).

Research Statistics and Monetization

Data on publication output indicate an increase in global research activity, a growth in middle-income countries' involvement and scientific capabilities, and an internationally connected research ecosystem. At least 64 million academic papers have been published since 1996, with the growth rate of newly published articles increasing. As of 2022, over 5.14 million academic articles are published annually, including short surveys, reviews, and conference proceedings. Four geographically large countries led the worldwide growth of publication output, from 1.9 million in 2010 to 2.9 million in 2020, based on data from the Scopus database of S&E publications. China (36%), India (9%), Russia (6%), and the United States (5%) together accounted for about half the increase in publications over this period. At least 64 million academic papers have been published since 1996, with the growth rate of newly published articles increasing (Science-Metrix, 2021). Publication output reached 2.9 million articles in 2020. The countries with the largest volume of S&E publications in 2020 were China, with 23% of global output, and the United States, with 16%. The compound annual growth rate of publication output has increased in recent years. The rate was 5% over the last 4 years (2017 to 2020) but was 4% over the longer 11-year period (2010 to 2020). The journals and articles publications data of the Top 10 or Big 5 in the academic journals:
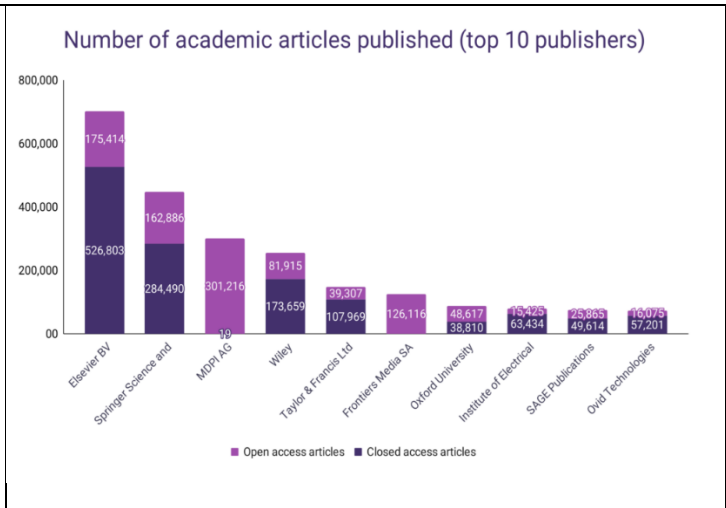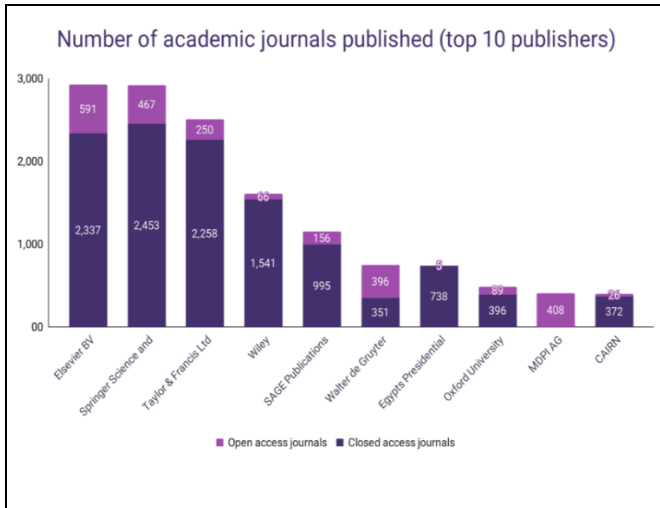
Figure 1: Largest academic publishers in the world

- Regarding the Number of academic journals published, Elsevier published 2,928 journals in 2022, the most among all academic publishers. Springer (2,920) and Taylor and Francis (2,508) are the only remaining publishers with over 2,000 journals.

- Together with Wiley (1,607) and SAGE (1,151), these 5 publishers have over 11,141 journals under their wing as of 2022.

- It means the Big 5 in academic publishing accounts for at least 25% of all journals published worldwide.

As to open-access journals, the biggest publishers are still resisting this growing trend:

- 20.18% of Elsevier's journals are open-access, and this is the biggest share of open journals among the top 5 publishers. Wiley has only 4.11% of journals with open access, and Taylor & Francis has around 9.97%.

- On the other hand, publishers like MDPI and Copernicus are fully engaged in open access, and all their journals are widely available for free.

Figure 2: Academic articles published by the Top 10

- In 2022, Elsevier published around 702,217 academic articles through its journals, the most among all academic publishers.

- No other publisher had over 450,000 articles published. Elsevier accounts for over 13% of all published academic articles per year.

- Only 6 publishers produced over 100,000 academic articles in 2022.

- 10 publishers account for almost 50% of all published articles during the year.

- MDPI leads all academic publishers in the open-access category with 301,216, or 99.99% of its articles having open access.

- Elsevier published over 175,414 open-access articles, accounting for only 24.98% of the publisher's total.

- 36.41% of Springer's articles have open access.

- Frontiers Media is the only remaining academic publisher, with over 100,000 open-access articles published over the last year.

There needs to be more official statistics on how many scientific journals there are, but several estimates point to around 30,000, with nearly two million articles published yearly. Some of the top journal publishers came up with the following numbers: Elsevier: 3263; Springer: "more than 2900"; Taylor & Francis: "more than 2100"; Wiley: 1500; SciELO: 1249; Sage: "more than 950" that adds up to 12,000, and under the ASEAN Citation Index, there are 10 Countries with 662 Journals 199996 Articles 306399 Authors (https://asean-cites.org/). These figures do not include those (1) owned and published by independent entities and (2) fly-by-night dubious operators

"predators" for publication and processing fees and dubious hi-impact journal claims, with a very fast and high turnover time of a few weeks. Thus, research has turned out to be a highly quick and easily profitable venture, as STM estimates that the journal market is worth about $10 billion. Assuming that 55% of Elsevier's 2017 revenues came from journals, that translates into £1.363 billion, which - at the average exchange rate for the year – equals $1.756 billion (a 17.5% market share). The academic publishing industry has a large financial turnover. Its worldwide sales amount to more than USD 19 billion, which positions it between the music and film industries (Buranyi, 2017). The market is largely dominated by five large publishing houses: Elsevier, Black & Wiley, Taylor & Francis, Springer Nature, and SAGE, which control more than 50 % of the market. Elsevier is the largest, with approximately 16 % of the market and more than 3000 academic journals. As an industry, these publishing houses are unique in their profitability, generating large net profits. Elsevier has a profit margin approaching 40 %, which is higher than that of companies such as Microsoft, Google, and Coca-Cola, and the curve is pointing upward (Hagve, 2020).

Publications with more citations are more impactful (Garfield 1955; Waltman, van Eck, and Wouters 2013). Potential sources of bias in the publication data counting publications and citations using bibliometric data in Scopus (1) inclusion of non-peer-reviewed articles, and a bias toward English-speaking countries because Scopus requires articles to contain an English-language title and abstract, or full papers in English (Science-Metrix 2021a). The first bias is mitigated by removing articles published in journals lacking substantive peer review, sometimes called *predatory journals* (Grudniewicz et al. 2019). Additional limitations include the lack of measurement for the amount of research in each article and the contributions of associated data sets (Sugimoto and Larivière 2018).

Research Issues and Problem Statement

Within these scenarios, the impending issues facing most academic institutions are key questions that (1) present days research is done for the sake of requirements and promotion rather than delving into the value of creating new knowledge or providing solutions to problems, (2) academics in fulfilling these research requirements are "short-circuiting" the research plethora with the massification of research undermining research practices and protocols integrity. This leads to the key issue facing all academic institutions of a Catch-22 "Quantity Vs. Quality" dilemma (Waltman et al. 2013). As these issues have become phenomenal and potentially implosive, more reputable research journals are "shutting off" research to maintain their status. Based on these potential issues, the paper aims to identify the importance of the research practices and protocols fundamentals, faithful and faithless understanding and applications of research fundamentals, and how potential budding researchers can enhance their research through some basic common-sense approaches in a Scopus Indexed journal.

Faith of Formal Research Practices

A simple googling on some key aspects of "research" produced many hits of: "research" 11,990,000,000 results (0.31 seconds), "research studies" 11,200,000,000 results (0.48 seconds), "research methods" 4,110,000,000 results (0.48 seconds), "research books" 2,760,000,000 results (0.65 seconds), "research frameworks or models," 1,700,000,000 results (0.47 seconds), "research methodology" 1,010,000,000 results (0.44 seconds), "research designs" 979,000,000 results (0.43 seconds), and "scholarly articles on research" 790,000,000 results (0.43 seconds) in descending order. The reference to "Research" on the internet ranges from the high

end of about 12 billion to the low end of 790 million. This demonstrates the vast amount of "Research" being done in one way or another. Regardless of the explosive vast amount of knowledge and practices in research, most of them are highly similar in the basic Research fundamentals, as shown in the 4 main infographics:
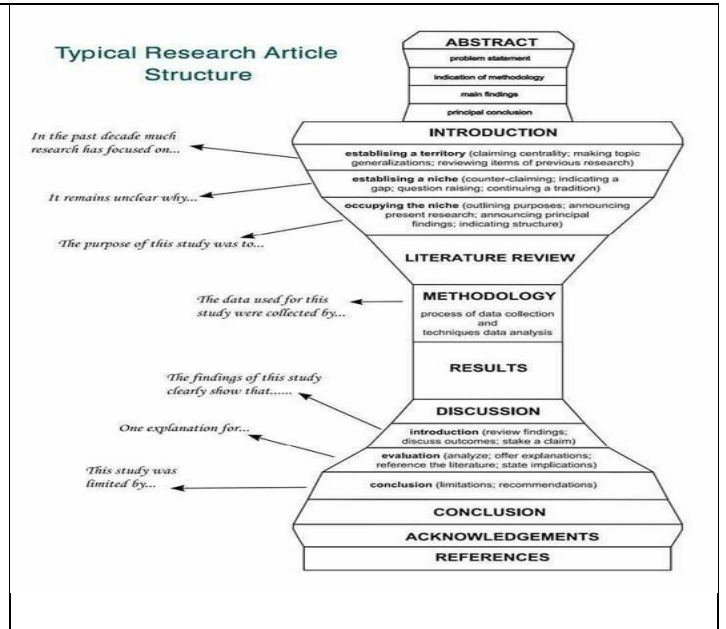

Figure 3 shows one of the more basic representations of Research Paper development, emphasizing the typical research methodology a researcher should follow. However, a Statement of Limitations is mainly found in a Thesis or Dissertation; not much is required of a Journal or Proceeding publication. Though the "Conclusion" shows the "Importance" of the Research, it can be enriched through a more extensive discourse of implications and recommendations based on the findings.

Figure 4 shows a more comprehensive Typical Research structure with a highly structured approach that needs to be incorporated in journal publications. The Abstracts have 4 main points that surmise the whole paper in 300 words, demonstrating the importance of the "Abstract," which most potential researchers failed to adhere to. The introduction also highlights the rationale of WHY the Research is done.
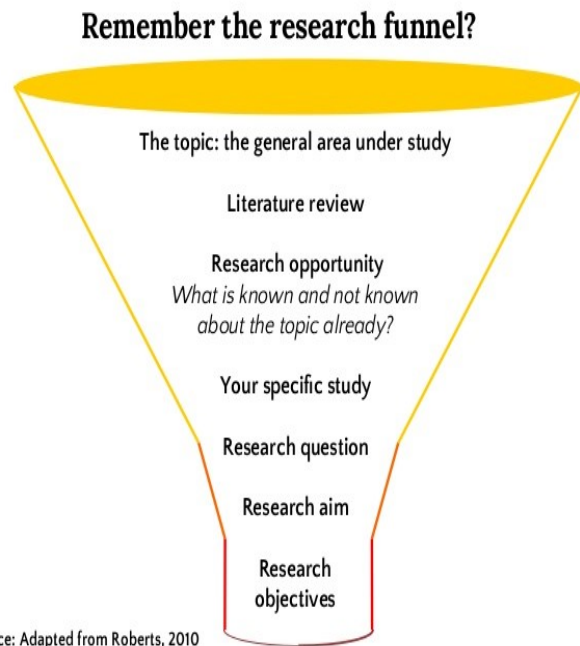
Figure 5 illustrates the value of a well-done and established research literature review. Most failed papers fail to understand and deliver on the value and stop at Step 1 of summarizing the Literature Review. A highly reputable journal requires the "synthesis", "analysis," and "evaluation" Steps to justify the development of the Research Framework/Model by identifying the key construct measures or variables leading to the statistical analysis to provide answers to the research questions fulfilling the research purpose/aims/objectives.	Figure 6 highlights the importance and imperative that all aspects of the research are interlinked through the Title or Topic of Research, Literature Review, Research opportunity, questions, aims, and objectives that should tie and relate consistently and coherently in a holistic way. They should not be treated nor discoursed independently of each other. Highly reputable journals will look at the consistency and coherence across the whole paper through this funneling of all the main items identified here.

Regardless of the Research focus, be it scientific or social science research, there are common principles that all are similar. The main difference is their emphasis on logic and focus on specific principles. Most of the Journal's publications and articles should inherently demonstrate faithful adherence to the basic principles, as shown in Figures 3 to 6. This inherently means that the Research Paper is not simply (a) an informed summary of a topic employing primary and secondary sources, (b) A book report nor an opinion piece or an expository essay consisting of one's interpretation of a text or an overview of a topic subjectively. A Research Paper means investigating and evaluating sources intending to offer interpretations of the text and not just a compilation of sources. As such, any academic paper or research aims to: (a) draw on what others say about a topic and (b) engage the sources to offer a unique perspective thoughtfully.

So, the common-sense approach is to conduct primary research on the Journal to fully & completely understand the Journal:

- Focus of the Journal – Does your paper meet the basic focus of the Journal and not based on your intentions?

- Profile of Editorial Board and Editor by using correct salutations
- Know well the Context and Content:
  – Explore some of the types of papers accepted (Academic papers? Empirical Research?)
  – Form and format of the papers; Statistical analysis needed of quantitative or qualitative analysis; discussions of findings, implications, and recommendations
  – Single or double columns
  – Referencing format (APA? MPA? Harvard? Chicago?)
  – Figures, Tables, Graphs

These basic First Steps tell the Editor you know & understand the Journal and practically lead to "Love at first sight," which forms the first impression of the paper's quality, 50% of the battle won.

Frustrations to "Fs" of Faithless Research

1. **Frustrated Love at First Sight** – If a potential author takes the time to review the journal requirements fully, the Editor will "love" you as you are interested and take the time to review and deliver on everything required of the Journal. "NO" arguments are warranted, and it will make the Editor's and reviewers' jobs so much easier.

2. **Focus** – First and foremost, determine the "FOCUS" of the Journal by searching for the requirements and past papers published. If you do this, you are on firmer grounds to receive your paper with thanks. Editors and reviewers are human beings, and they are "spiteful" in that they are "pacified and happy" in that the researchers take the time to deliver what meets journal requirements and "NOT" based on wishful, careless, or callous paper development and submissions.

3. **Forms and Formats** – All journals have a set of guidelines as to the forms and format of the paper in terms of (a) fonts and spacing, (b) citations, (c) titles, headings & sub-headings, (d) research paper length, and the Number of words and (e) research logical flow from the title, abstract, introduction, literature, research framework and instrumentation, research methodology, sampling, and statistical analysis, (f) discussion of findings, implications, and recommendations in detail based on the findings.

4. **Foci of paper development** – There are widely accepted research frameworks or methodologies. Ensure that all research papers have a minimum of

   a. *Research title* – The Research Title defines the scope and scale of the whole research within a maximum of 5 to 7 words,

   b. *Research introduction, problem statement, and objectives* – This is the key synopsis of the focus and logic of the whole paper as to the justification of "WHY" or "WHAT" the whole research is about and what problem issues it intends to address, – this supports the needs and justification of the research paper "value". The core introduction should be precise and concise to introduce and justify the research. It should not go into lengthy narratives of background and potentially unrelated data that direct the research's core issues.

c. ***Research literature and Framework or Model*** – In this case, the researcher compiles literature for the sake of "literature requirements" without fully understanding and expounding the nature and value of literature. The main fault is just the presentation or narration of literature without systemizing and synthesizing the "value" and "relevance" to developing the research framework, the research instrumentation, and the research statistical analysis.

d. ***Research Design and methodology*** – This goes into the realm of using the literature based on its synthesis and analysis to develop the research framework (model) with the variables (technically the research constructs) used for the instrumentation of both qualitative and quantitative methodology and statistical analysis,

e. ***Research statistical design analysis and discussion*** – This is the crux of using the research instruments to find "answers" to the research questions through statistical analysis and discussion of the analysis based on the statistical analysis,

f. ***Research implications, recommendations, and conclusions*** – There is a "faulty understanding that the discussion covers all three of these. Due to word counts and insufficient pages, the researcher normally condenses all three in one, which is technically an issue. The difference of statistical analysis is that the statistical findings discussion is on the discourse of the findings based on the statistics. Implications of a study are the impact your research makes in your chosen area; they discuss how the findings may be important to justify further exploration of your research topic. Research recommendations suggest future actions or subsequent steps supported by your research findings. These should be separated to demonstrate that the researcher is academically well-versed in widely accepted research organization and presentation.

5. **Faulty logic of research paper** – while most researchers know the bolts and nuts of 4 (a) to (f), the main issue is that they organize and present them separately and independently, primarily forgetting that there are "key" relationships that "cyclically closes" the whole research loop across all of them. It means that the whole research paper should "create and deliver" whatever is promised holistically, consistently, and coherent across the whole paper as "one" rather than a summation of parts as:

a. ***Research title, introduction, problem statement, and objectives set the pace of the research context and content, meaning that th***e paper evolves around these key scope and scale mandates. Nothing more, and nothing less. If it is less, the paper has not convinced the reader that all the stated objectives are consistently and coherently researched. Since these lay the scope and scale of the research, all the latter parts are created and delivered within these contexts. The research questions and hypothesis are based on statistical analysis and findings to provide answers to fulfill the research objectives.

b. ***Research Literature and Framework or Model*** – Researchers tend to summarize the literature without fully understanding the meaning and value of the literature review. The literature review goes beyond identifying and

summarizing the other studies, theories, or research relevant to one's research. A well-done literature review synthesizes the key measures and potentially the construct measures used in designing and developing the research variables within the research framework or model. The research framework or model is the culmination of the literature regarding the variables or constructs measures to find answers to the research objectives through the research instrumentations. This frequently overlooked or neglected aspect of most research does not make the excellence cut.

c. ***Research Design and Methodology*** – The main aspect of the research design is that the instrumentation of the quantitative research surveys, interviews, or the thematic case study highly depends on the key construct measures or variables operationalized for measure and synthesized and discovered in the literature reviews. Unfortunately, many researchers create the research instrument separately and independently of the construct measures or variables discovered in the literature review and as embellished in the research framework. This is the beginning of the fall of a good research paper as the logic of the instrumentation relevancy to the research framework to accomplish the research objectives is now in tatter, leaving the readers not comprehending the research as a seamless and valuable piece of "new knowledge". In addition, the crux is in the respondents as to how they are selected from the population. Regardless of the sampling methodology, the Journal does not need a rehash of theories but a realistic picture of whether the sampling is selected correctly and is representative of the population to answer the research objectives.

d. ***Research statistical design analysis and discussion*** – Statistical analysis is very diverse for quantitative research as various statistical methods are used. But for qualitative research, there is an often-forgotten issue that there are statistical methods for qualitative research, and it is not just re-producing "what X or what Y mentioned in interviews". This serves as a key reminder that regardless of whether the research is quantitative or qualitative, statistical analysis is the bane of all researchers that needs great attention, and it serves as the key to testing the research hypothesis or justifying the findings statistically rather than subjectively. The statistical results must be discussed technically to show whether the research objectives based on the research questions have been attained.

e. ***Research implications, recommendations, and conclusions*** – The discussion here of the implications, recommendations, and conclusions should not be mixed up with the discussion of the statistical findings. The main difference here is that the implications examine how the research has impacted or created "new knowledge" based on the research findings. Practical implications are potential values of the study with practical or real outcomes. Determining the practical implications of several solutions can aid in identifying optimal solution results. Theoretical implications in research constitute additions to existing theories or establish new theories. These types of implications in research characterize the ability of research to influence society in apparent ways. It is, at most, an educated guess (theoretical) about the possible

implication of action and need not be as absolute as practical implications in research. If the study supported the tested theory, the theoretical implication would be that the theory can explain the investigated phenomenon. Otherwise, the study may serve as a basis for modifying the theory. Recommendations allow the researcher to suggest specific interventions or strategies to address the issues and constraints identified through your study. It responds to key findings arrived at through data collection and analysis. Implications discuss the importance of the research findings, while recommendations offer specific actions to solve a problem. The implication section can include a paragraph or two that asserts the practical or managerial implications and links it to the study findings. Research recommendations should be based on your topic, research objectives, literature review, analysis, or evidence collected. Use the SMART approach when developing research recommendations, meaning they should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely. Research is meaningless if there are no recommendations, or the recommendations are not relevant or achievable so that they can benefit the readers and stakeholders.

6. **Fanciful research framework, methodology, and analysis –** Some researchers use fanciful terminology like mixed-research methods that combine quantitative and qualitative methods. It is fine if they are faithfully demonstrated for both research methods, with correct statistical methods, and discuss how the findings support or contradict each other to arrive at constructive implications and recommendations based on the two mixed approaches. Unfortunately, most of them failed in this fanciful attempt, as they failed to meet the requirements of 5 (b), (c), and (d) above, thus complicating their research and diluting the research findings' usefulness. Another example is the use of "phenomenological research," which is very rich-sounding. Still, unfortunately, the research design and analysis do not support Phenomenological Research. This qualitative research approach seeks to understand and describe the universal essence of a phenomenon as it investigates the everyday experiences of human beings while suspending the researchers' preconceived assumptions about the phenomenon. Another sampling issue is using respondents from different study levels, schools, universities, or countries to attempt a larger population study. Unfortunately, the researcher forgot and failed to understand that these are diverse and different groups with different characteristics. The fault lies in the combined statistical analysis and discussion as a single group, thus invalidating their research.

7. **Frustrated Failures –** Ultimately, failing to adhere to research principles and misinterpreting or misrepresenting these generic research principles that underpin the quality of the research can potentially lead to a "failed" research and the rejection of the paper.

Faithful understanding and representation of Quality Papers

To avoid the pitfalls of the 7 "F" s of Faithless understanding, interpretation, representation, and adherence to widely accepted generic research practices, protocols, and principles can, for some "common sense" approaches:

(a) Faithful initial preparation and provision – Initial preparation and provision calls for:

- Not agitating the Journal by fully researching the Journal that you want to publish.
- Giving the Journal what they want by following the middle path to the research papers' principles, protocols, and fundamentals:
    1) abstract;
    2) introduction;
    3) Literature Review;
    4) Research methods of:
        a) Research Model or Framework of the Constructs,
        b) Link Constructs to instruments,
        c) Sampling frame & methods
        d) Statistical analysis of findings
    5) Implications & recommendations based on findings
    6) Conclusion
    7) References

(b) ***Faithful Common-Sense Approach to Avoid Common Mistake (s) by copy-editing –*** Ensure the organization and demonstration proper:

- ✓ Writing Style – Miss to apply the required style properly, use the passive voice extensively, use verb tenses inconsistently, and make long sentences
- ✓ Accurate References – Snapshots of state of the state-of-the-art in a certain field and allow readers to exploit them as a starting point to step forward with their studies
- ✓ eliminate first-person pronouns – Use expressions such as "the authors" or "the researchers" with the verb in the active voice
- ✓ Maintain consistency and coherence in content, expression, vocabulary, and grammar – Ask a colleague, a supervisor, or a friend to read/review his/her work in progress could be helpful.

(c) ***Faithful Common-Sense Approach of things to do when Addressing Post Reviews & Comments –*** Address all of the reviewers' comments very carefully:

- ✓ Most importantly, demonstrate that you are a professional.
- ✓ Most importantly, the Journal is not your friend or business associate.
- ✓ When reviewers ask the researcher to do something, do it, and no questions are asked unless it is overlooked or misinterpreted by the reviewers. If you do not agree with the comments, provide justifications & explanations. If not, do not challenge.
- ✓ Do not procrastinate by checking & re-checking deadlines, as many journals are not patient, have backlogs, and are not in the interest of " babysitting" your paper.
- ✓ Do not give apologies for not doing something as it shows your irresponsibility & indifferences.
- ✓ Do not negotiate, as you need them more than they need you, and you are in a highly disadvantageous position to negotiate. Negotiations show that you have no respect for the Journal's intent.

Implications

While this paper has emphasized the importance of following the rigorous and stringent approaches to developing and writing a research paper using the widely accepted research methodologies, these might be viewed as overly repressive and making a paper longer than needed to write a quality research paper. It should be noted that social science and humanities journals are different from scientific or engineering journals in that those in social science and humanities tolerate more lengthy papers elaborating on the faithful adherence to the core research principles of literature synthesis, research framing, design, and methodologies that goes into length to support the findings, discussions, implications, and recommendations. Scientific and engineering papers are much more focused on the scientific methodology and results. In Social Science and Humanities, there are two main categories of empirical and non-empirical research, while the methodologies are mainly classified into two main groups: quantitative and qualitative methodologies and statistical analysis.

Lengthy papers do not mean being overly verbose and just documentation. Shortening a lengthy paper goes into synthesis as opposed to a summarized discussion of each research literature or documenting each literature separately without identifying the core variables, construct measures, and their operationalization. The key to a quality paper is the "synthesis of literature" to determine the key variables used in formulating the research objective, questions underpinning the research framework, and instrumentation.

To ensure coherence, consistency, and conciseness, a very research literature identifies the construct measures and operationalization of these variables. The importance lies in the clear and well-defined research framework with the core variables and sub-variables, which are critical measures that support the instrumentation logic and justification. This supports the "logic & flow" from the research title, objectives, and questions to the instrumentation, analysis, and findings, linking key aspects of the research methodology. It includes the use of appropriate sampling from the targetted population that is representative and delivers on the research objectives and question. What and how the sampling is determined and conducted needs clear definitions and development to ensure the validity and reliability of population representations, especially for different groups with different characteristics based on demographics, educational attainment, or behavioral groups. These groups can affect the statistical analysis based on this diversity and differences in groups' characteristics, norms, and behaviors,

Findings are normally statistical-based demonstrations of the statical analysis addressing the research objectives and questions objectively regardless of the use of quantitative or qualitative methods, as both have statistical or thematic/inferential approaches. In contrast, the discussion is centered on the discussion of the findings and relating to other research that supports the findings. Preferably, these two parts should be separated, but if combined, skill is needed to arrive at a statistically based discussion that is comprehensive and inclusive.

Unfortunately, most papers go directly into a conclusion after the discussion, missing out on two potentially important aspects of the research implications and recommendations. In addition, papers also mistakenly include implications as part of the discussion, which is potentially not correct. Discussion, as noted above, is the "discussion of the findings based on the statistical evidence". On the other hand, research implications suggest how the findings may be important for policy, practice, theory, and subsequent research. Research implications are basically the conclusions that the researcher should draw from statistical analysis and findings or results and

explain how the findings may be important for policy, practice, or theory. Research Implications demonstrate the impact the research makes in the chosen area based on the research aims or objectives as they discuss how the findings of the study may be important to justify further exploration of the research topic that has been conducted. Research recommendations may suggest constructive, pragmatic, and realistic future actions or subsequent steps based on the research findings. These are some of the weakest links in the whole research paper as they are taken as unimportant or unnecessary aspects of research.

On the contrary, they are important as this underpins the very reason why the research is undertaken and what sort of constructive actions can be developed based on the research objectives and its subsequent findings that are proven statistically. These are the defacto inferential analyses from the findings that close the research loop by linking them back to the research title and objectives. This inferential analysis covers inference from the conclusion about the current state of research in the field or the quality of methods employed. As noted in Elsevier (2024), "A research paper that does not explain the study's importance in light of its findings exists in a vacuum. The paper may be relevant to you, the author, and some of your co-workers. But it is unclear how others will benefit from reading it". The main aspects are who and what the readers will benefit from reading your paper and what stakeholders like policymakers, the public, or other researchers. Based on the implications of the research, a set of constructive practical or theoretical suggestions or recommendations should be provided, as the researcher better understands the research and provides a more constructive and usable set of recommendations based on the findings of the research.

Recommendations

In Social Science Research, which is the focus of this paper, there is normally a misunderstanding between academic papers and empirical research. There is a key difference in that an empirical article is a research article that reports the results of a study that uses data derived from actual observation or experimentation, either containing original research such as scientific experiments, quantitative or qualitative methodologies, and research studies. A scholarly literature review article or an academic paper summarizes, synthesizes, and critically evaluates academic articles and other scholarly works on the progress or current state in some particular subject, area, or topic to suggest a new conceptual approach, framework, or methodology that does not contain original research and is technically non-empirical.

Empirical Research vs. Non-Empirical Research

Aspect	Empirical Research	Non-Empirical Research
Definition	Reports new research and findings based on statistical or experimental data.	Summarises and synthesizes existing research studies and proposes a newer framework or approach.
Structure	Contains sections like introduction, methods, statistical results, discussion findings, implications, and recommendations based on data.	Includes a summary, topic introduction, and a discussion synthesizing research, identifying

Aspect	Empirical Research	Non-Empirical Research
		gaps, and suggesting new frameworks or approaches.
Content	Filled with new data and findings based on statistical methods (quantitative & qualitative)	Compiles and analyses existing data; no new research findings, but utilizing knowledge gaps to propose a new framework or approach.
Role	Introduces fresh research and insights to academia based on empirical results.	Offers a comprehensive view of a topic based on existing research, arriving at a new proposed framework.
Impact	Advances knowledge and prompts further research.	Clarifies and summarises research, guiding future studies through a proposed framework.
Sample Title	"Investigating students' HOTS on students' academic performance "	"Students' HOTS: A re-defined approach."

Adapted from: Stapleton, A. (2023). What Is The Difference Between A Scholarly Research Article And A Review Article? https://academiainsider.com/what-is-the-difference-between-a-scholarly-research-article-and-a-review-article/

Some of the suggestions for embarking on research:

- **Walk-through preliminaries before embarking on the Research –** Decide on the very onset, whether it is to be an empirical or non-empirical research, the research aims/purposes. Conduct a rough sketch of the paper's aims, methodology, and outcome. Then, check what Journal you will be targeting, investigate its focus, and review some papers on their requirements. This first small but critical step of "understanding the Journal" will save a lot of headaches in paper acceptance as it demonstrates one's resilience that the Journal is the door to your paper publication and the journal requirements and respect for the Journal and its Editor are the key and lock.

- **Defining and developing the Research logic and alignment –** In most cases, all papers have a research title, aims/purpose, literature, model/framework, instrumentation, sampling design, statistical/non-statistical methods, findings based on statistical/non-statistical methods, discussion of findings, implications, recommendations, and conclusions. It is a "sum of total" rather than the "sum of parts" imperative that is mostly overlooked, as what readers call "the smooth flow" to ensure logical understanding through the whole paper. Some potential issue mitigations are to ensure that the following:

  a) Research title aims/purpose, literature, model/framework, and instrumentation are logically and academically aligned coherently and consistently, as these are based on the systemized variables, sub-variables, and operationalization of the

construct measures. The researcher's main capability of "synthesizing and discussing" the construct measures should be improved on, as the basis is synthesis and not summarization, which is normally a potential weakness of most papers' literature review. Another potential flaw is the rehashing of literature or citing them without interpreting or synthesizing the core and critical essence of why this literature is chosen and how it contributes to a better research paper.

b) Sampling design, statistical/non-statistical methods, and findings based on statistical/non-statistical methods, as these are the solicitation of sampling representative of the population, can be avoided through a thorough and full understanding as to whether these sampling frames can provide a valid and reliable set of responses. In addition, ensure that sampling frames from different groups of demographics and characteristics like educational attainment and social-cultural and environmental backgrounds are statically or thematically separated.

c) Findings are statistically or thematically separately espoused for different groups, and the discussion of findings, implications, recommendations, and conclusions are based on the findings of the Research and other related Research done by others.

- **Faithful or Faithless research conscience** – All academics, regardless of academic standing or attainment, are required to produce research. Two main impetus requiring academics to do research are the institution's academic requirements for quality assurance and accreditation, with the other more personalized strive for advancement and promotion whereby research is a core criterion for promotion. Driven by these two mandates/motivations, an academic must produce research by all means. This inevitably calls for academic conscientious endeavors to produce quality or mediocre research or depend on guns for hire. It is a personal decision that no one can ever know the truth. Institution Presidents have fallen on plagiarism accusations, and the practices of hiring others to do their research or just plain coercion or bosses' acquiescence or patronage are quite rampant and normally blindsided. As discussed previously, academics will need to make a conscientious decision to stay on the faithful, truthful, but excruciating path to produce quality research following widely and internationally accepted practice or find ways and means to short-circuit their research productions. A small step on the wrong path is opening the floodgates of poor, mediocre, and unethical research practices that will stigmatize one's guilt or living an academic life of questionable conscience.

- **Conscientious Academic** – Being an academic is no easy job. Half of the academic's side is to be a role model to students in teaching, learning, sharing, guiding, and molding them into upright citizens with competent knowledge, skills, abilities, and social-cultural norms and behaviors. The other half is to further one's knowledge and skills through development, of which research is part and parcel of academic life. Pressures coming from both sides have made academic life a difficult choice. As a human being, there is also the additional social and family life. The academic has to delicately balance this "work-life balance" and find one's equation. Of these four pressures in a pressure cooker, teaching-learning, guiding the students' moral-ethical development, self-

development, and social-familial commitments, the academic is faced with a crucial decision of prioritization, and mostly, research is short-changed as it is easily short-circuited as there are ways and means to sideline this, the quality of it is debatable, as long as one is not caught, but one can blame others when one's paper is not accepted. Being a competent academic while balancing the "quality work-life decision" is a delicate decision. Quality development and publication is a conscientious personal decision that only one can decide on. Once an academic decides on the type of academic one wants to be, then decide on the type of Research one wants to publish.

Conclusion

The aims of this paper have faithfully provided an objective review of the basic requisites of a journal paper, the faith in understanding and delivering on these requirements, the faithless representation of research requirements that bring about faulty or failed papers, and some faithful common-sense approaches to deal with these misunderstandings and misrepresentation of what a Scopus Indexed journal requires to meet paper acceptance and publication.

It has also attempted to provide an insight into the implications of what is expected of the research and how the paper will be viewed by the Editor and the public when published. Rigidly adhering to all essential research requirements can increase the length but not the quality of the papers. Thinking through the whole paper outcome, what is needed to make a great impact, and what increases the seamless flow of logic consistency and coherence are some simple pragmatics that will help increase the quality of the paper and its impact.

The bottomline is quality research development, and publication is a highly personal decision that only an academic can conscientiously decide on to balance "quality work-life balance delicately" and the type of academic that one decides on and will walk the hard, agonizing journey as opposed to the wily journey that set quality research from mediocre research, an upright ethical academic from a devious academic mostly short-changing one's students in one's care, and jeopardizing one's "work-life balance equation."

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