



Publish-or-Perish in Business Academia: Ethical Considerations

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Keywords

Publish-or-perish, business academia, research ethics, predatory journals, accreditation requirements.

Abstract

This commentary critiques the publish-or-perish culture in business academia, driven by accreditation requirements, which pressures faculty to prioritize quantity over quality in research. It examines the impact of these pressures on research credibility and the rise of predatory journals. Ethical concerns regarding the necessity and impact of the resulting research are discussed. The article calls for reevaluating research priorities and advocating for high-quality, impactful studies that address significant business and societal challenges. By fostering ethical research practices and combating predatory journals, business academia can enhance the credibility and relevance of its contributions.

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1. Introduction

In the realm of business academia, the phrase "publish or perish" encapsulates a pervasive and intense pressure faced by faculty members (Bello et al., 2023). This culture mandates that academics must continuously publish their research to secure tenure, and promotions, and even to maintain their current positions. While the intent behind such a culture is to encourage ongoing research and the dissemination of new knowledge, it has also led to significant ethical dilemmas and challenges (Herndon, 2016).

The purpose of this article is to critique the ethical implications of this publish-or-perish paradigm, specifically focusing on the pressure to produce research that may not be necessary, valid, or impactful. This pressure is often driven by the need to meet stringent accreditation requirements, which prioritize the quantity of publications over their quality and relevance (Lee, 2014). As business schools strive to maintain or achieve accreditation, faculty members find themselves compelled to publish more frequently, sometimes at the expense of conducting meaningful and rigorous research.

This article will explore several key issues related to the publish-or-perish culture in business academia. Firstly, it will examine the impact of this culture on the credibility and validity of the research being produced. There will be a discussion on how the rush to publish can lead to questionable research practices, such as inadequate peer review and insufficient replication studies. Second, the article will analyze the necessity and impact of the research being conducted, questioning whether it truly addresses relevant business practices and societal needs. Finally, the rise of predatory journals, which exploit the pressure to publish by offering quick and easy publication opportunities, will be discussed. The ethical concerns and consequences of publishing in such journals will be highlighted.

By addressing these issues, this article aims to underscore the need for a more balanced and ethical approach to research in business academia.

It calls for a re-evaluation of research priorities that emphasizes quality over quantity, and the importance of producing research that is both valid and impactful. Through this critique, the article seeks to contribute to the ongoing conversation about how to foster a more ethical and meaningful research environment in business schools.

2. The Pressure to Publish for Accreditation

Historical Context and Current State

The publish-or-perish phenomenon has long been a cornerstone of academia, but its roots in business schools can be traced back to the mid-20th century (Doyle & Arthurs, 1995). As business education evolved, there was a growing emphasis on producing scholarly research to enhance the credibility and intellectual rigor of business programs. This drive was further amplified by the rise of accreditation bodies, which began to use publication records as a key metric for evaluating the quality of academic institutions (Wilson & Thomas, 2012).

Accreditation requirements for business schools generally place a strong emphasis on research productivity. Accrediting bodies, such as the AACSB and others, set standards that often prioritize the number of publications by faculty members as an indicator of academic excellence (Carraher, 2014). These standards aim to ensure that business schools contribute to the advancement of knowledge and maintain high educational standards. However, this has inadvertently created a high-pressure environment where faculty members are judged heavily on their publication records (Adams, 2003).

Across different business schools, the requirements for publication can vary significantly. Some institutions mandate a specific number of articles in top-tier journals for tenure and promotion (Valle & Schultz, 2011), while others may require a broader portfolio of research outputs, including books and conference presentations. Despite these variations, the underlying pressure to publish frequently and in prestigious outlets remains a common thread. This drive for continuous publication often

leads faculty to prioritize quantity over quality, resulting in a landscape where the sheer volume of research is celebrated, sometimes at the expense of its significance and rigor (Sandström & van den Besselaar, 2016).

Impacts on Business Faculty

The relentless pressure to publish can have profound impacts on business faculty members. One of the most significant consequences is the stress and burnout (Padilla & Thompson, 2016) associated with meeting publication demands. Faculty members often find themselves juggling multiple roles, including teaching, administrative duties, and research. The expectation to produce a steady stream of publications adds to this workload, leading to high levels of stress and, in many cases, burnout. This not only affects the well-being of the faculty but also their ability to engage in meaningful and innovative research (Li et al., 2019).

Moreover, the publish-or-perish culture creates a dilemma between quantity and quality in research publications. Faculty members may feel compelled to focus on producing a high number of publications to meet accreditation and institutional requirements. This can lead to a proliferation of research that may not be thoroughly vetted or significant (Martins et al., 2020). The pressure to publish quickly and frequently can result in cutting corners, such as insufficient peer review or inadequate replication studies, ultimately compromising the credibility and reliability of the research.

The emphasis on quantity over quality also influences the types of research topics that are pursued. Faculty members might opt for safer, more traditional research areas that are likely to yield publishable results, rather than exploring innovative or high-risk topics that could have a greater impact but carry a higher chance of failure (Chen et al., 2006). This conservative approach to research can stifle creativity and limit the advancement of knowledge in the field of business.

The pressure to publish for accreditation purposes has deep historical roots and continues to shape the landscape of business academia. While accreditation aims to uphold high standards, the resultant publish-or-

perish culture places significant stress on faculty members and often prioritizes the quantity of research over its quality and impact. This section highlights the need to reevaluate how research productivity is measured and encouraged within business schools, advocating for a more balanced and ethical approach to academic publishing.

3. Evaluating Research Quality and Necessity in Business Academia

Credibility of Research

The credibility of business research produced under the pressure of accreditation requirements is a critical issue. While the intent behind these requirements is to ensure a high standard of academic excellence, the resultant rush to publish often compromises the quality of the research (Bauchner, 2017). One of the primary concerns is the replication crisis, where many studies cannot be reproduced or validated by other researchers. This issue is particularly pronounced in business academia, where the pressure to produce novel findings can lead to a lack of thoroughness in research methodologies.

Validity and reliability are fundamental pillars of credible research, yet they are often undermined in the publish-or-perish culture. Validity refers to the extent to which a study accurately reflects the concept it aims to measure, while reliability pertains to the consistency of the research results (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Under the pressure to publish, researchers might cut corners, leading to studies that are poorly designed, inadequately controlled, or based on insufficient data. These practices not only diminish the credibility of individual studies but also erode trust in the field as a whole (Leek & Jager, 2017).

Examples of questionable research practices abound in business academia. These include p-hacking, where researchers manipulate data until they achieve statistically significant results (Elliott et al., 2022), and HARKing (Hypothesizing After the Results are Known), where

hypotheses are retroactively fitted to the results obtained (Baruch, 2023). Such practices can lead to the publication of misleading or incorrect findings, further contributing to the replication crisis and diminishing the overall quality of business research.

Necessity and Impact of Research

Beyond credibility, the necessity and impact of the research being published in business academia are also areas of concern. A critical analysis reveals that not all research being produced is essential or impactful (Reed et al., 2021). The pressure to publish can lead to an overemphasis on quantity, resulting in a proliferation of studies that may not significantly advance knowledge or address pressing business and societal issues.

The relevance of research topics is crucial in determining the necessity and impact of studies. Under the publish-or-perish paradigm, there is a tendency to focus on "safe" topics that are more likely to result in publishable findings rather than exploring innovative or high-risk areas that could have a greater societal impact. This conservative approach can limit the scope of research and prevent significant advancements in the field.

Examples of impactful vs. inconsequential business research highlight this disparity. Impactful research addresses critical issues such as ethical leadership, employee well-being, and sustainable business practices, offering insights that can lead to tangible improvements in business practices and societal outcomes (Wickert et al., 2021). In contrast, inconsequential research might involve niche topics with limited applicability or studies that reiterate well-established findings without adding new value (Koskela, 2017). The ethical considerations of publishing such research are significant, as it involves dedicating resources and intellectual effort to work that may not provide meaningful contributions to the field.

Publishing research that lacks practical significance or societal impact raises ethical questions about the responsible use of academic resources

and the role of business academia in addressing real-world problems. It is essential for business schools and researchers to critically evaluate the necessity and impact of their work, prioritizing studies that offer valuable insights and solutions to contemporary business challenges.

4. The Rise of Predatory Journals

Definition and Characteristics

Predatory journals are a relatively recent phenomenon in the academic publishing landscape, emerging as a direct consequence of the publish-or-perish culture. These journals are characterized by their exploitative practices, wherein they prioritize profit over scholarly integrity and rigor. Unlike legitimate academic journals, predatory journals often lack proper peer review processes, have dubious editorial standards, and charge exorbitant fees to authors for publication (Richtig et al., 2018).

The primary goal of predatory journals is to capitalize on the urgent need for faculty to publish their research, often by promising rapid and guaranteed publication. Common tactics used by these journals to exploit business faculty include aggressive and misleading email solicitations, promises of quick peer review and publication, and the absence of a genuine editorial board (Laine & Winker, 2017). They often mimic the appearance of reputable journals, making it difficult for researchers, especially those under significant pressure, to discern their true nature.

These journals also frequently list fraudulent impact factors and fake affiliations with established institutions to lure unsuspecting authors. Once a manuscript is submitted, authors may face unexpected fees and are often left with subpar publication quality, which can damage their academic reputation and the perceived value of their work.

Ethical Concerns and Consequences

Publishing in predatory journals raises significant ethical concerns. The most immediate issue is the compromise of academic integrity. When

researchers publish in these journals, the lack of rigorous peer review means that the quality and validity of the research are not properly vetted. This can lead to the dissemination of flawed or incorrect findings, which undermines the credibility of academic research as a whole (Xia et al., 2015).

The impact on the dissemination of business knowledge is profound. Research published in predatory journals is often not indexed in major academic databases, limiting its visibility and impact. This means that potentially valuable insights and findings may go unnoticed by the broader academic and professional communities. Moreover, the association with predatory journals can tarnish the reputation of the researchers involved and their institutions, leading to long-term consequences for their careers and the standing of their academic programs (Mathew et al., 2022).

Ethically, there is also a concern about the misuse of resources. Faculty members who invest time, effort, and sometimes personal funds (XIA, 2015) to publish in predatory journals are effectively diverting these resources away from more credible and impactful research endeavours. This not only affects the individual researchers but also the broader academic community and the stakeholders who rely on high-quality, reliable business research to inform practice and policy.

The proliferation of predatory journals also perpetuates the cycle of low-quality research (Beall, 2016). As these journals continue to profit from the desperation of faculty under publish-or-perish pressures, they encourage the production of substandard work. This creates a feedback loop where the focus shifts further away from meaningful, rigorous research towards mere publication volume.

5. A Call for Ethical Research Practices in Business Academia

Reevaluating Research Priorities

The publish-or-perish culture in business academia necessitates a reevaluation of research priorities to ensure that quality and ethical considerations are at the forefront. Business schools must shift their focus from the sheer quantity of publications to the integrity and impact of the research produced. This involves fostering an environment where ethical research practices are encouraged and valued over meeting publication quotas.

One proposal for institutional change is to redefine the criteria for faculty evaluations and promotions (Schimanski & Alperin, 2018). Instead of heavily weighting the number of publications, institutions should emphasize the quality, rigor, and relevance of the research. This can be achieved by incorporating peer assessments, evaluating the practical impact of the research, and recognizing contributions to societal issues and business practices. Additionally, institutions should provide more robust support for faculty engaging in high-quality research (Niles et al., 2020), such as offering grants, reducing teaching loads, and providing access to resources for conducting thorough and meaningful studies.

Encouraging Meaningful Business Research

Encouraging high-quality, impactful research requires a cultural shift within business academia. Faculty should be incentivized to pursue studies that address significant business challenges and societal needs rather than focusing on topics that are simply publishable. This can be achieved by implementing stricter guidelines and support systems for ethical publishing.

Business schools should establish clear ethical standards for research, including guidelines for avoiding questionable practices like p-hacking

and HARKing (Banks et al., 2016). Institutions can also create support structures, such as research ethics committees, to provide guidance and oversight for faculty research projects. Mentorship programs can pair junior faculty with experienced researchers to promote best practices and foster a commitment to ethical research.

Moreover, institutions should celebrate and reward impactful research (Upton et al., 2014). Awards and recognition programs can highlight studies that have made significant contributions to the field, demonstrating that meaningful research is highly valued. By shifting the focus from quantity to quality, business schools can foster a more ethical and impactful research culture.

Combating Predatory Journals

To combat the influence of predatory journals, business schools must take proactive steps to educate faculty and implement institutional policies that discourage engagement with these exploitative entities. Education is a crucial first step. Institutions should provide training and resources to help faculty identify predatory journals, including clear criteria and examples of red flags to watch for. Workshops, seminars, and online resources can raise awareness and equip researchers with the knowledge they need to avoid (Masic, 2021) these journals.

Institutional and collective efforts to blacklist (Das & Chatterjee, 2018) predatory journals are also essential. Academic societies, accrediting bodies, and institutions can collaborate to create and maintain comprehensive lists of known predatory journals. By making these lists widely available and encouraging their use, the academic community can collectively diminish the influence of predatory publishers.

Additionally, business schools can implement policies that discourage publication (Kakamad et al., 2020) in predatory journals. These policies might include refusing to consider publications in known predatory journals for tenure and promotion decisions, thereby removing the incentive for faculty to engage with these entities. Institutions can also support faculty in submitting their work to reputable journals by

providing resources for journal selection and offering financial support for publication fees in legitimate open-access journals.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing the publish-or-perish culture in business academia requires a shift towards prioritizing ethical research practices that emphasize quality and relevance over sheer quantity. The pressure to meet accreditation standards has led to significant challenges, including compromised research integrity and the rise of predatory journals. By reevaluating research priorities, encouraging impactful studies, and implementing strategies to combat unethical publishing practices, business schools can foster a more balanced and ethical approach to academic research. This shift will not only enhance the credibility and significance of business research but also ensure that it contributes meaningfully to both academia and society.

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