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## **Ethics and decision making in publishing journal: Issues to be taken into account**

Safa, Mohammad Samaun

SAFA (Society for Alliance, Fidelity and Advancement), MARA  
University of Technology

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## Ethics and Decision Making in Journal Publishing: An Emerging Issue to Be Addressed

### Editorial

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Mohammad Samaun Safa  
Chief Editor  
Department of Economics, FBM

### Acknowledgement

I would be assaying to hash out a few issues relevant to journal publication in this inaugural editorial. Before I begin, I must acknowledge my respectable colleagues including Associate Professor Dr. **Zaini Abdullah** (Assistant Vice Chancellor, International, UiTM) and Associate Professor Dr. **Ismail Ahmad** (Head, Institute of Postgraduate Studies, UiTM) who enlivened me to publish an international journal by the Faculty of Business Management, UiTM Shah Alam for the first time since her inception. It was at the beginning of my tenure with the university and very naturally I was vacillating to make that decision. However, considering it a challenge with the full support of the proposed editorial board and the current Dean, Associate Professor Dr. **Noormala Dato' Amir Ishak**, I stepped up as the founder chief editor of the journal entitled '*International Journal of Business and Management Research (IJBMR)*'. The support that I received from the management committee, editorial board, international editorial advisory council and external review board was beyond my expectation. Particularly, the associate editors' and management committee's hearty cooperation has made it possible. I must be indebted to my colleagues in the Department of Economics that I belong to for their sacrifice and adjustment in my teaching hours to spent time for this journal. It would be, indeed, very cheerful for me to cherish the support and contribution by the Coordinator of the Economics Department, Mrs. **Norizan Mohammad**, for strengthening my efforts toward publishing this journal.

### Brief Justification of Publishing IJBMR

One of the most prioritized questions of publishing a new journal in the almost similar fields covered by many other journals warrants certainly some clarification which needs to be addressed in the inaugural issue. A very straight response to this query is promoting business and management science in the country as well as in the region. The unique aim of IJBMR is to focus on quantitative aspects of business and management research. The contribution by China, India and Southeast Asian region to the global economy stimulates a curiosity of how the business and management problems are dealt by the entrepreneurs, business studies researchers and policy makers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Besides, the emergence of global networking among the business entities and incorporation of modern management tools strengthens the view of global business system. We have envisioned a future for IJBMR to surrogate the research works that centre around business and management problems of this century with a quantitative view. In this inaugural issue we have become a bit lineal in terms of accepting manuscripts irrespective of quantitative approach to enhance IJBMR's reach to general contributors.

We started working officially in Nov, 2007 and have been able to publish the inaugural issue by June, 2008. Within this few months every bit of time has been utilized efficiently. Further more a key strategy that facilitated us to get the work done in shorter time was the intensive use of ICT. IJBMR completely used ICT for each of its communication including call for papers, submission, review and so on. IJBMR's website and web documentation quickened our effort certainly a few times more than a traditional approach. As an additional responsibility I had the opportunity to develop and maintain the website of IJBMR. I attempted to utilize that opportunity as much as possible.

### **Ethical Issues: Author's Front**

Journal publication is closely tied up with several ethical and legal issues. There are various issues with regards to ethical attitude of an author such as plagiarism, authorship, multiple submissions of similar paper, submission with minor change in a published topic, dishonest intension of enriching publication record and PR-PR dilemma. Let me start with the plagiarism issue.

#### *Plagiarism and consequences*

While I was editing the *international Journal of Management and Entrepreneurship* (ISSN 1823-3538) I experienced often texoplagerism (A word that is combined of two words 'text' and 'plagerism' which mean plagerizing mainly texts) in submitted manuscripts. In dealing with texoplagerism, first of all an editor or reviewer requires to have tools for detection. Detecting texoplagerism is really difficult out of millions of web documents; fortunately there are services that can be used to detect plagerized text of which some are free web-based services.

Penalizing authors for plagerism is not a proper way to cure the "Texoplagerism Syndrome" or 'TS' (an acute habit of plagerism) because sometimes they are not aware enough to realize that such a misconduct is erosive to their professional reputation. Once plagerism it detected what the immediate action should be – should the author be black listed or be motivated to avoid this misconduct along with warnings? Publishing in journal is surely a mature attempt by individuals knowing all its pros and cons; thus, detection of plagerism in any manuscript should be warned strongly not to repeat in the future and given a chance of resubmission with rectification. If author fails to follow the consequence of plagerism and continues doing so, a submission can be rejected and the respective author(s) can be banned for a new submission to the respective

journal. Authors must understand the consequences of plagiarism as if they don't practice it and become more innovative and creative.

### *Authorship*

Authorship is a debatable issue among the researchers and academics or whoever publish paper in journal. Generally the most important question is to decide what the order of authorship should be. By right and ethically, one who is the owner of the main idea of an article deserves to be the first author. And other co-authors can be ordered by their contribution accordingly. This approach is called contribution-based approach which seems to me a very affective way to determine the order of authorship. Sometimes based on mutual understanding first authorship could be conferred, too. We must remember that mutual authorship should not always be appreciated because it hides the responsibility and demoralize the original author for contributing further.

### *Multiple submissions*

Multiple submissions of similar paper to different journals is found to be a common practice in young researchers. In journal publication, it is prohibited by the rule what is known as the 'Ingelfinger rule', named after the editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Franz Ingelfinger. Certainly the main objective of multiple submissions is to enrich publication record as well as to reduce the risk of rejection - "if one rejects other may accept". Author(s) needs to be aware that if both submissions are accepted simultaneously one of them must be retained since it is a worst case to have published same paper in two journals according to Ingelfinger rule. But which one is to be retained? The cost of reaching an advance level (decision level) of publication in terms of time and effort by a journal just goes in vein because of such unethical act by author. I experienced many times such incidences which was, indeed, intolerable. Sometimes author does not respond to editor after receiving positive review report. Often this non-compliance act is an outcome of multiple submissions. It is also seen that during editorial revision some authors stop communication either due to their disagreement with editor or possibly the paper is published somewhere else. Author(s) must remember that without their cooperation journal will not be able to assist them for their professional career development.

### *Dishonest co-authorship*

Co-authorship requires to be conferred based on the real contribution rather than the personal relationship or official obligation. It is, indeed, unethical to be a co-author only by contributing a little such as by reading a manuscript and giving shallow suggestions for the name sake. Co-author needs to contribute significantly to be on the author list. Dishonest co-authorship can enrich one's publication record but simultaneously deprives someone else who contributes more as an independent author in measuring professional credentials.

*New submission with minor change in old one*

Submission of a manuscript prepared based on previously published one with minor change or an adjustment in data analysis by rearranging variables is obviously an unethical conduct. The similar motive of enriching publication record works here, too. This kind of attitude creates the same consequences of misjudgment and making one looser who is truly more competent.

*PR-PR dilemma*

Intension of enriching publication record without any basic contribution is one of the most misleading events in journal publication these days. Many senior authors who intend to promote this idea of positive correlation between public relations and publication record which I call PR-PR (public-relation towards publication record) strategy. I found myself in different seminar and discussion forum that speakers focused on networking to increase number of publication instead of saying that this is a malpractice. I suppose this fact leads to an issue with regard to how one's publication credentials to be evaluated. One option is considering independent publication rather than just the quantity. A method of point distribution based on the order of authorship may be practiced to eliminate adverse impact of PR-PR strategy. Perhaps, it would be worthy to share that previously while I worked as the Dean of a faculty, I found that many interviewees showed their rich publication record in CV but during interview, they were found with poor knowledge in the subject area of the published paper. This fact detects the problem of unethical involvement in publication.

**Ethical Issues: Reviewer's Front**

Reviewing manuscript is a human process, an art rather than a science and usually commences by a request to an expert by editor to comment on submitted manuscript's scholarly value (Brown, 2004). In other words, review process confirms and facilitates the true contribution made by researchers to knowledge. Till date review process has been used as a unique way of evaluating quality of an article in rapidly changing arena of knowledge. In any kind of publication, many ethical principles must be considered. Particularly, there are some ethical issues that are embedded into review process irrespective of the review system and medium. Among the three entities –author, editor and reviewer - of a publication process, reviewer(s) is more responsible than others because reviews play a vital role to help editor in decision making. I have attempted to discuss some common ethical issues such as conflict of citation, benefit of citation index, concept piracy and rejection, reverse criticism and so on relevant to review process in the following section. Most of these issues I discussed in another article published in the *International Journal of Management and Entrepreneurship* (ISSN 1823-3538) in detail (Safa, 2006).

### *Conflict and benefit of citation*

Conflict of citation is a kind of conflict occurs when an author is asked to refer to a particular article by reviewer but is not followed (Lawrence, 2003). This problem can be resolved easily if reviewer just suggests to include that citation without confrontation either author includes or does not (Lee and Bero, 2006). Benefit for citation index can appear sometimes as a conflict, too, when an author does not cite the suggested article. This incident causes a loss to some extent to a reviewer in terms of citation benefit. Reviewer must ignore whatever author does after providing suggestions rather than inviting confrontation.

### *Concept piracy and reverse criticism*

The researchers who are involved in reviewing articles are at a better position to obtain new ideas and enrich their knowledge on ongoing relevant research (Mann, 2000). The opportunity of exposure seldom causes an unethical event of concept piracy and rejection which means an intentional rejection of a manuscript and incorporation of the same concept into own manuscript for publication. Another remarkable issue in reviewing is reverse criticism on a second review which often occurs. Authors often take it pessimistically which turn a conflict between author and reviewer. Reviewers have limitations too as human beings. It would be over demanding to see reviewers in a constant position regarding their thoughts. Therefore, it might be possible to make slightly reverse comments between the first and second review of a manuscript. Of course, it is unethical to give reverse criticism knowingly on a second review of a manuscript.

### *Deadline agony*

Often reviewers fail to maintain the deadline norm of a review assignment. Delayed review affects a publication process adversely. Usually excessive delay in review occurs if a reviewer is unable to allocate sufficient time for the review that he or she agrees to do. Delay in review is irritating when a manuscript is eventually rejected because it delays possible submission to another journal. This is an issue which is more related to courtesy than ethics.

### *Misery of recommendation*

Reviewer's evaluation usually includes an explicit recommendation of what to do with the manuscript, often chosen from a menu provided by journal including 5-6 options of recommendation. Any option of these recommendations is supposed to be supported by a detailed review report. A short note instead of a standard review report often fails to make an appropriate recommendation which is a misery of recommendation. Hence, a complete and detailed report is helpful for everyone- author, editor and reviewer- in a publication process. A detailed review report is the only way to get rid of misery of recommendation.

Review process is very complicated and not out of debate to be used efficiently as the standard way to evaluate journal article. A rationale for review process is that an author or research team is rarely able to spot every mistake or

flaw in a complicated piece of research work. In addition, usually an author or a research team is not enough skilled to judge scientific quality of their own work. There are issues including originality, logic, consistency, contribution in publishing journal articles that require a systematic process to be evaluated before getting published.

There is no way to ignore review process, whether it is open or blind. The philosophy of review is to promote science and knowledge in a scholarly way. The above synthesis converges at a consensus of conscientiousness in reviewing journal article. Publishing journal article is a team work where authors are the players, editors are the managers and reviewers are the judges. A balanced coordination among these three entities can accelerate generating sustainable knowledge.

Reviewing article is not as simple as making general comments. A quality review can be made only then when the reviewer has appropriate expertise, editorial experience, ethics and enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is one of the most important factors to do good review and contribute to research community (Safa, 2006). On top of all, ethics of being an agent of a scientific community must be the first lesson, other wise the progress of science and knowledge would be affected.

### **Quantitative Approach for Better Decision Making: Editor's Front**

Standardized Acceptance Factor Average (SAFA™) is a mathematical framework to facilitate decision making towards acceptance or rejection of a submission for possible publication. Generally, such decision is made based on reviewer's opinion but since all the reviewers are not at similar stand there may need an adjustment to the decision to be made. In order to estimate the SAFA, a standard double blind peer review process is used with the incorporation of review factor such as reviewers experience and expertise. The SAFA™ can be an option to eliminate 'misery of recommendation'.

The SAFA™ framework is developed to incorporate reviewer's efficiency as a measure of minimizing the bias due to less-efficient review work. Generally, a list of questions converges at a point of guessing on whether what decision could be made out of the decision options provided by journal in a structured format. Estimation of the SAFA™ is solely dependent on the structured evaluation form which can be varied accordingly with the required adjustment by publication authority. In this editorial I intend to avoid the jargon of discussing the tools used in the SAFA and mathematical models to make this editorial more comprehensive.

There are major four parts in the SAFA™ namely Determinant Score, Correction Factor, Review Score and Decision Factor. Determinant factor is estimated based on a set of questions provided to reviewer for their decision. By reviewing 20 review reports submitted to the *International Journal of Management and Entrepreneurship* (ISSN 1823-3538) and the *International Journal of Business and Management Research* (1985-3599) it is seen that review

score is inconsistent with the decisions (acceptance or rejection). For instance, while a review score is 0.73 (calculated based on the average technique - summing up all the score points divided by the sum of possible highest score of each item), ‘Accept with minor correction and review’ decision is made. In another case while the review score is 0.43, the same decision is made by another reviewer. This inconsistency causes less-efficiency to the process which may be corrected by adjusting the review score according to reviewer’s efficiency (experience and expertise).

The most difficult part of the SAFA™ is to measure reviewer’s efficiency. For the sake of the simplicity, editors have to follow a principal which is ‘Two Factor Review Efficiency Measurement (I would be calling it TFREM)’. TFREM covers two major factors to be considered in a review process namely (i) review experience which is measured according to the number of reviewed manuscripts and (ii) approximate peer-ness of a reviewer to the subject matter to be reviewed. This TFREM principal can be adjusted in the events where more than two factors are required to measure reviewer’s efficiency. The mathematical estimation procedure does allow considering many factors since it uses an averaging technique (Figure 1 reveals a snapshot of SAFA™ calculator which is Microsoft Excel based application).

After formulating correction factor, it is possible to estimate review score which will be weighted by decision factor (weighted over 100 following the rule ‘Acceptance is assigned higher weight’. Each review has a SAFA score; thus, more than one review produces more SAFA and an average can be obtained out of them.

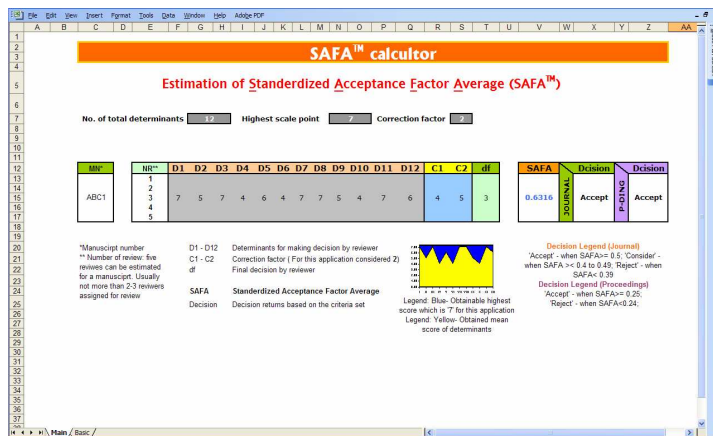


Figure 1. Snapshot of SAFA™ calculator (Microsoft Excel based application)

A general decision rule of using the SAFA is that if a manuscript has a value of SAFA equal or more than 0.5 the paper can be accepted for publication from review point of view. Furthermore, justification for the acceptance will be relying



on editor's view. If the SAFA ranges between 0.40 and 0.49 an article can be considered for further revision and possible publication. The SAFA can be used for categorizing papers according to the value. For example, after review if a paper falls within a range of SAFA between 0.30 and 0.39 can be selected for being included in proceedings. It is to be remembered that how and what standard will be maintained for accepting an article is completely a sole authority of the editorial board or the respective organization. Since the SAFA™ is flexible in terms of changing the review criteria suitable to any discipline it can be adjusted to fulfill specific need.

The SAFA has certain limitations like other scientific tools. The application has been developed based on Microsoft Office Excel which may not have a very professional look. The author of this application tried to avoid complications to make it more users friendly. As I mentioned in the earlier section that the SAFA is estimated based on TFREM principle, it may not minimize the bias due to reviewer's attributes one hundred percent exactly. Increasing the number of correction factor can be a remedy of this problem. Changing TFREM principle for including more factors may be easy and more effective procedurally but difficult to apply practically. A detailed explanation about the calculation procedure, interpretation and use of the SAFA™ can be found in the book "The Science of Publishing Journal Article" published by UPENA, MARA University of Technology.

### **Application of the SAFA™ for Ranking the Articles Included in This Issue**

Table 1 reveals the SAFA scores for each article included in the inaugural issue of IJBMR. The first and second highest scoring papers have been selected as the best papers of this issue appearing on the front cover of the journal.

Table 1. SAFA score of the articles in descending order

<b>Short title of articles included in this issue</b>	<b>**SAFA</b>
MNCs, Global Innovation Networks and Developing Countries	0.88
Internet Piracy among Business Students: An Application of Triandis Model	0.75
Assessing Production Efficiency of Islamic Banks in Malaysia	0.68
Female Entrepreneurship in Kosova	0.67
Relationship between Learning Organization and Transformational Leadership	0.49
Interactional Justice within Malaysian Institutions of Higher Learning	0.41
Government Inclusion in Porter's Diamond: The Case of Argentina*	-

\* Research note has not been included in the ranking

\*\*Standardized Acceptance Factor Average (SAFA)

The above scores are sorted in descending order. The articles that were accepted and included in the inaugural issue scored higher SAFA (higher than 0.5). Besides, the articles that scored more than 0.40 and less than 0.5 considered for further improvement and passed through an intensive editorial review for acceptance. The acceptance rate of this issue was only 35 percent. IJBMR will continue to evaluate all articles included in each issue by applying SAFA.

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