



Reviving a scientific journal: challenges and strategies

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Abstract

The revival of a scientific journal presents unique challenges in comparison with starting a new journal. In this case study, the experiences encountered in the recent revival of the *Manila Journal of Science* are outlined and discussed. The *Manila Journal of Science* is a general science journal published by De La Salle University, Philippines. The challenges faced during the revival of the journal included competition for submissions, restricted budget allocations, peer review, and improving the journal's reputation. Several strategies were adopted to address these challenges, and the journal's performance thus far is promising.

Keywords

Journal management; Journal revival; Scientific journal

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges in journal management is sustaining the publication of an adequate number of papers that meet editorial standards. This problem can cause indefinite cessation of publication of the journal. This case study presents the experiences encountered during the revival of the *Manila Journal of Science* (MJS). MJS is the general science journal published by De La Salle University (DLSU) through the De La Salle University Publishing House (DLSUPH). The journal was first published in 1998 with a semiannual frequency. The journal regularly encountered erratic publications, resulting in broken volumes (Fig. 1). This can be attributed to the seemingly perpetual problem of attracting submissions. Prior to 2016, the latest revived volume of the journal, the most recent publication volume was 2013, in which only 4 papers were published. In the following sections, the challenges we faced in reviving MJS and the corresponding strategies adopted to address those challenges are discussed.

Received: August 29, 2017

Accepted: September 18, 2017

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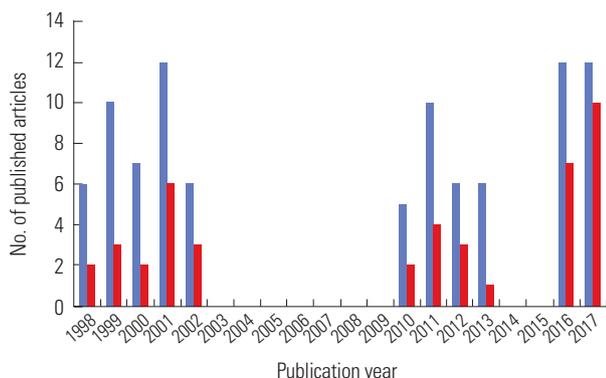


Fig. 1. Publication profile of the *Manila Journal of Science* from 1998 to 2017. Blue bars represent the total number of articles published in a given year. Red bars represent the number of articles that were authored or co-authored by non-De La Salle University-affiliated researchers.

Challenges in Journal Revival

The publication of journals is considered to be one of the concrete embodiments of the educational mission of DLSU. As a consequence, the revival of MJS was viewed as a responsibility of the DLSUPH that needed to be fulfilled. However, reviving the journal was not as simple as advertising that the journal was accepting submissions again. Some of the problems that the journal previously encountered, leading to its temporary cessation, as well as new challenges, made the revival more difficult than starting a new journal. The problem of attracting submissions is amplified for a revived journal since potential authors may not be inclined to submit papers to a journal that has a record of an inconsistent publishing schedule. Aggravating the situation, the competition for submissions is becoming tougher due to the presence of several established science journals in the Philippines that are indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. To date, there are 23 science-themed Philippine journals that are either listed in the Clarivate Analytics (formerly Thomson Reuters) Journal Master list or Scopus [1]. Another problem encountered was inviting referees to evaluate manuscripts. Since the journal has yet to establish a solid reputation in the scientific community, successfully inviting referees was difficult. This problem was compounded by a tendency for the review time to be lengthy when a referee did accept an assignment. Another major challenge was that the revival of MJS came at a time of financial struggles. During that period, which continues to this day, the Philippines undertook educational reforms, the most notable of which was the K-to-12 program. The K-to-12 educational reform mandated the addition of 2 years to the basic education of Filipino students [2]. This meant that for 2 years, higher education institutions experienced a drastic decline in freshmen

college enrollees, and that it would take around 4 years for college enrollments to stabilize. Since MJS is a university-published journal, its budget was reduced in response to the financial problems introduced by the K-12 transition [3].

Revival Strategies

The successful revival of MJS required the aforementioned challenges to be addressed. The first major change MJS adopted was to revise its publication format. Previously, MJS was a semiannual journal with print and online versions. The online version was hosted on the Philippine E-Journal website, which also hosted other Philippine scientific journals. The new model MJS adopted was to be exclusively online, using a new and dedicated website (<http://www.manilajournalof-science.com.ph>). This conversion addressed the restricted budget allocations, since print production accounted for 60% to 80% of the expenses incurred by the journal. In addition, the dedicated journal website facilitated the transition of MJS from a semiannual format to a ‘publish upon acceptance’ format. This operational revision was an attempt to address the competition for submissions. This new format, which significantly reduces the waiting period for an accepted paper to be published, is one of the unique selling points of MJS.

The journal recognized that peer review is the rate-limiting step in the publication process. Thus, a reasonably quick but thorough peer review process can significantly reduce the overall duration of the publication timeline. A viable strategy for identifying reliable reviewers is to personally ask researchers within the same university. This is effective since prior information is already available regarding the work ethic of the potential reviewers. However, for this to be possible, the manuscripts they have to review must be authored by researchers not affiliated with DLSU. Thus, the journal was promoted through social media. A Facebook page for the journal was established, which currently has 381 ‘likes.’ A paid advertisement on Facebook was also shown for 2 weeks, with the promotion focused on accounts containing and using academic keywords such as ‘university,’ ‘research,’ ‘publish,’ and ‘science,’ among others. The paid advertisement was considered successful since it reached approximately 1,900 accounts. Sending promotional emails was discouraged, since this technique is often employed by predatory journals. Instead, personal messages to colleagues were sent, in which they were requested to help solicit articles from their respective circles.

Another way to attract external submissions is to boost the journal’s reputation. As a recently revived journal, this is difficult to achieve, since the journal has not yet been listed in reputable databases, such as Web of Science and Scopus. In order to ensure editorial quality, the DLSUPH, the unit that over-

Table 1. Summary of challenges and strategies associated with the revival of the *Manila Journal of Science*

Challenge	Strategy
Competition for submissions	Conversion to a 'publish upon acceptance' format Dedicated journal website Social media promotion
Restricted budget allocations	Conversion to an exclusively online journal
Peer reviewers and lengthy review times	Manuscript solicitation was focused on authors outside the university so that university researchers could act as reviewers
Improving the journal's reputation	Basic quality standards for university journals were initiated and implemented Active recruitment of editorial advisory board members

sees and manages the journals of DLSU, established and implemented basic quality standards for DLSUPH journals. The aim of this policy is to ensure that the journals published by DLSU meet a certain set of quality standards. Some notable items included in the policy are the specification of at least 2 peer reviewers per manuscript and the requirement that a certain percentage of published papers must come from external authors, among others. Another approach taken to boost the journal's reputation was to actively recruit editorial advisory board members. Almost all the visiting professors at the college were invited to become a part of the advisory board.

Current Status and Outlook

While it would be premature to claim that the revival of MJS was successful, positive and promising results have been observed, which can be attributed to the strategies that we employed. The number of published papers has significantly increased compared with past volumes. Another promising indicator is the increase in authorship diversity (Fig. 1). Papers authored and co-authored by non-DLSU affiliates have been

becoming more common, and international submissions have also been recorded. Authorship diversity is one of the criteria for international accreditation in venues such as the ASEAN Citation Index [4]. Currently, the journal plans to sustain its momentum as it prepares to apply for inclusion in the ASEAN Citation Index.

Conclusion

In summary, the experiences encountered during the revival of the MJS were outlined. The challenges associated with the revival and the strategies adopted to overcome them are summarized in Table 1.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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