Challenges of Publishing the *Journal of Agriculture and Food Sciences* Online

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Abstract

The *Journal of Agriculture and Food Sciences* (JAFS) is a peer-reviewed platform for researchers and scientists in agriculture, food science and technology, and related disciplines to publish their research findings. This paper discusses the challenges of publishing JAFS online and provides recommendations for achieving full online editorial process for the journal.

Keywords: Peer Review, Electronic Publishing, Online Publishing, Journal of Agriculture and Food Science.

Résumé

Le *Journal de l’Agriculture et des Sciences de l’alimentation* (JAFS) est une revue évaluée par les pairs. C’est une plate-forme pour les chercheurs et scientifiques spécialistes de l’agriculture, des sciences et de la technologie de l’alimentation et de disciplines connexes, pour la publication de leurs résultats de recherche. Ce papier discute les défis de la publication du JAFS en ligne et fournit des recommandations pour la réalisation d’un processus éditorial en ligne complet pour la revue.

Introduction

One of the core functions of a university is to research and publish the findings of its research (Diala 2006). Universities are specially saddled with the responsibility of teaching, research and production of high quality
personnel. Through lectures, seminars, symposia, and publications, universities inform and influence public opinion and policymaking. At the Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria, one of the avenues for the publication of research results is the *Journal of Agriculture and Food Sciences* (JAFS), a peer-reviewed print platform for researchers and scientists in the fields of agriculture, food science and technology, and related disciplines. Published twice a year since March 2003, JAFS reached an agreement in 2007 for inclusion in the African Journal Online (AJOL). The migration to AJOL was necessitated by the need for more visibility, greater application of the increasingly popular technology (the Internet) and closer institutional identity with AJOL. Becoming a part of the digital dissemination of scholarly communications, which AJOL represented, however, presented some challenges. This paper presents these challenges and the experiences of JAFS with online publication. It is hoped that others interested in establishing online publications will learn from the lessons of JAFS’ experiences.

**Background**

JAFS is a peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the achievement of the following objectives:

- Highlight and accentuate contemporary leading issues in agriculture and food sciences;
- Disseminate the nature of and solutions to emerging problems in agricultural development and food sciences;
- Act as a forum for the dissemination and discussion of ideas, policies and practices in both public and private sectors as they relate to food and agriculture.

JAFS’ objectives reflect an attempt to promote high visibility for research output, first, from scholars at Imo State University, and second, from scholars in other universities. Based in Nigeria and published in English, JAFS is peer reviewed by senior academics and researchers in universities and research institutes. They are drawn from relevant disciplines and possess a minimum of the PhD. Additionally, reviewers are in the rank of senior lecturer or its equivalent, and considered to be authorities in their fields and have consistently published on contemporary issues in relevant scientific journals. The list of reviewers is updated annually, and is acknowledged in the second issue of each volume. There are two issues in each volume.

JAFS is issued twice a year, in April and October. These two issues make a volume. The maiden issue, Volume 1, Number 1, was published in
April 2003. As a rule, ten articles are required for publication in each issue of the journal.

JAFS’ institutional support comes from the Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria. Contributors are required to submit their manuscripts in three hard copies or through the Internet any time of the year. Moreover, they are required to pay an equivalent of N2,000 (about US$14) to help the editorial and peer review processes. Two reviewers report on each paper, and the outcome of any peer review can be any of the following:

a. Accepted in its present form;
b. Accepted with minor corrections;
c. Accepted with major corrections;
d. Not accepted.

The final editorial decision on a manuscript is communicated to the author for follow-up action. If the manuscript is accepted for publication, the author is notified accordingly. Subsequently, the author is expected to pay N12,000.00 (approximately US$80) for publication. For accepted papers, the authors are expected to make the required corrections and to return to the editors a hard copy and an electronic copy of the paper. For each issue of the journal, some 100 copies are produced for distribution as follows:

a. One copy to each of the ten contributors/authors;
b. One copy each to the Vice-Chancellor of the University, the University Librarian, Deans of the Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine, and the School of Post-Graduate Studies;
c. One copy to the library of the Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine;
d. The remaining copies are sold to the reading public at the rate of N1000 (about US$7) per copy. In some cases, copies are sent to other universities for publicity and as book exchange.

In 2007, JAFS reached an agreement with the African Journals Online for online publication. Thus, from 2008, electronic copies of JAFS began to be uploaded on the portal of AJOL for wider distribution.

**Literature Review**

Electronic publishing encompasses the digital publication of books and journal articles and the development of digital libraries (www.electronicpublishing.html). This is made technically feasible through the Internet which has extended the original concept of publishing beyond
the traditional. Electronic publishing also refers to current offerings of online and web-based publishers, and describes the development of new forms of production, distribution, and user interaction as they pertain to computer-based production of text and other interactive media. Thus, strongly associated with electronic publishing is online publishing, which refers to the distribution of publications via the Internet (www.electronicpublishing.html). Where the distribution is of the form of a website, it is known as web publishing. With specific reference to process, online publishing involves the actual mechanics of putting materials on the Internet for virtually limitless viewing (www.thetyping.com).

For a typical scientific and scholarly journal, the process involves submission of articles by interested researchers, review of articles by the editors to ascertain their scientific value and thus determine if they are publishable, eventual acceptance or rejection of the manuscript, and subsequent publication, if accepted. This well-defined process tallies with JAFS’ existing publication protocols. Perhaps for proper clarification of concepts, we may define a journal as a form of communication among scientists and other scholars (Scot 1998). It is characterized by peer review, and contains works that can be cited, retrieved and easily accessible anywhere in the world. Online publishing helps meet the criteria for retrievability, accessibility and citations. The ease of accessibility and the wide level of citation possibilities increase the visibility of academics, who are acutely aware of the ‘publish or perish’ culture in the academia. Consequently, researchers undertaking careers at universities and research institutes are conscious of the need to disseminate their research findings in refereed journals (Borgman 1993, Meadows 1993). Related to the ‘publish or perish’ tradition, African universities emphasise research and publication as a requirement for academic advancement (Altbach 2003:145). JAFS’ contribution to scholarship has been to serve as a platform for the dissemination of African academic research in the fields of agriculture, food science and technology.

Online Publication of JAFS

In the beginning, electronic copies of JAFS were available on the Internet under the auspices of an Information Communication Technologies (ICT) firm. The website address was www.imsu-jafs.info. The abstracts and full text of the articles for each issue were supplied in electronic format to the web manager who, in turn, uploaded the documents to the website address. Under this initial arrangement, JAFS was full text online and of open access.
This arrangement suited the journal’s purpose then. That was until December 2007, when an agreement for JAFS’ inclusion in AJOL was signed. Because JAFS was committed to improving visibility, sustainability, outreach and reader-awareness, the opportunities offered by AJOL were used. Thus, the shift to AJOL was necessitated by the need to be part of a relatively more visible, popular and institutional identity, which AJOL provided. However, the new arrangement for online publication presented some challenges to JAFS editorial team and management. We discuss some of these challenges in the next section.

The Challenges

Inadequate Funding

A major crisis of academic writing (and publishing) in Nigeria is funding. Given depleting funding for public higher education, Nigerian universities are no longer uniquely placed to house and support internationally acclaimed journals (Diafa 2007). This constrained financing, reflected in other university projects, has had it impact on funding support for JAFS. The requirements that authors whose papers have been accepted for publication in JAFS contribute towards supporting such publication is designed to help defray some of the costs associated with publishing the journal. This requirement has negative implication for the journal in that it may also spur potential contributors to seek other publication sources.

Poor Quality Articles from Researchers

While contributors are expected to submit papers of acceptable quality, this has not always been the case. Since inception in 2003, JAFS has received some 156 articles from researchers. Of these, only 50 articles or 32 per cent have successfully passed through the review process. In other words, 68 per cent of the articles did not meet the requirements for publication. Poor writing skills and the low quality of scientific research contribute to this problem. The inadequate funding for public higher education discussed previously has affected the adequacy of laboratory facilities, which ultimately impacts adversely on the quality of scientific research as well as the quality of postgraduate training. Since JAFS mandatorily publishes ten articles per issue, waiting to have sufficient quality articles to make an issue often leads to delay in publication of each issue. Even in an online publishing environment, that is fast-paced, this delay often creates a serious problem for journal credibility and sustainability.
Preference for Journals Based in Europe and North America

Without doubt, many African scholars prefer to publish in journals based in Europe and North America which certainly do not experience the funding challenges described above. The preference for these foreign journals may be related to greater scores ascribed to papers published outside Africa as “international” by several universities, scores that impact on career advancement. This then reduces the patronage and the number of articles that African scholars may choose to submit to locally based journals. As Diala (2007) has said, denying that there are hierarchies of publication outlets is tantamount to intellectual timidity.

Every discipline has and recognises its most authoritative and prestigious journals. Journals over the years acquire prestige and central roles in their fields through consistent generation and dissemination of high quality scholarly articles produced through rigorous review and evaluation processes. Publishing in such journals is not only career enhancing but also places one’s work before renowned names in the relevant field. However, a journal is not necessarily ‘international’ because it is domiciled in the West. To all intents and purposes, it takes years for a journal to attain respectability. We should therefore ‘decolonise’ our minds of this international journal mentality. Clearly, the arrangement with AJOL is designed to expand JAFS’ international outreach and increase the flow of manuscripts for publication.

Tardiness of the Reviewers

A major problem of publishing is that reviewers sometimes take long time to return comments on manuscripts sent to them. Very often, it becomes necessary to periodically remind reviewers before manuscripts are returned. A way round this challenge is to annually update the list of reviewers based on their satisfactory performance. One of the ways JAFS plans to solve this problem is to host reviewers’ retreats and workshops where the vision and mission of JAFS will be shared and constantly kept in view as a goal for all would-be reviewers.

Weak ICT Infrastructure

Among the challenges of online publication are overcoming any possibility of quality decrease in hard copy, digital amnesia or loss of electronic publications (Missingham 2005). Digital amnesia is attributed to decrease in hard copy, increased electronic communication, such as e-mail, and inadequate preservation of it, combined with poor record-keeping and
management practices. It should be pointed out that memory is greatly enhanced by frequent and repeated recall; recall is in turn aided by proper storage in the system. A data bank that fills the need for a one stop shop for research purposes is also a requirement for online publishing. Such data bank must offer such services as sourcing, assembling and processing of data into a systematic storage system for easy retrieval and use. JAFS lacks secure and easily accessible electronic storage system. During the run-up to the documentation for JAFS inclusion in AJOL, a request was made for the electronic copies of our past issues. Unfortunately, during that period, the website www.imsu-jafs.info was deactivated and, because there was no dedicated storage facility, we naturally had to turn to the ‘sent’ folder of our e-mail account to send some files to AJOL. Soon after came the reply that some of the sent files were blank, some were corrupt, and others inaccessible. Some files filled the bill though. This clearly dramatises the dilemma of digital disarray.

**Cost of Hardware and Software**

JAFS is also hamstrung by another digital demon – as Missingham (2005) labels the challenges of online publishing. That is the relatively high cost of hardware and software. According to Henry (2003), financial resources are required for online publishing to sustain an infrastructure of equipment, software and basic services, which help to ensure that intellectual resources are available well into the future. A good laptop sells for about N130,000.00 (approximately US$870), and a good desktop is half that price. Relative to JAFS’ circumstances, this is staggering. The United Nations has noted that enterprises in less developed countries will not benefit from ICT without access to good managerial and technical skills and innovation (UNCTAD 2004). Added to these are the cost of relevant accessories and the attendant cost of maintenance and upgrading, given the rapid evolution of ICT.

**The Future and JAFS**

These challenges have neither impaired our vision nor truncated the mission of JAFS. On the contrary, JAFS is evolving ways of standing up to them. With inclusion in AJOL, the frontiers of communication and distribution will expectedly be pushed outwards. This expectation is in line with AJOL’s aim of promoting the awareness and use of African published journals in the sciences by providing access to tables of contents (TOCs) on the Internet. With this arrangement, accessibility and wider visibility of the
journal will be greatly enhanced. This will hopefully address the issue of paucity of articles received for consideration for publication. Hosting retreats for reviewers will also refocus and reorient them for the new demand and realities of online publishing. JAFS plans to partner with AJOL to further develop a mechanism to strengthen online submission and peer review. While JAFS seeks to put in place necessary personnel, materials and infrastructure, lack of basic infrastructure may remain intractable for some time to come, because of funding gap.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the vision and mission of the Journal of Agriculture and Food Sciences (JAFS) as a platform for researchers and scientists in agriculture, food science and technology and related disciplines to publish their research findings. At inception, JAFS was available online by courtesy of an ICT firm based in the Netherlands. The arrangement was adequate for the journal’s purpose until the end of 2007 when an agreement for JAFS’ inclusion in AJOL was signed. This step was motivated by the desire to share a more visible, popular and institutional identity with AJOL. JAFS’ relationship with AJOL is expected to combat and mitigate the challenges as JAFS looks forward to reaching the enviable level of full online publishing.

References


Internet Sources
International Journal of Food Science and Agriculture is an international journal dedicated to the advancements in agriculture and food science throughout the world. The goal of this journal is to provide a platform for scientists, students, academics and engineers all over the world to promote, share, and discuss various new issues and developments in different areas of agricultural sciences. All manuscripts must be prepared in English and are subject to a rigorous and fair peer-review process. All journals published in Hill Publishing Group are open access. Open access provides readers with easy and barrier-free access to the articles. The cost of publication is shared by the publisher and the authors, their institutions, or their support funds. Agriculture (ISSN 2077-0472; CODEN: ABDGFK) is an international, scientific peer-reviewed open access journal published monthly online by MDPI. Open Access is free for readers, with article processing charges (APC) paid by authors or their institutions. Journal Rank: JCR - Q2 (Agronomy) / CiteScore - Q2 (Agronomy and Crop Science). Rapid Publication: manuscripts are peer-reviewed and a first decision provided to authors approximately 18.8 days after submission; acceptance to publication is undertaken in 2.8 days (median values for papers published in this journal in the second half of 2020). This article belongs to the Special Issue Contemporary Challenges of Agriculture and Rural Areas in the Context of Sustainable Development. Show Figures. The Indian Journal of Agricultural Sciences publishes papers concerned with the advancement of agriculture throughout the world. It publishes original scientific work related to strategic and applied studies in all aspects of agricultural science and exploited species, as well as reviews of scientific topics of current agricultural relevance. The Open Agriculture Journal is an Open Access online journal, which publishes research articles, reviews/mini-reviews and letters in all areas of agricultural science. The journal focuses on new methods and technologies for improving agricultural processes, increasing yield, conservation, and breeding. Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture publishes original research and critical reviews in agriculture and food science with particular emphasis on interdisciplinary studies at the agriculture/food interface. The journal covers fundamental and applied research. Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture (J Sci Food Agr). Publisher: Wiley. Journal description. The Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture publishes original research and critical reviews in agriculture and food science with particular emphasis on interdisciplinary studies at the agriculture/food interface. International Journal of Horticulture, Agriculture and Food Science is to publish papers in the field of Horticulture research, agriculture and food science with impact factor. All journal are online, open access, peer-reviewed, knowledge base, Bi-monthly, and refereed journal that publishes quality Articles for Global appearance. Quick Links. Home. Submit your Paper Online. Paper Format. Contact us. License.