

# Academic Publishing in Nepal during the COVID-19 crisis

*COVID-19 has transformed academic publishing, for books and journals. In this post **Min Pun**, shares his experiences as editor of two journals in Nepal. He outlines some of the opportunities posed by COVID-19, including the increased demand for research. However, there are also multiple barriers to the production and dissemination of knowledge in Nepal, including lack of funding for open access publishing and an increasing reliance on secondary evidence.*

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This is the ninth post in a six-week series: **Rapid or Rushed?** exploring rapid response publishing in covid times.

Read the rest of the series [here](#).

As part of the series, there was a [virtual roundtable](#) featuring Professor Joshua Gans (Economics in the Age of COVID-19, MIT Press), in conversation with Richard Horton (The COVID-19 Catastrophe, Polity Press and Editor of The Lancet), Victoria Pittman (Bristol University Press) and Qudsiya Ahmed (Cambridge University Press, India)

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Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an ever-growing number of submissions for our journals. The campus alone (where I am working is one of the largest campuses of Tribhuvan University) publishes more than 30 academic journals. As a result of lockdown during the outbreak, these journals received more research articles from the authors for publication. For instance, the special issue “COVID-19 & Beyond” of *Prithvi Academic Journal* that was published in September 2020 could receive approximately three times more manuscripts than the journal’s determined number. The overall rejection rate of manuscripts was around 75%, which was our first experience in the history of our academic publishing. It never happened, not even during the crisis situations such as the ten-year long Maoist Insurgency (1996-2006) and the 2015 Earthquake in Nepal. Frankly speaking, there was always a dearth of good research articles for academic publishing in the campus.

For researchers, the COVID-19 outbreak provided time to reflect and begin to rethink on the crisis situations and respond more rapidly to them. Additionally, this is also a rare opportunity for researchers to unlock creative talents and discover their personal passions. As such, many researchers responded to the crisis through their research papers, contributing to the “COVID-19 & Beyond” issue of *Prithvi Academic Journal*. This was an instance to respond more rapidly to the ongoing pandemic crisis. This covered the issues from using natural products to develop drugs against the coronavirus to formulating public health policies in combating the coronavirus, to the economic recovery during the time of business interruptions and lockdown due to the concerns over the outbreak, to switching physical classes into virtual classes.

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I had to handle two journals during the ongoing pandemic. With the first emergence of novel coronavirus from Wuhan in China in January 2020, Nepal imposed the nationwide lockdown on 24 March 2020 to fight against the possible spread of the virus, followed by its official lifting of lockdown on 21 July 2020. As Nepal is now on a partial or full lockdown and as cases of coronavirus infection and fatalities continue to surge across the country, we are experiencing many challenges in our academic publishing venture. First, our authors have to depend more on e-resources for their research papers because there is less possibility of scheduling their field visits. Secondly, our team including editors and peer reviewers had the habit of working in the physical environment, but during the pandemic, they required to work virtually that became a huge challenge for the team; however, they are now gradually learning to live with the current situation. Thirdly, there is an increasing demand for academic publishing since many authors want to see their research outcomes in print, but the government institutions in Nepal lack funding for open access publishing.

Interestingly, the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has both positive and negative impacts. The pandemic has compelled scholars to work virtually, making the work faster, easier and more economical, but at the same time it has paralyzed economic activity across the globe. So due to the impossibility of working in the physical working environment, the journal editors get the increasing number of manuscripts so that they could choose the best from the submissions, guaranteeing the quality of the academic publishing.

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Despite the fact that the outbreak has created opportunities for researchers, the rapid research in the social sciences is not free from risks. One of the major risks is the validity and reliability of research outcomes since mostly the researchers have to depend on the secondary data which can be retrieved from both print and electronic sources. Now, most manuscripts submitted for publication did not present the primary data due to the current pandemic threats, especially due to the absence of physical activity in the process of data collection. In many cases, the researchers are found to be overstating their results.

Finally, I would say, the ongoing pandemic crisis is a 'new normal' situation that has taken over the new world order. This is the reality of life that the new world is confronting today. As editors, our role is to accept the 'new normal' situation and be prepared for 'changed priorities ahead'.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.*

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