



# The evolving crisis of the peer-review process

Maria Petrescu<sup>1</sup> · Anjala S. Krishen<sup>2</sup>

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Managing the peer-review process is getting more difficult as years pass; it has also been significantly negatively affected by the pandemic (Flaherty 2022). Even before the pandemic, the Global State of Peer Review Report (Publons 2018; Vesper 2018) emphasized the growing level of reviewer fatigue, caused by an increase in the number of peer-review requests from a larger number of publications. At the same time, researchers are accepting a lower number of review requests, leading to an increase in the time required per review.

More than 70% of researchers decline review requests because the article is outside of their area of expertise, 42% of them decline because they are too busy, and 39% of them never received any peer-review training (Publons 2018). Moreover, 10% of reviewers are responsible for 50% of all peer reviews, with developed countries writing three times as many peer reviews per paper submitted as researchers in emerging nations (Publons 2018; Vesper 2018). This unfortunate situation affects the amount of time an article spends in the review process as well as the volume of work for certain reviewers. It can also affect the number of revise-and-resubmit decisions and diminish the chances for some manuscripts (Flaherty 2022). While at the JMA, we strive to have a first round of review turnaround of 30 days, this timeframe has been affected by the longer time necessary to find specialized reviewers, by delayed review submissions, and even by overwhelmed researchers who accept a review request and are unable to complete the review.

Various potential measures of improving the peer-review process have been discussed, including reviewer monetary and professional incentives (Flaherty 2022; Vesper 2018).

Researchers note that this type of professional service activity helps develop a good reputation among colleagues and can also support researchers in increasing their knowledge and exposure to the latest theories and trends (Vesper 2018). In most cases, journals now provide recognition to their best reviewers each year. Some academic institutions consider these service activities during the promotion and tenure (P&T) process, although this type of service “credit” is not common and most often does not improve P&T likelihood. At the same time, while financial incentives for reviewers have been discussed, there are very few publication outlets considering this option because of the potential bias issues that can arise (Flaherty 2022; Vesper 2018).

We surmise that the most alarming statistic we previously mentioned is the fact that 39% of reviewers never received any peer-review training or knowledge. When looking at Ph.D. programs in business and marketing at top business schools, it is not common to see mentions of peer-review training as part of any doctoral course or training. While all doctoral programs include research seminars and workshops, very few specifically mention the integration of paper review activities in their curriculums. Exceptions can be seen, for example, in the business doctoral program of the University of Chicago, including a Marketing workshop and Research Paper Review, and Stanford University, including a field exam based on reviewing and writing a thoughtful critique on a paper.

At the same time, publication outlets have limited resources and programs for encouraging and training reviewers, although there are some useful resources provided by some of the top organizations in marketing. For example, the Academy of Marketing Science provided a webinar on “What Makes a Good Reviewer?” and included additional resources on the importance of reviewers as developmental coaches, and the importance of the peer-review process (Babin and Moulard 2018; Houston and Hulland 2021). Likewise, the American Marketing Association also aggregates resources on how to review for the *Journal of Marketing*. Nevertheless, journal-provided information and training are not enough when the benefits of writing peer-reviews

✉ Maria Petrescu  
petrescm@erau.edu

Anjala S. Krishen  
anjala.krishen@unlv.edu

<sup>1</sup> Department of Business Administration, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, USA

<sup>2</sup> Lee Business School, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, USA



from a professional point of view are not emphasized. At the same time, the willingness of researchers to perform time-consuming reviews when they count very minimally in the P&T process is on a downward trend, as emphasized by 85% of respondents in the 2018 Publon survey. Finally, the domination of American and West European researchers in the review process and the lack of training especially in developing countries highlights the need of not only academic support, but also interest and involvement on the part of academics in emerging research markets. As current trends emphasize, there is a need for all academic stakeholders, including researchers, administrators, and publishers to encourage, train, and recognize the efforts of one of the most important categories of contributors to the research world, the peer-reviewer.

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**Maria Petrescu** is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Her main research areas include marketing analytics and digital marketing. She has published articles in journals such as *Psychology & Marketing*, the *Journal of Marketing Management*, *Public Management Review*, *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, and the *Journal of Internet Commerce*.

**Anjala S. Krishen** is the Mel Larson Endowed Chair of Marketing, and Professor and Department Chair of Marketing & International Business at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She has a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from Rice University and an M.S. Marketing, MBA, and Ph.D. from Virginia Tech. She held management positions for 13 years before pursuing a doctorate. As of 2022, she has published over 75 peer-reviewed journal papers in highly ranked journals. In 2016, she gave a TEDx talk (at UNR) titled “Opposition: The light outside of the dark box,” and a UNLV Creates speech entitled “Consuming to Creating, Watching to Doing, Seeing to Being.” To date, she has completed over 65 marathons, seven ultramarathons, and seven 100 milers and has a black belt in Taekwondo.

