# Research in the *European Journal of International Management*: reflections from the outgoing and incoming Editors in Chief, and *EJIM*'s Chief Editorial Consultant


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In June 2023, Ilan Alon completes his six-year tenure as Editor-in-Chief (EiC) for the *European Journal of International Management*, taking over from the founding EiC, Vlad Vaiman, who still serves as the journal's Chief Editorial Consultant. Prior to being an EiC for *EJIM*, Ilan was also a Senior Editor for *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* and EiC of *International Journal of Emerging Markets* and *AIB Insights* (Academy of International Business publication), so he came to this job with some related experience

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and energy to improve the quality and ratings of the journal. It has been a challenging but prosperous journey, along with colleagues both inside the journal and outside from around the world. In June 2023, Nicole Richter, who has been a senior editor for *EJIM* and *EJIM*'s deputy EiC for the last year, will take over as EiC. In this article, we will share our views and thoughts of the journal and its role in the discipline of international business and management, reflecting on the past and providing guidelines and directions for current and future editors, authors and reviewers.

To give context to the journal's positioning today, it is instructive to look at its history and evolution. *EJIM* was established in 2007 by a group of scholars consisting of Vlad Vaiman, Gerhard Fink, Nigel Holden, and Gerhard Apfelthaler, with a great deal of support and assistance by Randall Schuler. The original objective of the journal was 'to establish an outlet for scholars interested in a variety of topics in international management in Europe' (Schuler et al., 2009). The focus on Europe at that time was needed as most journals developed a North American view on international business and management, and the European perspective, both in scholarship and authorship, was underrepresented (Dunning, 2007). Some of the world's most important international business scholars were recruited by the founding editor to the task of building the journal and writing articles, including John Dunning, Geert Hofstede, Shalom Schwartz, Peter Buckley, Alan Rugman, Randall Schuler, John Child, Anne-Wil Harzing, Mark Mendenhall, Nancy Adler, Ikujiro Nonaka, Sheila Puffer and others.

By the third year of publication, the journal published 71 articles (excluding editorial materials and book reviews). The journal was also quickly included in the prestigious ISI Web of Knowledge Database (WoS today). *EJIM* has become part of the Web of Science's Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) since 2008, after only two years of publication. Notable articles of the early years included topics such as cultural values, talent management, and international human resources management (Kumar et al., 2022). *EJIM* was the first international journal dedicated solely to research in international management theory and practice from a European perspective, and its early growth affirmed the need for such an approach. Towards the end of the first editorial team's tenure, *EJIM* was among the top IB journal, ranked 9th by Tüselmann et al. (2016).

In 2009, Schuler et al. wrote: since its inception, *EJIM* has always strived to evaluate its coverage and determine whether to continue on the same path or change direction. With the changing landscape of Europe and the world over the past five years and the increasing importance of international business and management (IB/IM) reflected in the growing number of journals devoted to the field, it may now be worth exploring potential changes to the journal.

Prior to joining *EJIM* as EiC, both Ilan and Nicole were involved in *EJIM* as authors and published two papers (Alon et al., 2011; Kiymaz and Alon, 2011; Yari et al., 2020; Richter et al., 2020), and as reviewers. We often get asked by colleagues who want to join the editorial staff of the journal, and we usually suggest a similar path, along with a formidable research track and impact.

When Ilan joined as EiC in June 2017, the first thing he needed to do was to augment the vision and build the new editorial team. Few of the existing senior editors stayed, and the structure of the editorial staff was regional. Ilan recruited new senior editors, moved some of the existing ones to the review board, built a new advisory board, and refocused the journal. The new vision was to become the leading international management journal

in the world. To accomplish this vision, the team needed tangible and reachable objectives for quality. It was essential to improve on all the metrics, including ones offered by Google, Clarivate, Scopus, ABS and others. There was also a need to increase the number of paper submissions and rejection rates (selectivity). Table 1 shows how submission, rejections and acceptances changed since 2017. *EJIM* was in the Academic Journal Guide (2021) by the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) as level 2. By April 2023, the journal published 634 articles, 294 since 2017.

**Table 1** Total submissions, acceptances and rejections

| *Year* | *Acceptance rate* | *Throughput time* | *Total articles submitted* | *Articles accepted using review process* | *Articles accepted without review process* | *Articles rejected* | *Articles still in review* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2022 | 13.6% | 267 days | 333 | 45 | 0 | 286 | 1 |
| 2021 | 18.5% | 244 days | 395 | 73 | 0 | 319 | 0 |
| 2020 | 20.2% | 189 days | 435 | 88 | 0 | 347 | 0 |
| 2019 | 28.9% | 235 days | 367 | 106 | 0 | 261 | 0 |
| 2018 | 34.6% | 264 days | 390 | 128 | 7 | 255 | 0 |
| 2017 | 35.7% | 256 days | 42 | 15 | 0 | 27 | 0 |

The scope of articles we review has also changed. Rather than focus solely on European perspectives, the journal took a more holistic view of international management, to compete more directly with the *Journal of International Management*. This global approach was appropriate, as globalisation blurred the differences between the European and non-European perspectives and research. *EJIM* became a platform for the dissemination of high-quality research on a diverse array of topics in the field of international business. Coverage included new topics such as global virtual teams, international strategy and business policy, international marketing management, methodological aspects of international and comparative research, sustainability, international social enterprises, non-governmental organisations, comparative management systems, global spirituality and religion in management, and international value and supply chain management. The breadth and depth of topics covered by *EJIM* became more mainstream international business.

In celebration of the 15 years of publication, Kumar et al. (2022) published a bibliometric analysis of all articles published until then in *EJIM*. The article identified the most impactful articles, authors, universities, and country collaborations in the journal. Authors found six research clusters: 1. International entrepreneurship, 2. Multinational companies, 3. International strategy, 4. International human resource management, 5. National culture, and 6. Organisational culture. While the latter three categories are the traditional areas of strength, the first three are new areas of focus. The works by Vlačić, González-Loureiro, and Eduardsen (2023) typify the new research in the first category. Kumar et al. noted that since 2017, international entrepreneurship has become more prevalent and impactful. Table 2 shows how the impact of *EJIM* has risen over the years.

**Table 2** Impact of *EJIM* since 2017

| | *2017* | *2018* | *2019* | *2020* | *2021* | *2022* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of articles | 33 | 32 | 41 | 44 | 61 | 49 |
| CiteScore (Scopus) | 1.5 | 1.5 | 2.7 | 3.4 | 2.4 | NA |
| Clarivate IF | .575 | .575 | 1.39 | 2.15 | 2.51 | 2.29 |
| 5 year IF | .905 | 1.164 | 1.655 | 2.851 | 3.128 | NA |
| Impact score (Scopus) | .92 | 1.45 | 2.40 | 2.08 | 1.78 | NA |
| H-index | 19 | 22 | 25 | 25 | 28 | NA |
| Google H5 index | | 14 | 15 | 19 | 24 | NA |
| Google H5 median | | 17 | 19 | 31 | 33 | NA |
| Scopus SNIP | .442 | .611 | 1.208 | .996 | .787 | NA |
| Cites / Doc. (5 years) | 0.98 | 1.48 | 2.36 | 2.63 | NA | NA |
| Scimago | .300 | .556 | .753 | .663 | .532 | NA |
| Normalised Eigenfactor | .048 | .050 | .055 | .179 | .204 | NA |
| Clarivate Journal Citation Indicator | .40 | .57 | .69 | .66 | .48 | NA |

Note: Compiled by authors from various rating agencies.

## *Future directions and challenges: 2023 and beyond*

Following from *EJIM*'s widened scope embracing more mainstream IB/IM topics, one of the key challenges is to differentiate its positioning in the landscape of competing journals. Core topics in IB/IM research, such as culture, internationalisation processes, emerging market related topics, and knowledge management are and will remain of relevance to all outlets (as demonstrated, for instance, in Kumar et al., 2023; Mukherjee et al., 2021; Buckley and Casson, 2021). The same goes for the integration of the grand global challenges and hot topics in today's business world, such as sustainability, social responsibility, and digitalisation (see, for instance, Doh et al., 2016; Ghauri et al., 2021), and more inclusiveness of locations and actors (e.g., Arikan and Shenkar, 2022). While *EJIM* is at the forefront of these contemporary topical areas, developing a healthy transition to a leading outlet in IB/IM will involve a sharpened positioning in the landscape of journals that offer some more unique selling points.

This process has been initiated and will build on *EJIM*'s current comparative strengths, which are found in the work-related domain of IB/IM (covering international human resource management, global and cross-cultural leadership, and talent management topics) as well as in the field of international entrepreneurship. Future core areas of relevance to *EJIM* are currently developed in collaboration with the team of senior editors and will be translated into special sections with core responsibilities within the team. An example is the freshly updated special section on 'X-Culture and Global Virtual Teams' (see Taras et al., 2023).

The new positioning is, however, not only about topical areas. It is also about research approaches covered. *EJIM* publishes both empirical and conceptual research, with a clear dominance of empirical studies. *EJIM* has been an outlet with a relatively higher share of qualitative research approaches in the past, but has more and more grown to include quantitative studies, which currently account for the clearly higher share of

research published in the journal. Considering the many calls for method triangulation in IB/IM (e.g., Nielsen et al., 2020; Richter et al., 2022), we are convinced that *EJIM*'s qualitative heritage can be leveraged into more mixed methods research and a stronger involvement of studies engaging in theorising rather than, or in addition to, theory testing. The journal is open to studies using the full portfolio of both qualitative, but also contemporary quantitative designs. Likewise, *EJIM* is open to publish research on toolsets and critical reflections thereof, including toolsets for strategic decision-making in IB/IM, which the editorial team perceives as a gap in the IB/IM literature that can be of interest to both academics and practitioners. Last but not least, *EJIM* is open to review-studies, meta-analyses, as well as to different study formats, including research notes. No matter which of the above approaches or formats is chosen, a core criterion to publish with *EJIM* remains a significant contribution to the field of IB/IM.

Another initiative involves potential strategic partnerships. *EJIM* has been self-standing for its entire life and formed no formal association with an academic organisation, such as EURAM, AIB or EIBA. Such associations/partnerships may help ensure the continuity of submissions and quality sources of authors and reviewers. Building stronger connections to the relevant academic communities is therefore in the focus of the incoming editor, and for 2023 team members are present at meet-the-editor sessions at all leading conferences in the field, including EURAM, AIB, and EIBA.

In addition to these strategic initiatives, an operational challenge is to improve our time-to-market after acceptance of articles both online and especially offline publications. This has been an area of concern for some of the authors who received their acceptance in the recent two to three years. Due to the growing popularity of *EJIM* as an outlet, the number of issues planned was not sufficient to timely publish accepted articles. This problem has been tackled by a now increased number of issues (12 issues per year), so that these concerns will no longer be an issue for future submissions.

It is also important to note a few challenges that academic journals face nowadays. First, papermill is a problem that seems to face all academic publications. In academic research, 'papermill' refers to a fraudulent practice where an individual or group of individuals produce multiple research papers, often with little or no original content, by slightly modifying the same material and submitting it to different academic journals or conferences as different works. The goal of this practice is to increase the number of publications on their CV or resume, which can lead to career advancement or grant funding, without actually contributing substantially to the field. This practice is considered unethical and can lead to severe consequences, including loss of reputation, loss of funding, and possible legal action. Another challenge comes with the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, and particularly ChatGPT, which makes it harder to authenticate authors and the originality of their work.

Finally, one of the most essential issues for all academic outlets, including *EJIM*, is about access. Access to published articles is fundamental for good research, and Open Access is increasingly desired. Inderscience model of distribution requires database-specific access not always available in all universities. To counter that, shadow library networks like Sci-Hub, for example, are proliferating to facilitate free access to all academic knowledge. While this practice is problematic to the journal profitability models, publishers are pressured to provide wider access to academic knowledge, at a reasonable price (preferably free). Publishers are therefore tasked with inventing new business models without sacrificing integrity and quality.

Despite multitude of challenges common to all academic outlets, *EJIM*'s future remains bright, and the entire editorial team is looking forward to tackling these challenges and implementing strategic initiatives identified in this brief article. And as always, *EJIM* is looking forward to your submissions!

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