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RESEARCH ARTICLE

BALANCING CONTROL AND AUTONOMY: A THREE-TIERED POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR STRENGTHENING ACADEMIC PUBLISHING IN INDIA

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Abstract

The University Grants Commission (UGC) in India has taken commendable steps to maintain academic publishing standards by implementing the UGC-CARE (Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics) List. This initiative expected to compact predatory publishing and enhance the global recognition of Indian research output. While the UGC-CARE List has succeeded to a large extent in filtering out substandard journals and guiding researchers toward reputable publications, several operational shortcomings persist. These include lack of transparency in the selection and removal processes, limited resubmission opportunities, centralized control, and frequent list updates that sometimes affect the credibility of journals. Recently, UGC has proposed discontinuing the CARE List in favor of a new system comprising peer-reviewed journals meeting certain criteria, possibly published directly by UGC. This paper argues for the continued relevance of the UGC-CARE List, suggesting improvements in its implementation and transparency. It also proposes a three-tiered journal classification system: (1) UGC-CARE List I, (2) UGC-CARE List II (internationally indexed journals), and (3) a decentralized, university-level journal list. Such a model would ensure both national standardization and local academic autonomy, fostering inclusivity and enhancing the quality of research publications in India. The paper concludes by advocating for a more transparent, user-friendly, and independent indexing system similar to international standards.

Introduction:-

In India, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has implemented several measures to encourage the integrity of academic publishing and prevent predatory, questionable, or substandard journals that could damage the status of Indian academicians, thereby ensuring excellence and maintenance the standards of journals. One of the key initiatives of UGC is create and maintain "UGC-CARE Reference List of quality Journals" (UGC-CARE List), which serves as trusted source for all academic needs.

This list is designed to guide researchers and academics to reliable, high-quality journals, thereby protecting the academic community from unethical publishing practices. However, if asked whether this has been a complete

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success, it is impossible to give a definitive answer. The opinion expressed in this article suggests a 75% success rate, with the remaining 25% marked by minor flaws.

The UGC is now planning to discontinue the CARE list and implement a new system that includes peer-reviewed journals meeting specific criteria and published by the UGC. This paper discusses the importance of maintaining the UGC CARE list in the future, while also exploring additional methods to ensure the quality of publications by Indian academicians.

Santhoshkumar (2025), in his article titled **"The Challenges, Consequences, and Solutions: Addressing Problems Before and After the Discontinuation of the UGC-CARE List,"** examines the significant role of the UGC-CARE List in ensuring the quality of academic research. The article delves into the challenges and implications surrounding its discontinuation, while also highlighting the broader significance of the list in upholding research standards. Through a comprehensive analysis, emphasizes the importance of maintaining such a framework to support credible and high-quality research in the future.

A considerable number of publications have emphasized the importance of quality in scientific publishing system (Alonso et al., 2010; Bazeley, 2010, Grimaldo, 2018, Lakshmi and Ugandhar, 2022, Mårtensson, 2016). Several other noteworthy reports are also available on this topic **(**Wagner et al., 2019**).** According to Satyanarayana and Sharma (2008), since its introduction in the 1960s, the Impact Factor (IF) had been widely criticized for its misuse in evaluating scientific work. Despite warnings from its creator, Eugene Garfield, citation data like IF continued to influence decisions on research funding, often promoting mainstream topics at the expense of important but less popular areas, which led scientists to focus on trendy research rather than addressing crucial questions, causing researchers in relevant but unfashionable fields to face underfunding and lack of recognition, ultimately skewing the direction of scientific progress.
However, most of these article have not proposed or discussed a structured three-tier model for publication indexing. This article presents a new three-tier framework tailored to the Indian academic landscape, designed to improve the credibility, accessibility, and inclusivity of research publications through a more structured and transparent indexing system.

Materials and Methods:-

For this study, the websites of various indexing agencies were visited, and relevant data were collected for compilation. Additionally, the UGC CARE List website was accessed to gather and compile the number of journals across different categories. The study also examined the various parameters used by different agencies for indexing journals.

Results and Discussion:-

Approximate number of Journals in Scopus List

Scopus currently indexes approximately 27,950 active peer-reviewed journals and nearly 300,000 books, with these numbers subject to change as new titles are added and others removed. The database also features content from more than 7,000 publishers and includes over 90 million records (Elsevier. 2024). The approximate number for 2025 is provided because the list may be reviewed and revised later, making the exact number unavailable at any given time.

Approximate number of Journals in Web of Science List

Web of Science indexes over 34,000 journals across diverse disciplines, including science, social sciences, and the arts and humanities. The platform also includes conference proceedings and other publication types (**Web of Sciences indexed journals,** 2025). Here, the approximate number for 2025 is also provided, as the list may be reviewed and revised later, making the exact number unavailable at any given time.

Number journals in UGC CARE 1 List for different disciplines

The figure 1 shows the number of journals included in the UGC CARE List across different disciplines. The results indicate that there are very few journals available for certain disciplines (UGC CARE 2025).The data indicates that the number of journals listed in the UGC CARE List is as follows: Sciences – 252, Social Sciences – 320, Arts and Humanities – 340, Multidisciplinary – 16, and Indian Languages – 282. This brings the total to only 1,210 journals. Compared to international indexing agencies like Scopus or Web of Science, this number is relatively low. In this context, it is important for the UGC CARE List 1 to expand and maintain a separate, comprehensive listing similar

to international indexing agencies. Doing so could help include more Indian journals and enhance their global visibility.

Expanding Journal Scope: Encouraging the Inclusion of Opinion-Based, Conceptual, Theoretical, and Traditional Knowledge Articles

It has been observed that the majority of journals in the current publishing ecosystem predominantly focus on experimental research. Only a limited number of journals accommodate opinion-based, conceptual, theoretical, or traditional knowledge-driven articles. For instance, a novel concept related to gene maturation was initially published in one journal (Santhoshkumar, 2021) and later elaborated upon in another (Santhoshkumar, 2022). Similarly, a number of articles have been published exploring diverse and intellectually stimulating conceptual themes. Notable examples include the development of a parallel number system in Hindi **(Santhoshkumar,** 2019). These contributions highlight the importance of expanding the scope of academic journals to include innovative, policy-driven, and culturally significant conceptual works. Encouraging such publications can foster richer academic dialogue and support meaningful societal reforms. These examples highlight the importance of encouraging journals to accommodate a wider range of thought-provoking and policy-oriented conceptual papers, which can contribute meaningfully to academic and public discourse.However, such conceptual contributions continue to face limited acceptance across most academic journals. Therefore, there is a pressing need for more journals to broaden their scope and actively consider publishing high-quality conceptual and theoretical articles, ensuring timely peer review and dissemination. This shift would support intellectual diversity and innovation in academic discourse.

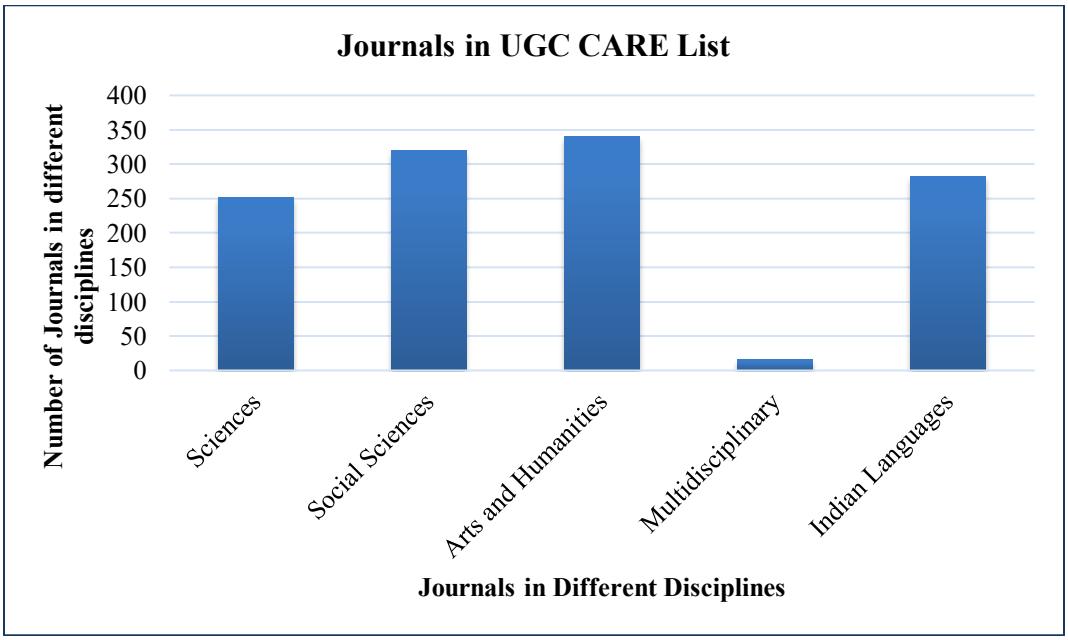

Figure 1:- Number of journals on UGC CARE List for different disciplines as of 10/4/2025.

Discussion:-

Examining the Benefits of the UGC CARE List Implementation

The first of these is that publications that were published solely for the purpose of financial profit were discontinued or brought to a state where they could not be sustained. The next thing is that Indian publications have received recognition at the global level. Additionally, Indian journals have received centralized approval. This was a way to resolve doubts regarding recognition between different universities, especially regarding mutual recognition of publications. In addition, many publishers have tried to improve their quality so that they can reach global indexing platforms such as Scopus and Web of Science.

An Analysis of the Shortcomings in the Implementation of the UGC CARE List

The authorities of UGC-CARE list have published several parameters on their website for inclusion and exclusion of a journal. It was specified that the title of the journal had to be provided in its exact form, including any subtitles. It was also mentioned that a valid and confirmable Print ISSN or E-ISSN was a mandatory criterion. In addition to

this, it was stated that the name of the publisher should be accompanied by a complete contact address with phone number(s), and email ID. Other details include details of editorial board members, it was emphasized that the full names and their affiliations and also editorial board members needed to be included, along with the office address, phone number, email ID(s), URL Furthermore, and it was highlighted that the website of the journal should carefully display all relevant details. Besides, it was mentioned that any deceptive or false information found on the website of the journal or within its pages would result in the journal being deemed ineligible for inclusion in the list of UGC-CARE.

All these parameters are very good and acceptable. But it is said that even journals that have completed all these are often rejected. That is, when a journal is rejected without inclusion, the publishers need to be convinced of the reason. However, the reality is that those responsible often fail to fulfil it. For these reasons, publishers often are not interested in resubmitting once rejected. Another problem was that publishers were not allowed to submit journals directly to them. This meant that their journals were often only allowed to be submitted through the nearest university. This was a situation that had to be said to be not in accordance with the rules followed by many international agencies like Scopus or Web of Science. Some of these agencies also encourage publishers to submit their journals.

The next major issue is how long a journal will remain on the list once it is included. This was also often a cause for criticism. This means that the list is revised approximately four times a year. Therefore, it can be seen that some journals are included and then excluded within one year. This often led to the journal's own credibility being questioned. It is worth noting that international standards could not be met here either. This is because almost all international agencies give journals a 1-year term. That is, most international agencies only update their lists once a year. For that, they mostly use the calendar year. Additionally, these agencies go through several stages before deciding whether to include a journal or not. In this case, updates for each stage will be published on their website. Only then will they reach a decision. Another drawback is that such methods were not modelled after our system. The next drawback is that the website does not show exactly when a journal is listed from and to. But even if this has changed in the past, the fact that details from long ago are no longer available from it is a fact.
Another issue in this system has observed is the practice of removing journals from the UGC CARE List simply because they are included in an international indexing platform like Scopus or Web of Science, as mentioned in the remarks column.However, it is generally understood that international indexing platforms such as Scopus and Web of Science maintain their own databases and update them on an annual basis.As a result, they sometimes exclude journals from their lists. Therefore, the inclusion or exclusion of journals from these platforms should not affect their status on the UGC CARE List. The opinion of this article, the UGC CARE List should continue to be maintained as an independent indexing platform, separate from other international indexing databases, in the future as well.

Evaluation of whether this system is necessary or not
It must be said that it is better for this system to remain in place after the above shortcomings are resolved. This means that this system can be maintained as an Indian benchmark to bring the quality of our journals to international standards and, in the future, be used like Scopus or Web of Science.

What to do now?
Make three instead of two
Currently, there are two types of journals recognized by the UGC CARE Lists. The first is the UGC CARE List One, which includes those that meet the criteria set by the UGC CARE List authority. The next is the UGC CARE List II, which includes journals recognized by international agencies such as Scopus and Web of Science. The opinion of this article, these two systems should be followed in the future as well. However, when preparing the UGC CARE List, the issues mentioned earlier must be addressed.In addition to these two lists, a third list of journals should be included in the future.

What is the third list?
Now, according to UGC, decentralization is needed for journal selection. This article also support it in the matter of journal selection. That is, the power to select UGC journals should be given to the respective University. But it seems fair to say that this is a very good decision on some subjects or languages. This is because there are very few journals for some subjects. Therefore, here believe that the university can properly utilize the power it has in such selections. The third list means that the universities prepare it in strict accordance with the UGC criteria.

Importance of the Three Types of Lists and the Issues Arising from Their Absence

If the list is entirely under the authority of the university, the possibility of journals that are on one university's list but not on another's list being mutually recognized may often be questionable. However, there will be no problem in selecting journals from the respective university list for the needs of the persons in the respective Universities. But that doesn't mean that one University should accept another University's journal lists as is. That's why here stated here that three indexed lists of Journal are needed. That is, a decision must be reached that the first and second should be accepted by all universities, and the third can be decided by the respective universities. This gives each individual the freedom to decide in which journal to publish. Many opportunities and possibilities are opening up before academics.

Conclusion:-

In conclusion, here accept as true the UGC CARE List should be maintained in the future, with modifications in its procedure of the selection of journals to ensure greater truthfulness and inclusivity. Additionally, the UGC CARE List should have a well-designed website, similar to platforms like Scopus or Web of Science, to improve its convenience and integrity. Moreover, allowing Universities to maintain their own indexing platforms for journals could considerably enhance research activities within those institutions.

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