

Exploring Video Journals: An Interview with Latest Thinking

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LATEST
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Research papers are evidently quite difficult to interpret and understand especially for an audience that is not very familiar with the research topic. In order to make scientific research easier to understand, a number of journals are now encouraging the use of video-based content that allows authors to explain their research in a simplified manner. So, to understand the impact of video journals, we had the opportunity to speak with Pajam Sobhani, founder and CEO of *Latest Thinking*. LT.org is an open access video journal that hosts videos of researchers providing a detailed explanation of the area of their research as well as the impact of the study. These videos are presented by the authors themselves and are structured in a five-step process that helps authors describe the question they are working on, the methodology used by them, the significance of their results, as well as the future prospects of their study. Thus, in its current format, *Latest Thinking* is a full service for researchers wanting to increase their outreach and the video shootings are crafted to meet the requirements of the interviewees. The videos are currently shared under the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY 4.0).

EA: For many researchers, the concept of publishing in a video journal is still quite new. Can you explain the benefits of video journals?

Pajam: The idea of video journals is simple as it provides easy access to complex research findings and thereby helps to increase the dissemination and the impact of scientific work. However, there is also a bigger idea behind video journals: The success of science and academia is driven by specialization—but at the same time growing specializations are posing a challenge to science and society, as it makes communication across disciplines and with the society at large tremendously more demanding. Overall, research is published in more than 50,000 periodicals today. As a result, only about 50-100 people on average read research articles. The downside of the increasing specialization is that research becomes more isolated from society and even within the same discipline. What is missing, thus, is an arena where research discoveries from specialized sub-systems are systematically reconnected to the broader scientific community and the general public. Video journals are this arena!

EA: At present, many publishers are still exploring how they can utilize video-based content for their readers. Do you see more opportunities for video-based research to get cited and promoted?

Pajam: Yes, indeed! There is an evident correlation between dissemination and citation. Many publishers currently explore how videos work best in the context of scientific publications. The challenge for most publishers is to find a format that matches the quality level of the research at hand and is affordable at the same time. Here, we observe two extremes—on one hand, we see very professional videos that are appealing, but too costly to be produced in large scale. On the other hand, publishers rely on self-made videos from the researchers that often are of a poor quality and risk devaluing the high-quality research in the paper.

EA: How is *Latest Thinking* different from other video journals currently published by other publishers?

Pajam: I believe there are two main reasons why *Latest Thinking* is different from other video journals. Firstly, we have defined a visual standard on how to present the research. The researcher is the main character and his elucidations are enriched by our illustrations or text animations. This approach allows the user to shape clear expectations about the content that is being provided. On a more fundamental level, the chapter structure (question, method, findings, relevance, and outlook) of our videos, which is directly accessible, makes LT videos unique. By this approach, the video is not only a presentation format but also a working tool where specific knowledge can be accessed directly and easily.

EA: What are some of the challenges faced by authors in enhancing the outreach of their research?

Pajam: The challenge for the researchers is inherent to their work—they deal with highly complex and highly specialized subject matters. Therefore, the key challenge for them is to communicate their findings to a broader audience without trivializing the content on one hand or overwhelm the audience on the other hand. The key here is to find the right balance.

EA: Does *Latest Thinking* actively collaborate with authors to create video summaries about their research?

Pajam: Yes, we actively work with researchers in developing the LT Videos. These researchers are guided by a coach who helps them articulate their research findings in a way that is accessible to the wider academic community and the public. We do not see ourselves primarily as a video production company but rather as “midwives” that help the researcher gain visibility and understanding.

EA: Recently, many new methods of communicating scientific research have developed like graphical abstracts, video abstracts, and tweetable abstracts. What are your thoughts on the effectiveness of such formats to readers?

Pajam: I am glad to see so many new formats around—it shows that there is a demand. At the end of the day, you need to select the right method for the right purpose. In order to judge how effective these new forms of communication are, we need to give them time and space to flourish. I personally think that it is dangerous to reduce scientific findings to very simple messages in order to fit everyone’s taste, as it evidently does not correspond to the nature of the sciences and the humanities. Our world is complex and research communication is all about focusing on the key elements and about adding transparency. However, there are natural limits to how far you can reduce the level before the content becomes meaningless or plain wrong.

EA: Are the videos published on *Latest Thinking* indexed by any of the databases?

Pajam: Yes, our videos are indexed by the repository of the Max Planck Society <http://pubman.mpdl.mpg.de>

EA: Could you give us more details on the processes followed for creating these videos?

Pajam: We have developed a process that is fully customizable to the needs of researchers. As all our videos are linked to publications, we first select a publication that is already published or about to be published. We get together with the researcher and coach him to present his research work in a structured manner, according to our defined

chapter division (question, method, findings, relevance, and outlook). We record 60-90 minutes of footage and then start editing the final video. Next, we illustrate the video or add text animations and provide editorial content about the researcher to promote him or her as well as the original publication(s). Once the researcher approves the video, we publish it on It.org and the researcher can embed the video on his website or use it in various other ways.

[What is “Latest Thinking”? Science – Videos – Summaries](#) from [Latest Thinking](#) on YouTube

EA: How are you educating researchers about *Latest Thinking*? What is the awareness of such journals in ESL countries?

Pajam: One key tool for the promotion of *Latest Thinking* is the embedding of the LT video player on websites. Researchers with whom we have worked embed and share their videos on their respective institutional or personal websites thereby making LT known to even more people. Of course, LT is also present on social media channels.

EA: Many ESL researchers find it difficult to communicate the impact of their research because of the language barrier. Do you think video journals can help overcome this barrier?

Pajam: Indeed, video journals are a unique opportunity for ESL researchers to present themselves to a broader audience. Often, non-native speakers do not feel comfortable when presenting at international conferences. However, it is increasingly important for these researchers to be visible as a person and not hide behind the publication. In this light, video journals are an ideal dissemination tool, especially for ESL researchers.

EA: Are there plans for *Latest Thinking* to host videos in languages other than English?

Pajam: To ensure maximum dissemination, English is spoken in the original videos. After all, English is the dominant language in academia. Since we do not produce the videos live, there is no disadvantage for non-native speakers, as we can redo recordings and have several takes while shooting the video. Actually, until now we have shot most of our videos with non-native English speakers. Nevertheless, there are plans to provide subtitles in additional languages.

EA: Can you share some of the major milestones of *Latest Thinking*?

Pajam: The first milestone for *Latest Thinking* was to develop a product that meets the needs of the scientific community and matches the demands of a society which is overloaded with information already. We spent a lot of time testing different formats to ensure that LT Publications work for all scientific disciplines, work internationally, and is linked to traditional publications (journal articles, etc.). Once the product was defined, we developed our platform and started to reach out to the scientific community. We are happy to get very positive feedback from researchers and institutions as well as the general public.

EA: *Are there plans to expand the nature of content published on Latest Thinking?*

Pajam: Yes, we are thinking in two directions here. On one hand, we are considering to add more video formats, e.g. to provide an overview of a research field. On the other hand, we are planning to integrate other existing resources, e.g. related courses, infographics, etc.

EA: *How do you propose video journals such as Latest Thinking can be promoted within the academic community?*

Pajam: I think that we have various drivers that promote the idea of video journals. Moreover, we observe a demand from society wanting to better understand what is happening in science and simultaneously also have funding agencies that request the researchers to disseminate their research findings—the dissemination strategy is currently becoming an important factor for the success of grant applications.

EA: *As the founder of Latest Thinking, how do you see it evolving in the coming years?*

Pajam: I see video journals becoming a new entry point in being acquainted with ongoing research and research results. As we speak we can observe that the generation of the “digital natives” uses videos as a key tool to accessing knowledge—e.g. via YouTube. What was missing before we launched It.org was a platform with a standardized presentation format and stringent quality assurance approach. I am looking forward that *Latest Thinking* is closing this gap and I hope LT Publications will become a standard for research dissemination.

It was a great pleasure to talk to Pajam Sobhani. We sincerely thank him for taking the time to be part of this interview and also wish [the entire team](#) at Latest Thinking all the very best.

(This interview is a part of our interview series of Connecting Scholarly Publishing Experts and Researchers.)

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