

## Peer Review

# Review of: "Navigating the Madness of Academic Publishing"

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Over the last 30 years, hundreds of articles and books have been published decrying the scam that corporate academic publishing is. It never hurts to have yet another one. Ideally, it should add something to the literature that the previous articles did not cover. On balance, I think this article does that, but I think it is possible to improve the amount of information readers may find novel.

For instance, the second paragraph ("You spend months...") mentions all the steps of the research workflow. Readers ought to be informed that publishers have long since captured that workflow and already know what we are working on long before we circulate our manuscript to our co-authors, e.g.:

[https://www.dfg.de/download/pdf/foerderung/programme/lis/datentracking\\_papier\\_en.pdf](https://www.dfg.de/download/pdf/foerderung/programme/lis/datentracking_papier_en.pdf)

<https://doi.org/10.3998/jep.1874>.

<https://www.codyh.com/writing/tracking.html>

[https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Web\\_tracking\\_by\\_academic\\_publishers](https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Web_tracking_by_academic_publishers)

So the madness begins already long before submission.

I think it should also be noted that, of course, academics receive compensation for their work in the form of salaries. Only a few academics are subsistence authors/reviewers. As the author writes: "journals serve as platforms for scientists to share their discoveries with the scientific community". Researchers publish because this is how they communicate with their community, not to pay their bills. The same goes for reviewing; it's part of a researcher's job. I do think it is important to emphasize this, as this is the situation that the parasitic corporations are exploiting. Painting the picture that jobless academics starve because the publishers aren't paying them anything is simply not accurate. In fact, the "hefty APCs" that the publishers charge would only grow if they'd need to add author/reviewer payments to their balance book. So it is far from clear what the emphasis on payments for authors/reviewers would add or help solve.

It's also worth including the fact that, on average, APCs are cheaper per article than subscription fees have historically been – even if one doesn't include the “no-fee” journals. Publishing costs money, even if the source material is provided to the publisher free of charge. The costs (as opposed to the price) of publishing have been covered, e.g., here:

<https://f1000research.com/articles/10-20/v2>

Publishers charge about 5-10 times their publishing costs and use the surplus to spy on the very researchers that provide their material in good faith and pay the publishers on top. This aspect is one of the most crucial insights of the last decade that needs to get circulated more, IMHO. From my personal perspective, it is also quite a lot more insane than the slightly more traditional picture the author paints.

If the positive correlation between IF and price is mentioned, the *negative* correlation between IF and reliability must also be mentioned:

<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/human-neuroscience/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2018.00037/full>

What could be more insane than paying more for less and then being spied upon by tools bought from that overpayment?

The author also seems to miss the point that it cannot be up to individuals to change the system, but up to institutions: the institutions support the current system in a myriad of ways, be it in evaluation procedures or funding decisions. Experts have pointed this out some time ago – see a recent write-up here:

<https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsos.230206>

and politicians, at least in the EU, are recognizing this:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/05/23/council-calls-for-transparent-equitable-and-open-access-to-scholarly-publications/>

and

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3603e219-6a65-11ef-a8ba-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

so researchers are not left alone. Institutions are starting to realize their complicity, and I think readers ought to know that they may have a chance to garner support from their institution as well.

Such institutional solutions split the costs and serve lower-income countries as well. In fact, Latin

American countries have been publishing with such systems for decades (e.g., SciELO, Redalyc, AmeliCA). They deserve a mention whenever the Global South is mentioned in this regard.

Preprints, as the name implies, have been around long before the internet and have never changed the journal landscape. Not even in math/physics, where many fields publish 100% of their work on arxiv. Even in these communities, authors still publish copies in journals, despite nobody reading these zombie-journals as everything is available on arxiv. It is probably prudent to assume that if 'preprints' haven't promoted any change in the last 3-6 decades, it's likely to be futile to expect any change in the next 3-6 decades. See also the institutional solutions mentioned above.

In conclusion, hedging one's bets on yet more journals that are somehow going to transform the existing roughly 50,000 peer-reviewed journals as circumscribed in the penultimate and last paragraph was a hope that lasted until about a decade ago. For a timely article, the latest developments as referenced above ought to be described instead.

## **Declarations**

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.