

Review of: "Publish or perish: time for a rethink?"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Publish or perish: time for a rethink?

I offer here a discussion and I hope an extension to this article, somehow for the same reason than F. Kafka wrote The Great Wall of China.

Reviewer: Christopher Gomez (Professor at Kobe University, Japan).

This paper is a courageous piece that investigates the growing (already large but still feeding further) need to publish rapidly almost any piece of research, and so because of institutional pressures and economic imperatives (careers, etc.). Profiting from this unfortunate productivist trend (after modeling schools after factories, we are now applying the same model to scientific research), open-access journals have embodied the pinnacle of this huge academic factory.

My academic opinion however is that the argument falls short in providing a fair picture of the publishing landscape, which I think is essential. I will try to articulate these views, not so much as a need for correcting the paper, but maybe the possibility for the reader to see that there are other aspects to the problem being presented.

(1) Traditional publishing models have given birth to open-source predatory models

First of all, despite a well-rounded argument, I believe that the authors could have gone further and also look at the traditional models proposed by huge publishing warehouses, and the roles they actually play in the birth and development of the predatory-journal culture, as their role is maybe greater than the open-source system itself.

Indeed, as a monopoly of well-established publishers also control university rankings, and academic publications, and the database that come with those, they have been pushing universities to pressure academics to publish more, so that each university can increase their ranking. If you are an academic reading those lines, how many of you have felt pressure to publish more to climb the career ladder, or to even make sure that you get a tenure or keep your job. And more than quality, quantity is certainly a factor that you may have been considering. But the genius of these large publishers economic model is that at the same time that they are telling universities they need more publication to go up their ranking charts, they are also telling the very same universities that they should pay more for their database services, etc. because there are more papers in those databases...etc. And if it is a brilliant economic model, I am not sure it is the best model for academic institutions, or academics. It is also the reason why fast-publishing "predatory" systems have started to

emerge.

Consequently, I think that it is fair to state that the problem does not stem solely from the open-access publishing system. It is deeply rooted in the traditional publishing system that paved the way for it. As this new system was emerging, so were universities in the so-called “developing nations”, and I have been working with brilliant researchers from those places, and in their cases there is certainly “no money” to access most of the conventional academic work in the pay-per-view system, and it is only naturally that they have turned towards these models. I am not defending the newly developed “fast-food” like journals that offer peer-reviewed papers in a couple of weeks with reviews that are obviously not of the best quality, but I am also convinced that the capitalist system that has favored only one type/class of academics can take about half of the blame as well. And the main publishing warehouses being part of the Western White academic system are keeping the post-colonial culture alive.

(2) Post-colonialism and casual racism: the trigger to new predatory journals

In the trail of the post-colonialism model, I have seen racism and racial profiling against one type of author or another, against the fact that some individuals would certainly be able to write in English because they were from such and such country. Once again, if you, the reader have been in an editorial position, you have undoubtedly encountered such behaviour, even from reviewers. And, this is another reason for the development of those new models that have turned predatory. They are targeting the vulnerable academics, who are set aside for economic reasons, for cultural and geographic reasons; but these vulnerability was generated fully by a dominant class of Western academics. Once again, I don't think that it is fair to incriminate one journal or one publisher, they are just the results of an ill-body academic publishing system. If there is a murder and the murderer is caught, it is not the murder weapon that goes to prison, but the individual who handled it.

(3) Economic battle and monopoly

I also think that we have to be aware of the economic battle at play in front of us. Recently an article that went after the MDPI model (and there are important problems with it, I agree) was suddenly retracted, but the calumny had already spread, and the retraction did not undo the damage. Such accusations, the decision to drop from given database some journals because they belong to MDPI, and the different battles occurring are all underpinned by the large distributors who want to keep their monopoly.

Even university libraries have been pressured not to take on MDPI journals, and academics were given similar instructions. This battle is not occurring because traditional publishers are so concerned with ethical standards, their only concern is with their market share and making sure that they are the only one who can continue feeding on academics and academic institutions (when you think about it, we produce the research financed by public or private funds, we write the papers, we do the reviews, we do the editing, all for free, and the academic publishers are only getting us to even pay for all of it through subscription and more). So, when a new kid on the block comes in and says it will be all free, provided that you pay at publication (arguably much cheaper overall), well the big boys try to get rid of that kid.

So, indeed, we have to be aware of the open-access predatory system, but we also need to keep in mind that the

mainstream publishers are operating a similar model, except that they are targeting different pockets.

Can anyone tell me why the country I reside in are paying for my researcher salary, pay for the research funding (or private companies and entities), but yet the sesame to the research result needs another payment to a foreign entity. Go and buy your favorite bagel down the street, hand over the money and then wait for the vendors to tell you that you only get the smell of the bagel for that price (nothing much, except onions maybe?), and that you need to pay a second time to taste it. Who would accept that?

Conclusion

In conclusion, I think that the article is a good appetizer, the article is opening the lid of this smelly pot, but it only looked at the surface of the viscous liquid inside. We need to stir the pot to see all the bones and carcasses the soup was made of.