

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

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The manuscript 'Publish or perish: time for a rethink?' tackles topical and important aspects of research and publishing ethics. The authors are encouraged to work on the coherence, clarity and accuracy of the narrative to improve their manuscript. In particular, the authors seem to be making the argument that the 'publish or perish' system fosters unethical practices mainly through open access publishing. This somewhat controversial line of reasoning is insufficiently supported.

Some suggested aspects for improvement:

1. Open access publishing is presented as a direct and main consequence of the 'publishing or perish' system, without discussion of other important drivers of the model.
2. Although the authors mention some of the benefits of open access to researchers, the broader societal context that supports the open access movement (and the pressures on publishers to switch to open access), including government and other funder mandates, is not sufficiently explained.
3. Open access publishing is equated with predatory publishing, salami-slicing and irreproducible research. The fact that salami-slicing and the irreproducibility crisis cut across both open access and non-open access journals is not explained or referenced, and there is also no mention of quality open access publishing. Overall, the discussion around the value and quality of open access journals is somewhat confusing and contradictory.
4. The focus of the article could be made clearer. Are the authors discussing medical research, life sciences research, scientific research as a whole?
5. On the question of profit margins for big publishers, are the authors making the point that these have increased with the expansion of a publisher's open access output and corresponding decrease in the proportion of non-open access output? If so, can they provide references?
6. The point about business consolidation as a consequence of open access is valid but not well explained. For example, there is no mention of the challenges of subscription journals face because of the increased pressures from funders towards open access. The relevance of the 'oligopoly' to the main argument of the article is also unclear.
7. Open access is equated with gold open access, without consideration of other open access models.
8. Impact factor is presented as a proxy for quality of research, which is not correct.
9. A paragraph on publisher-led research integrity initiatives puts emphasis on the International Congress on Peer Review and Scientific Publishing, without mentioning other (and perhaps more obvious) research integrity groups and initiatives. For example, the Committee for Publication Ethics (COPE), a reference advisory group in this area, is not mentioned.

10. Plagiarism detection software already exists and is used at many journals.
11. Many references are dated and/or do not support the statements they refer to. Several facts and figures are referenced from secondary sources (commentary or opinion pieces) rather than original sources.

I hope these comments are helpful to the authors should they wish to revise their piece.