



# The Dysfunctional Academic Publishing Ecosystem: The Need for Reform

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**A**cademic publishing is in the midst of an unprecedented crisis. The academic communication network that has served science well since the late nineteenth century is no longer effective. A key problem is the sheer expansion of scientific production. Articles, books, and other knowledge products have expanded, stimulated by the massification of higher education, the increased scope and complexity of the scientific enterprise, and the pressure on the academic profession to publish more. The global rankings, which predominantly stress publications and research, and the actions of the traditional and new—in many cases predatory—publishing industry actors, contribute to this trend.

The internet has revolutionized the production of knowledge, dissemination of research, and collaboration among scholars. Preprints became ubiquitous, and many journals moved from print to online. But, while the internet has democratized access to knowledge, the proliferation of low-quality and predatory journals with no or low standards, like a disease, threatens the health of the academic ecosystem. These journals generally charge authors to publish. This problem is exacerbated by the pressure on academics to publish more, often at the expense of quality.

All of this has created immense problems. Traditional journals, which rely on careful peer review to ensure quality and accuracy, face challenges in finding qualified reviewers. These issues are compounded by the fact that many journals are now owned by Western-based multinational publishers.

While open access has indeed increased the availability of research, it has also created serious problems. These publishers often charge high prices for providing open access, creating profits for themselves and disadvantaging those who cannot pay fees, such as scholars in the Global South, emerging scholars, and those in poorly funded disciplines.

The crisis in academic publishing extends beyond journals to books, which are also facing significant challenges. Print-on-demand and e-books have made it far less costly to produce books, resulting in too many books of poor to mediocre quality. Even high-quality books are not getting the recognition they warrant, as evidenced by the rare reference to books and book chapters in journal articles, even in the humanities and social sciences.

The crisis in publishing also extends to issues of reproducibility and data sharing. Many studies cannot be replicated due to the unavailability of data, code, and other materials. Additionally, citation metrics can be easily gamed and do not adequately capture the societal impact of research.

The combination of the rapid expansion of science and scholarship, the massification of higher education, the rapid growth of technology, the increasing marketization of “knowledge industries,” and the entry of unscrupulous players has created chaos in areas that require high standards of quality. While there are no easy solutions to these challenges, we cannot ignore the fact that all of these problems are potentially contributing to doubts around science. Addressing them will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including researchers, publishers, funders, and policy makers. ▲