

Cheaper and Better: Why Scientific Advancement Demands the Move to Open Access Publishing

Don A. Moore and Elizabeth R. Tenney

Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley, California

Once in a while, someone has the courage to stand up and say something that is obviously true but that, once it has been said out loud, changes things. After someone says the emperor has no clothes, the crowd can react to the absurdity of the situation. Brian A. Nosek and Yoav Bar-Anan's article (this issue) speaks the truth about the archaic and inefficient system of journals and commercial publishers that we academics have been relying on for disseminating our work. Nosek and Bar-Anan describe the process by which commercial publishers exploit our volunteer labor as researchers, reviewers, and editors; claim copyright over our work; delay dissemination of the work; and then charge our own university libraries for access to it. Articulating it helps us realize that this process is absurd, and we can react.

The days of our dependence on commercial publishers should be over. In the current system, universities and research institutions are both supply and demand: supplying resources and financial backing to professors and researchers as they write journal articles and then paying commercial publishers for access to those articles. That business model should be obsolete in a world where researchers can share their work by simply posting it online, costlessly. We, as scientists, have helped keep an archaic, exploitative, and inefficient system alive. Nosek and Bar-Anan have penned a persuasive entreaty for us to throw off the yoke of our exploiters. In doing so, we can also advance a fundamental goal that we all share: the speedy dissemination of scientific knowledge. They have painted a compelling vision of this future in which the most obvious beneficiary is the advancement of our science. The scientific utopia to which Nosek and Bar-Anan invite us would bring us closer to our scientific goals of wide and efficient dissemination, insightful and transparent review, broader and faster influence for our work, and more rapid scientific progress.

What could get in the way of moving toward scientific utopia at full speed? Institutional inertia is probably the largest single reason. If the editorial team at well-respected journals decided to take their status, prestige, and wisdom and move en masse to a new online version of the same journal, they would undoubtedly take the paper submissions with them and effectively cut commercial publishers out of the picture.

But getting the whole group to move requires work and a coordinated effort that few have the incentive to undertake. Our university libraries arguably have more incentive to enact change than editorial teams because libraries are the ones that directly pay the exorbitant subscription fees to journals (e.g., \$1,165 for a 1-year subscription to the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* through Elsevier; the fees add up, and libraries spend millions of dollars on journal subscriptions each year). Indeed, university libraries have begun trying to nudge us toward open-access outlets for our work, but they could do more. As an essential early step, libraries should educate professors and researchers about the consequences of their choices (e.g., perpetuation of the dysfunctional status quo), and they should also work with our professional societies (e.g., the American Psychological Society, the Association for Psychological Science, and the Society for Personality and Social Psychology) to support open access journals. Currently, commercial publishers pay fees to professional societies, and, although the fees are modest, societies have come to depend on them. The fees may, in effect, be buying professional societies' support for the current system. However, the nominal fees commercial publishers pay to professional societies are negligible compared to the fees that libraries pay to the commercial publishers for access to articles. Thus, it may be financially advisable for libraries to help wean professional societies from their addiction to fees from commercial publishers by giving some financial support to the societies. This exchange would make it easier for professional societies to move their flagship journals to open access formats.

Short of such coordinated action to shift to open access outlets, we can take individual action. There are open access journals out there in every field, and when we can submit to them, we should. Publishing in open access journals is also a good bet, because even if those journals aren't the most selective now, their status is likely to increase as more submissions move online. Open access facilitates dissemination, reading, citation, and influence. Some of these journals, such as *Judgment and Decision Making* (<http://journal.sjdm.org/>), do not charge submission or publication fees. Others, like *PLoS*, do, but this ought not to be an insurmountable obstacle to

publishing there, as *PLoS* will waive publication fees for those authors who cannot pay. *PLoS* has structured its publication decisions so that they should not be influenced by the decision to waive publication fees. Perhaps absorbing publication fees is another way that universities or their libraries can help individuals make the switch to open access journals.

There are other ways that we can act individually to move the scientific world toward open access besides submitting our manuscripts to open access journals. Perhaps one of the easiest pertains to our service as editors and reviewers. Most of us find ourselves over-committed, having said yes to too many professional obligations. Providing free labor to commercial publishing houses does provide useful work, but the profits are eagerly claimed by corporations who do not share our scientific values. This realization should empower all of us to say no to such invitations. We should feel free to be choosy about the beneficiaries of our volunteerism and to think carefully before providing our precious time to corporations that often act in opposition to the values that drive scholarly inquiry and the advancement of scientific knowledge.

Another thing we can all do is more regularly use the Social Science Research Network (<http://SSRN.com>) and other online open access venues for posting manuscripts. These venues allow us to share papers freely in advance of formal publication. Posting papers on SSRN carries the obvious benefit that, even if it takes some time before the paper appears in print, we still claim the mantle of “first to find.” There are enough instances of more than one investigator researching the same hypothesis and then racing to get the results published that we see obvious value in the first one being able to stake his or her claim by posting the results

online as soon as they are ready to share, regardless of the length of the review process at the journal to which the work gets submitted. There are some journals that discourage authors from posting to SSRN prior to publication. The American Psychological Association, for instance, threatens that online posting could count as prior publication and constitute grounds for any APA journal to refuse to consider a manuscript. Although this antiscientific policy puts the APA in the company of the most exploitative commercial publishers, we know of no instance in which it has been enforced. The journal *Science* embargoes the dissemination of results prior to publication, but this only applies to accepted papers. Papers, once accepted for publication at *Science*, must be removed from other outlets, and this has not stopped *Science* from publishing papers in physics that have been posted and disseminated through arXiv.

So what are we waiting for? For too long, we have allowed the dissemination of our work to be controlled and exploited by a sovereign who allegedly provides us with benefits, but who, in truth, offers us less and costs us more than the alternative system. The emperor has no clothes. After hearing the truth from Nosek and Bar-Anan, we should balk at the preposterousness of the current system, and we should get to work on starting our own little revolution to change the way that scientific knowledge gets published and disseminated.

Note

Address correspondence to Don A. Moore, Haas School of Business, 545 Student Services #1900, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720. E-mail: dmoore@haas.berkeley.edu