

Scholarly publishing is broken. How do we fix it?

University of Chicago
20th September 2023

My biases

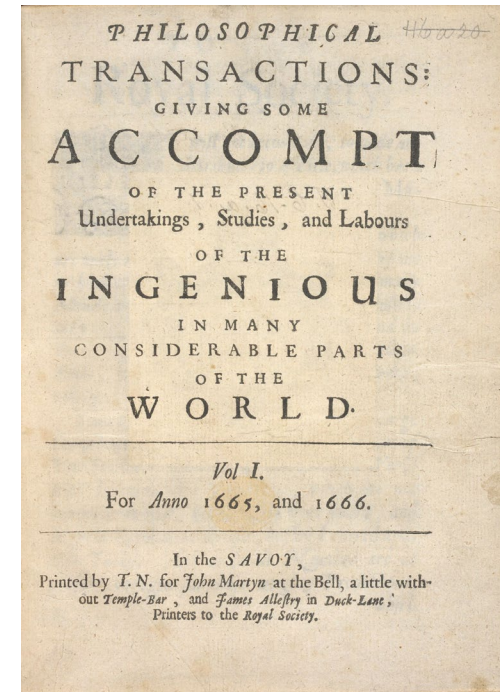
- I view the world of publishing with the eyes of a strategist and a financial analyst, not an academic
- I collaborate with SPARC in the US since 2018, focusing my work on the strategy of the scholarly publishers, the introduction of commercial research data analytics and the future shape of scholarly communications
- I became concerned with the state of scholarly publishing as early as 2012, when I argued that Reed Elsevier would see its value decline because the academic community would not tolerate the inequities and the costs of high-priced subscriptions

Three statements

1. Nobody can predict the future
2. The scholarly publishing system is broken
3. It is vital to know what initiatives should be supported (and why)

1- Nobody can predict the future

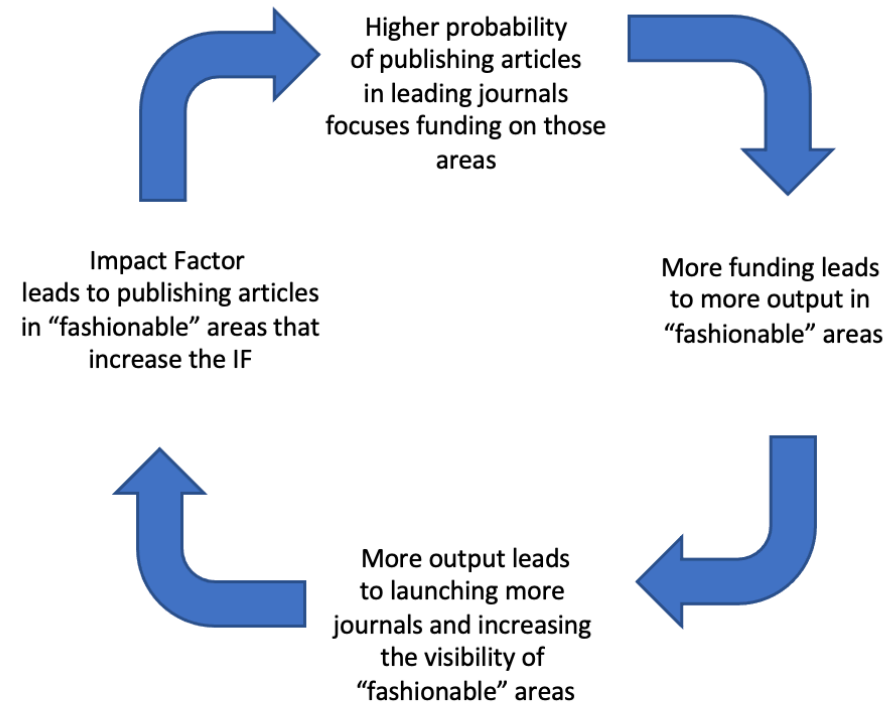
It took 215 years to go from the Gutenberg Bible to the first scholarly journal. Any assumption on what scholarly publishing will look in 200 years appears premature



2 – The system is broken

- a) A self-reinforcing research/publishing cycle that disfavors historically marginalized communities
- b) A set of terms and conditions that hinders the resolution of crises and raises major ethical questions
- c) The deployment and use of metrics and algorithms that distort academic life
- d) The conflict of interest between publishing and assessing research

a. A self-reinforcing research/publishing cycle that disfavors historically marginalized communities



b. A set of terms and conditions that hinders addressing crises and raises major ethical questions

- COVID-19 has shown that, in an emergency, the system must be uprooted altogether. Restrictive licenses, lack of access to backfiles with relevant foundational knowledge, high APCs, restrictions on machine reading, and long publication queues are incompatible with advancing and sharing knowledge.
- Global emergencies are everywhere, from climate change to loss of biodiversity
- Other diseases represent a daily emergency for individual and communities around the world.

c. The deployment and use of metrics and algorithms that distort academic life

- There is a well-known replication crisis, as journals and authors strive to publish eye-catching findings. This phenomena drives a wide array of deviant behavior. It also drives research spending to explore blind alleys.
- University rankings also have pernicious effects on the policies of even some of the best funded and/or most prestigious academic institutions in the world

d. The conflict of interest between publishing and assessing research

- Publishers that also assess research put authors in an untenable position, since they must fear the consequences of publishing their work elsewhere
- Assessment of research seeps into every facet of academic life in inscrutable ways, ranging from decisions on funding to hiring and promotion.

One word in defense of publishers?

- Many of the issues that affect publishers have roots in mechanisms that plague the academic community
- Publishers can legitimately claim that senior academic leaders and faculty are involved in many of the decisions that lead to the issues outlined earlier.
- Ultimately, however, publishers are responsible for the quality of their products and for the impact of their activities. Participating in (and profiting from) the activity of a “academic-industrial complex” is a choice.

3. Four proposed principles – identified with my two co-authors

Amy Brand – Director of the MIT Press



Jean-Claude Guedon – Professeur Honoraire,
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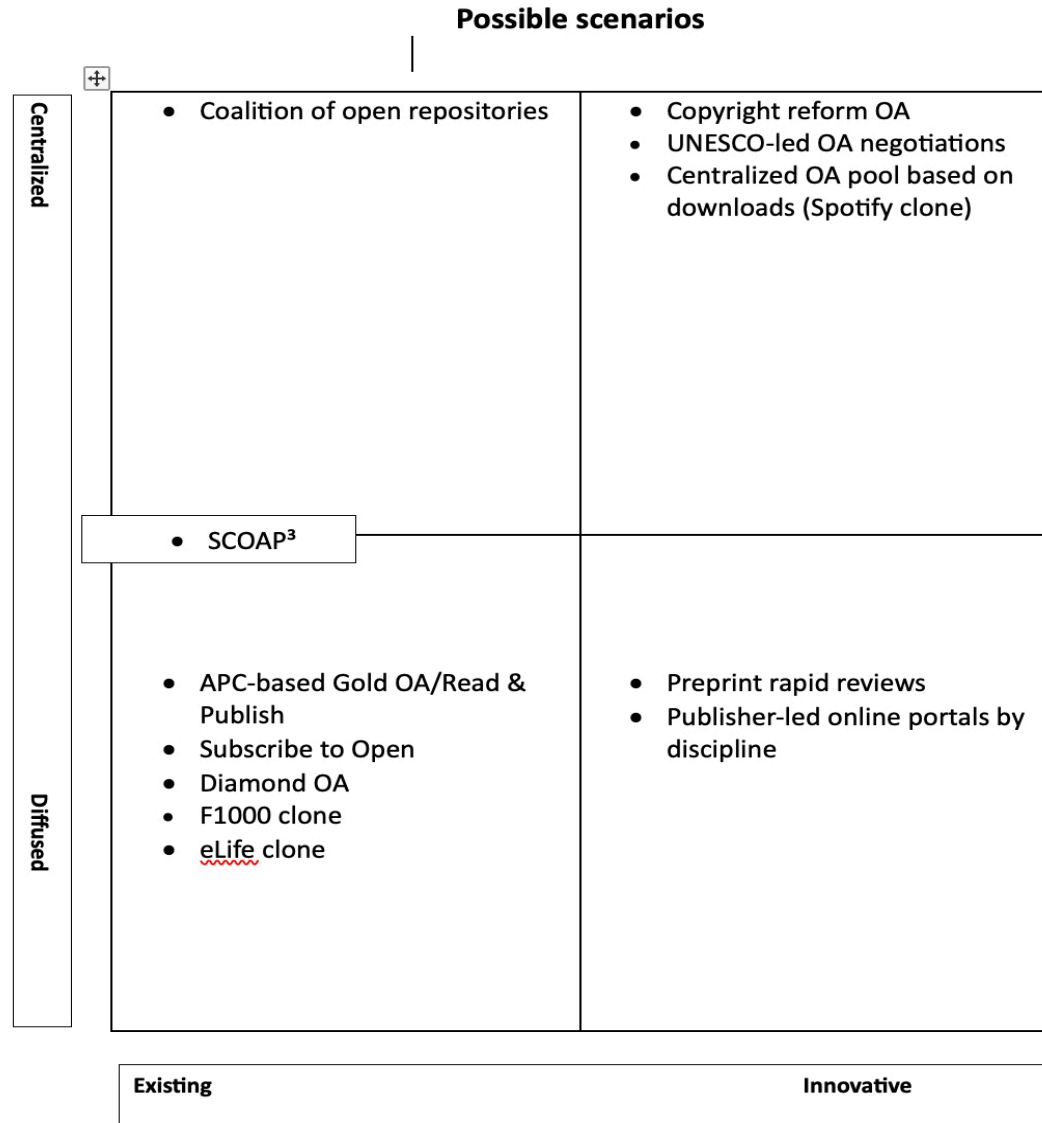
Four proposed principles

- **(1) The model provides that registration, certification, dissemination and preservation are equitably available to all research contributions deemed to be of sufficient quality.**
- **(2) The model distinguishes certification from assessment and supports the “record of versions” construct.**
- **(3) The model enables research agendas to be driven by global or regional relevance rather than journal visibility.**
- **(4) The model allows equitable open access to research results for the purposes of reading, mining, and re-use without undermining the sustainability of mission-aligned OA publishing enterprises.**

Some scholarly communications models that fit with the proposed principles already exist...

- Diamond OA
- Subscribe to Open
- Preprint Rapid Reviews
- Open Repositories

How to think about feasibility



In summary

- The current model is failing across multiple dimensions (effectiveness, equity, transparency, societal support, etc.)
- However, there are many innovative models aimed at correcting these shortcomings
- It is impossible to predict which one/s will succeed, but experimentation should be encouraged
- It is possible to “screen” both existing and new models by observing how they fit a set of agreed-upon principles
- Feasibility matters