
Description

Who Can Forecast the End?

When Amazon introduced its first electronic book reader (e-Reader), the Kindle, in 2007, the reaction from the general public was overwhelmingly positive. The first shipment sold out within hours, and the Kindle remained out of stock for several months thereafter.

At a selling price of \$400 for 250MB of memory, compared to 4GB for only \$59 in 2015, the device attracted primarily early adopters when it first launched, but its impact on the publishing industry was an interesting mix of both cautious optimism and resentment.

On the one hand, ease of use implied increased readership of books, but on the other hand, traditionalists decried the imminent end of the printed book that eight years on, does not appear to be happening.

Life After Print

Advancements in digital publishing technology, and the arrival of [open access journals](#) has produced the same dour forecast for printed academic journals. The days of spending hours in the campus library researching back issues of academic and professional society journals are far behind us now. Student and graduate researchers have quickly adapted to the availability of journal databases on their laptops or tablet anywhere they can find a Wi-Fi signal.

Intellectual Gate-keeping

Does this change in expectations sound the death knell for print journals? If you consider the [academic publishing](#) model, and the apparent intransigence of journal “prestige,” (as indicated by the almighty [Journal Impact Factor](#)), print journals appear to be very much in control of their own destiny.

Open Access online journals may be making clear inroads into changing the future direction of [academic publishing](#), but print journals still control their niche specialty. It doesn't really matter if your specialty is left-handed lab equipment or underwater basket weaving, as long as your journal continues to rank #1, it will be the de facto choice to which young researchers will submit their papers.

As such, the journal editor and editorial board can continue to operate a subscription pay wall and remain as a printed journal for as long as they hold that #1 ranking.

But it's a Different Economic Model That Works

Prognostications about the death of printed books were based on customer demand for choice and the attraction of convenience. Those dynamics don't apply in the same way for the academic publishing industry.

Academic journals get their content submitted for free by eager researchers, they reserve the right to reject as much as 90% of those submissions based on the work of unpaid peer reviewers, and then the free content is packaged and sold back to other researchers, academic libraries, and institutions. With that type of economic model, journals can keep printing their editions for a long while.

Category

1. Publishing Research
2. Selecting Journals

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