



Description

Academic publishing is still largely the domain of traditional academic journals. Academics understand the impact of their work when published in an established and prestigious peer-reviewed journal. It means esteem for the work, for them, and for the universities they represent. It can also mean progress along the pathway to tenure or grant funding or a desired position within the university. Academic journals still command a great deal of influence. However, open access publishing (OA) is gathering steam and moving into a sphere of influence, which is no passing phase. Much like the movement to digital, wireless, or online communication, this movement is not going to derail or reverse. Academics want to preserve the legitimacy provided by academic journals while making publishing more accessible and collaboration more authentic. [SocArXiv](#), focused mainly in the fields of sociology and social sciences, is the latest manifestation of this movement.

New Players in the Field

The [Center for Open Science](#) (COS) is at the heart of new technology and methodology in open access publishing. Founded in 2013, COS is a non-profit technology company *with a mission to increase openness, integrity, and reproducibility of scientific research*. COS built the platform Open Science Framework (OSF) which later helped in establishing SocArXiv. OSF *is a web application that connects and supports the research workflow. It enables scientists to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their research*. Researchers use the OSF to collaborate, document, archive, share, and register research projects, materials, and data.

“OSF | *Preprints*” is the COS preprints service that utilizes OSF. SocArXiv is the latest version of OSF | *Preprints*, which also includes PsyArXiv and engrXiv for psychology and engineering, respectively. OSF | *Preprints* also uses [SHARE](#) to link with other preprint service providers in order to create an even more expansive shared database. SHARE is the result of a partnership between the [Association of Research Libraries](#) (ARL) and the COS.

One can see that the COS has been a true catalyst for change in the industry. Philip Cohen, the director of SocArXiv, is hoping that it will be a sea change. He, and other academics like him, would like to see academic research move beyond the confines of traditional publishing. In an ideal situation, researchers would be able to share, comment, and collaborate on one another’s work. All this would make the work better and create a truly interactive community of readers, authors, and publishers.

Although SocArXiv is still in its Beta stage, >600 papers have been deposited and downloaded over 10,000 times.

Ideological Struggle

The old vs. the new method is a never-ending tale. In any arena, resistance to change generally comes down to power and money. While academic publishing has a lucrative business model, academic scholars became primarily interested in acquiring power over their works and the means of its publications.

Academic journals and for-profit publishers are concerned about losing both their influence in the academic world and the source of their revenue. As commercial books and magazines publishers have adapted to the digital age, academic publishers will need to adapt to this change. However, this adaptation will have to encompass more than just simply moving their journals to an online format. Scholars are looking to rework the process of academic publishing from beginning to end.

In the [blog](#) written by Richard Poynder, Philip Cohen is quoted as saying, “In the end, I believe we need to replace the current journal system. I hope SocArXiv helps us move in that direction.” Poynder comments that he hopes SocArXiv will disrupt the traditional system, and help to eventually supplant it. Technology, particularly as embodied by the OSF, seems to be the pivotal component of this disruption and replacement.

Technology, Funding, and Power

OA publishing aims to remove the limitations of traditional academic journals such as paywalls, restricted access, and a small group governing a large community. The technological advances represented by the OSF are impressive means to do this. Citation metrics, one of the key elements of academic [journal publication](#) allows authors, their supporting institutions, and journals to keep track of how many times their works receive citations elsewhere. The more citations an article has, the better for all. Because this function is now available in an open format, traditional academic journals can no longer make proprietary claims regarding citations.

The next step is procuring funding for this new methodology. Currently, SocArXiv, through the University of Maryland, has received grant money from OSF and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Each of these societies contributed \$50,000 which is encouraging to SocArXiv stakeholders.

Universities seem to hold the key in the area of funding. Significant portions of departmental budgets become devoted to journal subscriptions and society memberships because it is important for faculty to be active members in their fields. Convincing universities that those dollars would be better spent on OA publishing and the technology that powers it will ensure the long-term success of platforms such as SocArXiv and other repositories like it.

As much as universities hold the power to affect change, traditional academic journals will not willingly give up the power they have over academic publishing. They will have to find a way either to co-exist or somehow join forces with OA publishing if they want to take part in this future. Ultimately, scientists and scholars believe they should hold the power when it comes to the development and publication of their work, as this is in the best interest of what really matters—the work itself.

References

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