

The Infamous Events That Made Academia Headlines in 2017: (Part 1)

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The academic and research community is not immune to turbulence. However, the year 2017 has witnessed an unusually large number of ups and downs in research and academia. These have adversely affected the relationship between researchers and publishers. There have been a series of lawsuits, boycotts, and resignations throughout the year. As the year comes to an end, let us look back at some of the infamous events that made the academia headlines in 2017.

Lawsuits and Injunction against Sci-Hub

Sci-Hub is the so-called “Piratebay of Science”. It suffered a tremendous blow when it [lost against Elsevier](#) and the American Chemical Society (ACS), with the court ordering Sci-Hub to pay millions in damages. ACS, one of the most vocal opponents of Sci-Hub, stated that it would go after entities that directly link users to the website. However,

it stated that [it won't go after search engines and internet service providers \(ISPs\)](#). The U.S. government has decided not to block search engines and ISPs from accessing Sci-Hub, at least for the time being. The injunction applies to “any person or entity in privity with Sci-Hub and with notice of injunction.” The reason behind this is that the order specifically states that only search engines and ISPs “in active participation” with Sci-Hub be asked to block the sites. Google and Comcast were not deemed to be part of this group.

In a twist, however, [U.S. District Judge Leonie Brinkema](#) issued a final decision that was a clear triumph for ACS. ACS received the maximum statutory damages of \$4.8 million, as well as the ruling of permanent injunction. This permanent injunction includes hosting companies, domain name registrars, search engines, and ISPs. The injunction means that ISPs such as Comcast and Google can be requested to block users from accessing Sci-Hub. This is a big deal, because the injunction would also affect a lot of internet services.

As a result, at least four of Sci-hub's domains (sci-hub.cc, sci-hub.io, sci-hub.ac, and sci-hub.bz) have been [permanently shut down](#) since November this year. However, there are some [Twitter users](#) who are using the domains of Sci-Hub that still remain active.

ISPs and Users: What do They Say?

It is clear that the parties affected, both ISPs and users, are [not happy with the injunction](#). Google and Comcast are not happy with the injunction. The [Computer and Communications Industry Association \(CCIA\)](#) already tried to change the contents of the new injunction, but they failed. The court did not even hear its plea. It is very likely that organizations such as the CCIA would go ahead and protest against the injunction.

While Google and Comcast may not be able to provide access to Sci-Hub, users are not entirely sure of this new development. In addition, users are likely to be confused about the small changes in the injunction, which have a ripple effect on internet usage. Another thing to worry about is whether Google and Comcast will be required to make changes to net neutrality, and this is worrisome for users. The academic community has to wait patiently to see where this injunction on Sci-Hub leads to, in the coming year.

German Universities Lose Access to Elsevier Journals

Debates on access to educational materials have existed long before the dispute between [German universities and Elsevier](#) began. The universities have been protesting against the high price they must pay to access academic articles. The charges paid can be as high as \$1,000 per year and sometimes, even more if more journals need to be accessed. Paying high prices for article access has been an inconvenience to academics for decades. As a result, many universities are [canceling their contracts](#) with Elsevier in protest. The dispute between Elsevier and German universities took a bitter turn when the negotiations failed. Industry experts believe that this may eventually lead to about 200 German universities losing access to Elsevier journals.

The consortium, [Projekt DEAL, that began](#) in 2016, had the goal of creating national licensing agreements with all major academic research publishers, including Elsevier. While discussions with other publishers succeeded, negotiations with Elsevier have failed. Despite the continuing problems in negotiation, support for open access is not limited to Germany. Thousands of [Finnish scientists](#) have voiced their support and have boycotted Elsevier since November 2016.

Possible Outcomes and their Effects

If negotiations with Elsevier remain stalled, German universities would likely lose most of their journal access. This probably would not have [an immediate global effect](#). Failing to resolve this debate, however, means that a similar situation would arise again in the future. Allowing the current system of publication to continue may only postpone further disputes.

One possible outcome is a win for Elsevier, affirming its contracts and prices for article and journal access. An outcome like this could strengthen the [academic publishing](#) industry, greatly increasing their profits. On the other hand, paying a high price for academic literature could make it more difficult for many people to access it. Reducing access to the literature would, no doubt, stifle scientific or academic innovation.

Another outcome could be [a win for the German universities](#). This would lead to a reduction in cost to access journals, and a lesser stringency of contracts. This would be unfavorable for the academic publishing industry, as it relies mostly on the income from contracts. However, for researchers, it may indeed create new publishing strategies. Open access to journals also has the potential to improve scientific literacy, which is of particular interest to scientists. No matter how this dispute ends, everyone involved may face a new reality in academic publishing.

These are some of the infamous events in academia in 2017 that made it to the headlines. Stay tuned for some more such events in the next article of this series!

Are you using any of the domains of Sci-Hub? What is your opinion on the dispute between German Universities and Elsevier journals? Please share your thoughts with us in the comments section below.

Cite this article

Enago Academy, The Infamous Events That Made Academia Headlines in 2017: (Part 1). Enago Academy. 2017/12/28. <https://www.enago.com/academy/the-infamous-events-that-made-academia-headlines-in-2017-part-1/>