Cite or Site? The current view of what constitutes 'academic publishing' is too limited. Our published work must become truly public.

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Producing papers for a growing number of journals with an ever shrinking audience risks diminishing the potential of the impact of academic work. **Pat Lockley** *and* **Mark Carrigan** *consider the incentives of the current system of academic publishing and call for a new definition.*

Cite or site? Citation, or the seeking of capital via academic publishing, is obviously unavoidable for anyone involved in academic research while 'site' – as in to publish content via social media, would perhaps seem a marginal alternative, perhaps an indulgence, when considered in terms of the intense structural pressures all researchers are under to 'publish or perish'. After all, isn't it basically a form of self-publishing, a shiny technological alternative to the vanity presses of old?

Sites, which we use as a synonym for academics utilising social alternatives to journals for research dissemination, create the possibility of engaging more widely, as well as more productively, with broader audiences. However the differences between social media and 'traditional' publishing are both quantitative and qualitative. The phrase "academic publishing" now defines how an academic is published, not how an academic could publish. Antipathy towards the idea of online dissemination within academia comes from the assumption, perhaps unacknowledged, that the former impacts negatively on the latter: that the capacity to reach so many more people through alternative publishing risks the academic value of the material being published, as if 'publishing' is but a single, individual action, and not a series of different, distinct events.

One such difference is between writing for an academic audience and for a general audience. Some of the features of academic writing deemed to be negative, such an excessive reliance on technical jargon are, at least in part, a reflection of the properties of their traditional medium. If you find yourself writing for a renowned high-impact journal, only the most intellectually self-confident, particularly when the author is a grad student or post-doc, would not feel any temptation to throw in a bit of additional academic jargon as a means to, consciously or otherwise, foreground the technical sophistication and conceptual rigor of their argumentation. If you find yourself writing for a relatively specialised journal, perhaps in a very narrow field, it's natural to assume a great deal of knowledge (of theoretical perspectives, historical disputes, methodological controversies etc) because these are so personally familiar and, given the relatively niche interests of such a journal, chances are they will be to other readers.

However, some journals explicitly ask that such writing be avoided as part of their editorial policies such, as for instance, the British Sociological Association's flagship journal, 'Sociology', which states that "jargon or unnecessary technical language should be avoided, as should the use of abbreviations". Presumably such policies are motivated by a desire, at least in part, to open up the journal to a wider readership. Yet such policies run up against the brute empirical fact that, given what an academic journal is in the present setting, no one outside of academic sociology is likely to have even heard of the journal, let alone chosen to read it.

Acknowledging this brute fact isn't an anti-intellectual attack on long-standing practices within the academy. Nor does it entail the suggestion that traditional mediums of academic publishing, as well as traditional forms of academic expression, lack value. Nothing could be further from the truth. But at present the academy suffers from a pervasive crisis of over-production: ever more intellectual energy goes into

producing papers for an ever wide array of journals which even fewer people read. In doing so, academic publishing is tending to inverse economies of scale. Publishing in this sense tends towards the opposite of it's own meaning ('to make public') but also into smaller and smaller communities where impact becomes ever diminshed.

The social structures of both the modern university and of commercial publishing have combined to crystalise a structure of perverse incentives. The need to publish, the need to differentiate oneself and raise one's profile – ultimately the need to make oneself 'valuable' in terms of the ludicrously narrow quantitative auditing of the REF – have led us to objectively perpetuate, though subjectively disavow, a system which eviscerates academic values (with 'salami slicing' being perhaps the most egregious ensuing practice).

We need to have an ongoing and honest conversation about what academic publishing is, what it could be and what it should be. At present, academic publishing remains in meaning being published in a journal, and as such is not a meaning to which the word academic confers only the source of the content, and possibly the nature of the potential consumer. Within the phrase is no inference, or limitation of the platforms used or usable. So how did its meaning become so limited and/or specific, and how can those limitations be overcome?

Pat Lockely and Mark Carrigan will write again shortly on the changing context within which academic research takes place, the structural pressures researchers are subject to and the cultural environment which stands ready to receive the products of that research.

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