

Setting the Record Straight on Scholarly Journals

The Partnership for Research Integrity in Science and Medicine (PRISM) is committed to challenging key misconceptions about scholarly publishing as put forth by those who simply do not know the facts. Below are a few:

Myth 1: American consumers have a right to free access to articles their tax dollars fund.

Fact

American taxpayers do not fund peer reviewed research articles; they fund some of the research that is used in those articles. Institutions that fund research are encouraged to make research results available to the public. However, journals provide something else - a published journal article that has undergone a rigorous process of selection and peer review to ensure that research results are validated before they are disseminated and preserved for use by other scientists and the public. Subscription-based journals -- not the taxpayer -- fund the peer review process and the substantial costs associated with preparing, distributing, and preserving peer reviewed material.

Myth 2: Peer review costs publishers nothing - referees do not charge for their work.

Fact

Scholarly publishing involves far more than volunteer referees and printing. Non-profit and commercial publishers invest hundreds of millions of dollars every year managing and coordinating the work of millions of authors, editors and reviewers, and vetting millions of submissions through an independent peer review process. Publishers then also assume the responsibility and costs associated with bringing peer reviewed articles to the attention of other scientists and the news media, including the editorial staff that coordinates multiple revisions, extensive proofreading, layout, design, publishing, distributing and archiving of articles.

Myth 3: Non-profit and commercial journals that are subscription-based hinder science and research.

Fact

Scientists rely on scholarly journals to produce and preserve authoritative, trustworthy peer-reviewed information which serves as the foundation for current and future research. Subscription-based journals are the foundation of a system of scientific publishing that has made more scientific, technical and medical (STM) information available to more researchers at lower cost than ever before.

- 90% of researchers say they have sufficient access to the STM journals that they need. Access to journal content ranks very low on their list of concerns.
- More than 70% of researchers say that access to global journals is better than it was just five years ago.
- Scientists now read 25% more articles per year from almost twice as many journals and they do so using a smaller percentage of their time.

Myth 4: Journal publishers are opposed to technological progress in the publishing industry.

Fact

Many non-profit and commercial journals use both print and Internet media to distribute their peer-reviewed articles. Private sector publishers invested millions of dollars in developing and launching cutting-edge technology and around-the-clock maintenance to make their articles available world wide via the Internet. Publishers are working successfully with research funders,

patient groups, international organizations, and other to make information even more widely available online.

- Publishers make journal articles available online at no cost in 100 least developed countries through programs like [HINARI](#), [AGORA](#) and [OARE](#).
- Publishers encourage authors and their funders to post research results and manuscripts online.
- The public has unlimited walk-in access to the online databases and materials subscribed to by a library.
- Publishers have partnered with patient organizations to provide scientific information to the public through [PatientINFORM](#).

Myth 5: Publishers charge exorbitant subscription fees for their journals.

Fact

Researchers have more access to more journal content at lower prices than ever before. Increases in prices largely reflect the growth in the volume of scientific research, which doubles every 13 years. Even with this growth in the volume of journal content, increases in subscription fees over the past five years have been rather modest, particularly compared with increases in university tuition and university endowments, and the industry's investments in electronic distribution have led to a major decline in the cost per article downloaded. One publisher has reduced by five fold the per-article consumer cost of peer reviewed articles since 1999.

Myth 6: Efforts that force scholarly journals to surrender their peer reviewed work to the federal government are critically important to expanding access to medical research findings for patients.

Fact

Most scientific journal articles are not helpful to patients looking to find information about diseases. Publishers have developed far better ways to provide access to patients such as PatientINFORM. PatientINFORM provides summaries of disease-specific research articles and puts them in a context that patients can use. If a patient wants to read the article itself, regardless whether it is federally or privately funded, they can do so at no cost.

Myth 7: Congress needs to act to "fix" the scientific journal publishing system.

Fact

Journal publishers respond to the changing needs of users, scientists and the public without prompting from Congress. A "one-size-fits-all" approach to scientific publishing ignores the complexity and variety of business models that already exists. Publishers embrace and encourage the various business models that exist within the market. Intervention from Congress would interfere with an already well-functioning and adaptable system.

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