



Editorial

Are paper print scientific journals doomed?



Editor

Our paper print journal is still developing very well. We have maintained a strong impact factor, currently 1.363, increasing submission numbers resulting in a rejection rate around 70%, and even increasing advertisement activities. You, as a reader might assess the quality of the content yourself. When I assess this myself as reader and even when I respect my bias as editor-in-chief, I see a positive development regarding quality of the content. At the same time, I receive daily information about new journals that are mainly available only online. These journals operate with very slim and flexible organizational structures and they sometimes do not even have a publisher as such.

This calls into question why we put so much effort in generating this paper print journal that you're holding in your hand right now. For 2020, we are even planning eight issues instead of six and with increasing page numbers (1000 instead of 600 to date). Is this the correct way? Do we need hardcopies at all? Would it not be much easier and much more appropriate to operate just online? This is something that you as a reader and also as EFAS member, should assess yourself. Most readers I speak to do appreciate holding a real paper printout journal they like to read it like that, not just online, they even like to store it in their place of work. We cannot be sure how this will be with future generations of foot and ankle surgeons, but I feel that at the moment we are still doing the correct thing by providing a journal printed on paper and sent by mail, instead of just online content sent by email.

There will be a transition away from paper print and I am aware of the advantages like including video material, live links, and more sophisticated possibilities for advertisements. Also, the high cost and disadvantages of paper print including paper consumption, CO2 producing shipping, and waste production. In the end, we have to take care for our patients, ourselves and our environment. Still, I don't believe that 1000 printed pages shipped in 8 issues for one foot and ankle surgeon is too much, at least when comparing with other paper printed content. This discussion is of course not limited to our journal.

1. Who can forecast the end of paper printed scientific journals?

When Amazon introduced its first electronic book reader (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 Euro for 250MB of memory for the 1st generation, compared to 32GB for 200 Euro in 2019 for the 10th generation, 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 and journals, but on the other hand, traditionalists decried the imminent end of the printed journal or book that eight years on, does not appear to be happening. 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.

2. Intellectual gate-keeping

Does this change in expectations sound the death knell for print scientific 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 high. 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 high ranking.

3. Different economic models for online journals

Prognostications about the death of printed books and journals 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.

In conclusion, we should enjoy having a real paper foot and ankle journal as long as we can, and the editorial team and the

publisher will do their best so that this will not end in an unjustified waste of paper.

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