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TRADITIONAL PAPER JOURNALS ARE ON THEIR LAST LEGS

by Saskia Woutersen-Windhouwer

Journals that are only available in paper form, and not digitally, stand a very good chance of falling outside the process of scientific research. After all, most researchers (and teaching faculty) only look for information on the Internet. If it's not available in digital form, it's outside their field of view. That's something you can establish by experience: papers published after 1988 are much more frequently cited than papers published before 1988. There really is a distinct transition after 1988.

So why is that? It's because nearly everybody searches for publications through Web of Science, and many universities only have access to Web of Science starting with the year 1988! So eventually, journals that are not searchable online will be rarely consulted. You can compare it to the digitalization in the music industry: who in the world listens to vinyl records these days? And where would you even buy them? The paper journal is the vinyl record of the science sector: it has long been the most used information carrier and is still nice as a curiosity, but has by now become impractical and is therefore no longer being used.

THE PAPER JOURNAL IS THE VINYL RECORD OF THE SCIENCE SECTOR

The journal in its traditional form is on its last legs. The way it works right now, the publication process is slow and costly. Eventually, there will have to be a different way of publishing, possibly with an evaluation afterwards, or something that uses a different model. Alternatives can be found in nano publications, which only publish concepts. Or "liquid" publications, which can be continuously adjusted and further developed, even after publication and by authors other than the original ones – anyone may contribute.

In our digital world, paper has become too limiting for use in communications. These days, research often happens digitally. This yields digital materials, such as movies, software, and so on. Those types of results can only be communicated digitally. An

example of this is the Journal of Visualized Experiments. JoVE is a peer-reviewed video journal of high caliber, as it is indexed in the PubMed database.

The concept of subscriptions also goes back to the "paper age", and is completely outdated. Publishers need to look for alternate models that are in tune with the digital age, such as open access. There are no practical objections: different publishing models already exist and are extensively used – for example, through an open access publisher such as PLoS (highly regarded among biologists), and through online archives such as ArXiv (the long-time standard among physicists). Both are freely accessible to anyone!

These days, an estimated 20 percent of research is published open access, and the number of open access publications is growing much faster than the number of toll-access publications. NWO and the universities are promoting open access in the Netherlands. In the United States, MIT, Harvard, Stanford, and the NIH require that their researchers publish open access. Also notable is the fact that, if they can't get access through a publisher, many students and researchers often try through Google (Scholar). Increasingly, you can find published papers on the Web site of one of the authors or elsewhere. Social software also plays a growing role in accessibility. For example, young researchers may request papers from colleagues via Facebook, or have access through Mendeley. Although this is not officially considered open access, one way or another everyone makes sure to get free access.



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<http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/s.windhouwer>

<http://www.plosone.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pone.0011273>