





The Citation Economy as a Site of Extraction for Surveillance Publishing

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Article abstract

A few companies with dominance over academic publishing have been able to capture and use surplus value created through the publishing lifecycle. This extraction—of academic labour, of data, of information—is reinvested into their proprietary data analytics products. This is both literally, as the data collected by the publishing side can be incorporated into data analytics algorithms, and financially, as the profit margins of these academic publishing arms are astonishingly high. Crucially, these profits have been used to expand these companies' portfolios of extractive data services across industries as academic publishers transition from information vendors to technology-driven data brokers. By providing their labour directly (as editors, reviewers, etc.) or indirectly (as authors) to these companies, scholars are complicit in data collection and analysis used for everything from advertising to law enforcement. This data is sold back to universities who use it to evaluate and surveil the publishing practices of their employees, using proprietary metrics and methods that do not align with principles of academic freedom.

This paper provides an overview of this landscape, concluding with implications and recommendations for the scholars and librarians ensnared in it. It also includes a mini-zine we plan to distribute to help contextualize academics' roles in the citation economy and the ethical implications for their work.



The Citation Economy as a Site of Extraction for Surveillance Publishing

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ABSTRACT

A few companies with dominance over academic publishing have been able to capture and use surplus value created through the publishing lifecycle. This extraction—of academic labour, of data, of information—is reinvested into their proprietary data analytics products. This is both literally, as the data collected by the publishing side can be incorporated into data analytics algorithms, and financially, as the profit margins of these academic publishing arms are astonishingly high. Crucially, these profits have been used to expand these companies' portfolios of extractive data services across industries as academic publishers transition from information vendors to technology-driven data brokers. By providing their labour directly (as editors, reviewers, etc.) or indirectly (as authors) to these companies, scholars are complicit in data collection and analysis used for everything from advertising to law enforcement. This data is sold back to universities who use it to evaluate and surveil the publishing practices of their employees, using proprietary metrics and methods that do not align with principles of academic freedom.

This paper provides an overview of this landscape, concluding with implications and recommendations for the scholars and librarians ensnared in it. It also includes a mini-zine we plan to distribute to help contextualize academics' roles in the citation economy and the ethical implications for their work.

Keywords: *citation economy · data analytics · scholarly publishing · surveillance*

RÉSUMÉ

Quelques entreprises qui dominent l'édition académique ont été en mesure de capturer et d'utiliser la plus-value créée tout au long du cycle de vie de l'édition. Cette extraction — de travail académique, de données, d'informations — est réinvestie dans leurs produits brevetés d'analyse de données. C'est à la fois littéralement, car les données collectées par l'édition peuvent être incorporées dans des algorithmes d'analyse de données, et financièrement, car les marges bénéficiaires de ces branches d'édition académique sont étonnamment élevées. De manière cruciale, ces bénéfices ont été utilisés pour élargir les portefeuilles de services de données extractives de ces sociétés dans tous les secteurs, à mesure que les éditeurs académiques passent de vendeurs d'informations aux courtiers en données axés sur la technologie. En fournissant leur travail directement (en tant que rédactrices, auteurs, réviseur.e.s, etc.) ou indirectement (en tant qu'auteur.e.s) à ces entreprises, les chercheuses.eurs sont complices de la collecte et de l'analyse de données utilisées pour tout et par tous, des agences publicitaires aux forces de l'ordre. Ces données sont revendues aux universités qui les utilisent pour évaluer et surveiller les pratiques de publication de leurs employé.e.s, en utilisant des mesures et des méthodes brevetés qui ne correspondent pas aux principes de la liberté académique.

Cet article donne un aperçu de ce paysage, concluant par des implications et des recommandations pour les universitaires et les bibliothécaires qui y sont piégé.e.s. Il comprend également un mini-zine que nous prévoyons distribuer pour aider à contextualiser les rôles des universitaires dans l'économie de la citation et les implications éthiques de leur travail.

Mots-clés : *analyse de données · économie des citations · édition savante · surveillance*

IN 2017, Brenda Avelica's father, Rómulo Avelica, was detained by ICE when he was driving his two youngest daughters to school. Rómulo had been in the US for 25 years, one year longer than Brenda had been alive, and he was only detained due to minor misdemeanor convictions. Her sister, Fatima, made a video of his detainment, which went viral on the internet.

This story gained the attention of the world because of the viral video, but there are thousands upon thousands of similar stories of families ripped apart by the regressive immigration enforcement program in the US (Avelica 2017). It is easy to place blame on the US government and on the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents who abducts parents and throw them in cages (Holcombe, Gallagher, and Catherine E. Shoichet 2019).¹ ICE, however, does not act alone. The

1. ICE is one of the United States Department of Homeland Security's agencies, which delivers its abductees to Customs and Border Protection, an agency that has an established pattern of subjecting children to incarceration, torture, and death (Acevedo 2019).

same companies that collect and sell data gleaned from migrant flows (Lamdan 2022) also collect and sell academic knowledge and data, for example, RELX, via its subsidiaries LexisNexis and Elsevier. Sarah Lamdan's foundational book *Data Cartels* clearly identifies the relationships between publishing companies and the surveillance arms of the carceral state:

RELX and Thomson Reuters provide the data dossiers that match faces and cell phones to names, addresses, and associates. The companies give law enforcement agencies the informational links that connect someone's DNA to their address, their address to their workplace, their workplace to their work associates, et cetera. (Lamdan 2022, 23)

While the outcomes of incarceration and physical violence may seem very far apart from those of research assessment and faculty profiles, we argue that the use of our own data against us is a common thread. The commodification of data obtained through surveillance by sophisticated firms like RELX mean that the profile, as the automated sorting of information from pervasive surveillance into a seemingly authoritative representation of an individual, whether it be of a migrant, a consumer, or a scientist, possesses an extraordinary power and commercial value, even if the reasoning and data behind the systems that produce these representations are often opaque, obscured, riddled with error and omission, unaccountable, or unknowable (Diakopoulos 2016; Ananny and Crawford 2018).

Information as a commodity derives its value from its abilities to provide advantage and to be categorized and combined to generate new knowledge (Murakami Wood 2009). The current intensification and private ordering of data flows shouldn't allow us to forget that surveillance has always been an essential aspect of capitalist society; without it, there is no modernity. The primitive accumulation by way of dispossession and mass murder that serves as the foundation for the western settler-colonial political project demands that colonized people and other victims of imperial conquest continue to be monitored in order for colonies to sustain themselves (Sa'di 2012). The ongoing expansion of this colonial gaze is also required to quell forms of resistance and insurgency that threaten profits sustained through extraction. Surveillance is particularly innovative in how it facilitates various forms of extraction (Sadowski 2019). Whether the target is resources, people (Rosenthal 2019), labour (McIntyre and Bradbury 2022), or time (Gilmore 2017) surveillance continues to serve as an indispensable aspect of the settler-colonial society. While the academic library may look and act as a stark contrast from prisons, police, and the rest of the military-industrial complex, it serves as a valuable appendage of the carceral state, generating and sharing information for surveillance infrastructures. Today, academics serve an integral role in upholding colonial, carceral regimes (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition's Academic Complicity Work Group 2023) since, "[t]he academy and the academic are

both constituted by a form of police power that precedes and exceeds the police” (Sirvent 2023).

As an ideological/intellectual arm of the State (Althusser 2001), the university functions as a site of extraction and exploitation, ripping surplus value from the students, faculty, and workers responsible for its reproduction. This history extends deep, as public universities in the US were granted land by the Morrill Act as part of the project of settler colonization (Ahtone and Lee 2020), and many early private universities exploited the labor of enslaved people (Harris, Campbell, and Brophy 2019). Canadian universities are sites of settler-colonial knowledge production and infrastructure building, and they have long been hostile to Indigenous Knowledge systems, or, in recent years, treat Indigenous Knowledge, “as separate from our colonial past, as an untapped contemporary resource for their own exploitation and use” (Simpson 2004, 376).

Companies like Elsevier and Thomson Reuters are developing new ways to extend bordering regimes (Walia 2021) by reiterating historical forms of surveillance that uphold racial hierarchies (Browne 2015). These companies facilitate the State’s disregard for constitutional protections and help scale up its human trafficking operations in unprecedented ways, for example, selling information to law enforcement agencies that allows them to bypass the requirement for a warrant (Currier 2019).

The same companies that sell border administration tools to the State sell faculty management tools to the academy and track driver behaviour on behalf of insurance companies (Tavernise et al. 2024). Through the continued commodification of knowledge and information (Schiller 1995), vendors and publishers expand the capacities of and potential for state violence, profiting off of the immiseration of those on the margins. Meanwhile, the university provides liberal cover for these corporations by continuing to renew their database contracts *and* by giving them their research outputs that help develop and expand modern forms of surveillance. This paper provides a step-by-step overview of this landscape, concluding with implications and recommendations for the scholars and librarians ensnared in it. It also includes a mini-zine we plan to distribute to researchers and scholars, to help them contextualize their role in the citation economy and the ethical implications for their work.

The Citation Economy and The Economics of Scholarly Publishing

The story of the rise of surveillance as a dominant contemporary capitalist strategy (Zuboff 2020) typically places large technology companies like Meta and Alphabet as its main protagonists. These mammoth, powerful companies have built their

positions over the last decades through their capture and control of the online advertising market. They have accomplished this via their rapacious collection of users' behavioral and demographic data, and, most analogously to the activities of surveillance publishers, via their commercial re-engineering of the technical systems and infrastructures of the internet into a vast marketplace for bids for attention (Crain 2021). Much of this capture is covert, in that a user typically does not have access, via a dashboard or suite of metrics, to their own profile or persona through which these private firms buy, sell, and recombine data into the systems of other companies for profit.

Similarly, in scholarly publishing, a small number of companies with market dominance have been able to capture and use the surplus value created through the publishing lifecycle. This extraction—of academic labour, of data, of information—is then reinvested into their proprietary data analytics products, which are repackaged and sold back to universities with the promise of ranking the research output of both individual researchers and the institution as a whole. This is surveillance publishing.

It turns out that academic institutions and the commercial publishers that service them have created an economy built around both the extraction of academic labour and assigning value to those extracted goods through citation metrics. This is often referred to as the citation economy, in that, “In the age of publish or perish, citations—e.g., discrete units of publication acknowledgment—are a de facto academic currency” (Cranford 2020, 1343; Wershler 2012). This economy, which is measured using metrics often controlled by major commercial publishers and companies like Google, is ripe for exploitation, both by authors “laundering” citations to increase their rankings, and by commercial publishers creating products to sell back to universities that reinforce this system (Crous 2019).

Jeff Pooley (2022) has noted that surveillance reinforces the citation economy by shaping scholarly behavior, as the algorithms fed by metrics fold back into incentives for academics to seek out citations. What Pooley (2022, 41) calls the “metric tide” already determines outcomes and behaviours across many domains and disciplines. This wave is overt, and whether it is understood as the product of surveillance or not, it dominates how higher educational institutions, researchers, funders and other participants in scholarly publishing navigate and make sense of their places within it. Fire and Guestrin's (2019) large-scale study to test the presence of Goodhart's Law² across millions of papers found that the validity of various metrics across all disciplines was in decline, in part because of many researchers' enthusiastic optimization (or gaming) of their own publishing activities according to the incentives that this system creates. Koivisto and Sly's (2022) Ouroboros metaphor

2. “When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure” (Fire and Guestrin 2019).

is perhaps more apt still: the datafication of scholarly communications represents a feedback loop (“a snake eating its own tail”) that distorts the mission of the research enterprise in a direction that may not be in line with the true (or nominal) goals of researchers and universities. In starker terms, it may enable systems of governance and control to cause harms not just to the research community, but, given these companies’ larger portfolios of surveillance/governance products, to society at large, especially to its most vulnerable members.

An Oligopoly of Extraction

Scholarly researchers, academic administrators, authors, libraries, and the library workers who support them must engage with an industry dominated by an oligopoly of extremely profitable companies determined to extract all possible value from every stage of the research process (Larivière, Haustein, and Mongeon 2015). This exploitation began after World War II, when, in response to the near-exponential growth of research funding in much of the Global North, large commercial companies formed and began acquiring and creating new journals, building a business model through the extraction of academic labour for the lowest possible cost, and then selling the content back to libraries and institutes for the maximum amount that the market would tolerate (Eger and Scheufen 2021, 1922; Fyfe et al. 2017, 7). The growth of this industry was part of the postwar political settlement and seen as a key strategic, geopolitical concern by US and British governments (Gray 2021). This consolidation increased exponentially as part of the digital transition to web-published journal articles, facilitating the dramatic rise in both the number of journals published and the profits of publishers, who started to sell journals back to libraries in big deal packages, with “university libraries subscribing to a publisher’s entire set or large bundle of journals regardless of their specific needs” (Larivière, Haustein, and Mongeon 2015, 12).

As Stephan Buranyi (2017) has outlined, the extraction of labour means that scholars whose work is publicly funded provide their research to publishers for free; other scholars provide most of the editorial labour for free; and then publishers sell the publications back to (largely public) academic libraries so that other scholars can read it. While specifics vary, one constant is the maximization of profits, by any means necessary, in order to transfer as much value as possible to publishing corporation owners and shareholders from the academic workers who both create and pay for their products. This extraction process has evolved over time from individual journal subscriptions to big deal packages as described above, to hybrid journals, article processing charges (APCs) and transformative (read-and-publish) agreements, and, finally, to big data analytics and surveillance (Moody 2023).

Because of these publishers' strategies, the recent transition to partial open access agreements has not changed the fundamental capitalist dynamic of the industry in any meaningful way. This increased pricing visibility comes with a significant sticker shock for researchers (Sanderson 2023), with prices to publish a single article open access ranging from a few hundred dollars to over ten thousand, depending on the journal. Price discrimination continues to be a key feature of the industry; publishers will charge whatever they think their customers will bear to pay. This is big business. Butler et al. (2023) estimate that from 2015–2018, the oligopoly publishers (Elsevier, Sage, Springer-Nature, Taylor & Francis, and Wiley) collected \$1.06 billion in APCs, with \$612.5 million going towards publishing in gold open access journals and \$448.2 million for publishing in Hybrid journals.

In a 2020 study, Budzinski et al. found that APC price setting was not primarily driven by the cost of production; instead, considerations like publisher size and market concentration enable already dominant publishers to further exploit their market power and increase APC prices. Tying publication numbers to profit like this provides added incentive for publishers to increase their publication output, leading to a multi-faceted crisis in scholarly communication, which some have blamed on open access advocates and the partial success of openness (Anderson 2024), rather than on publishers' (and, unfortunately, researchers') choices to respond to these new incentives as they have.

Core to the oligopoly's power is the platformisation of knowledge, or the strategy of locking content and users onto platforms that inform both the types of content that are successful and the data and metrics used to measure that success (Chan 2019). This strategy is similar to those used by social media companies. However, the big oligopoly publishers also sell their analytic tools and services back to the universities who produce the research in the first place, and, given the transfer of copyright, "researchers and research institutions have no control over how their publications are disseminated, or whether they are archived or preserved, whilst the data derived and captured are owned by the platforms" (Ma 2023, 3). This can have significant unanticipated implications for authors signing their rights away to these companies, as is reflected in Taylor & Francis's recent deal to license the content in their published books and journals to Microsoft for the purpose of developing and training AI applications (Potter 2024).

Underlying all these modes of extraction are the publishers' real expertise in the technical side of publishing. Okune and Chan (2023) give the example of the Digital Object Identifier (DOI) as a counterintuitively central site of publishers' extractive strategies and enabler of their governance of surveillance publishing. To be counted in the citation economy as a "Version of Record," an article requires a DOI. That DOI

can only be issued by certain bodies, and the publishing oligopoly's effective control of the DOI issuance process delimits the bounds of what counts as research, shaping scholarly infrastructures globally. The DOI also serves as the node of surveillance; without it, the analytics and administrative tools built by these publishers would not have a central point of observation to which all other connections and citations could be appended.

This is not to sell the older model of scholarly publishing short: the paywall continues to allow these sophisticated companies to extract profits from all sides of the publishing process. Institutions are still required to pay to access the research produced by researchers who do not have the means, requirement, or desire to pay to publish their work openly. This level of rent-seeking is extraordinary. The immense profit margins of 30–40 percent (Puehringer, Rath, and Griesebner 2021; Smith 2018), extracted from their academic clients at multiple points, have only strengthened the powerful positions that these firms enjoy as the end-nodes of scholarly production. Their dominance has catalysed the technical investments and acquisitions that have enabled their transition into the data business (Pooley 2022). As part of our team's work at the Triangle Scholarly Institute, we built a timeline of Elsevier's acquisitions strategy over the years, covering both the company's "Risk" and publishing portfolios. The acquisitions on both sides of the company have focused to a remarkable degree on companies and tools which purposefully collect, extract, and refract data of all kinds across the company's business segments.

Surveillance (or what these publishers may call "data analytics") is the future of profit extraction for these oligopoly publishers. In *Data Cartels*, Sarah Lamdan (2022, 52) uses the example of Elsevier to demonstrate how "the companies' millions of academic research materials are ideal data vectors—data analytics companies can put their research databases online and collect tons of personal data about both the people who write the materials and the people who access them." Lamdan, Poole and others note that the "surveillance publishers" have rebranded themselves to de-emphasize their role as publishers, instead prioritizing their role as a "global leader in information and analytics" (Elsevier 2024a), or as a "global leader in trusted and transformative intelligence . . . [bringing] . . . together enriched data, insights, analytics and workflow solutions, grounded in deep domain expertise across the spectrum of knowledge, research and innovation" (Clarivate 2024). Even those companies that retain the term "publisher" in their name or shareholder materials are clearly pivoting to data surveillance through acquisitions and new data products that ensure that they are a player in this space (Pooley 2023). Arguably, this shift has been ongoing for some time. In 2009, Murakami Wood noted that publishers and their parent-businesses were engaging in this strategy not so much to better capitalize on

data or formal scholarly outputs, but to gain value through selling “various forms of combination, mixing and manipulation of data, including the growing trade in the products of surveillance: information about individuals and groups” (484-85).

This growing pivot to surveillance and data brokering may not always be clear to authors, even as they are its subjects, but these companies have been explicit in their intentions in communications to their shareholders. RELX, for example, states clearly that they are no longer just in the content business: they are in the business of selling access to its layer of analysis, which it provides overtop of the content that it controls via copyright and other intellectual property laws, as well as its technical expertise in integrating with other content providers to offer a technical infrastructure and a comprehensive suite of tools to “understand” and administer a given domain. The opening statement of the 2023 RELX annual report to shareholders states that they are a “global provider of information-based analytics and decision tools for professional and business customers, enabling them to make better decisions, get better results and be more productive.” This focus is also reflected in the annual reports of other oligopoly publishers. For example, Informa (2023), owner of Taylor & Francis, states in its annual report that “researchers (i.e. knowledge makers) [are] the heart of the business, extending addressable markets and creating further growth opportunities.” Finally, Springer Nature uses, in its 2022 annual report, very similar language about the centrality of researchers’ behavior to its business: “In our platforms and business solutions unit, we use technology to put the researcher at the centre, supporting the entire research lifecycle from idea to impact, by providing platforms, products and solutions to maximise the speed, quality, and reach of their work.”

This nose-to-tail re-envisioning of the publishing business creates a monetizable academic graph to be mined, analysed, and re-packaged. This is the leading business strategy for growth for these publishers in the future, with many implications for the research community. Similar to how Alphabet and Meta’s commercial re-engineering of the tangible nature of the internet helped them amass massive profits through the internet, surveillance publishers, through their dominance of the technical systems of publishing (Okune and Chan 2023), are in the process of remaking these systems using surveillance practices as well. The model of data surveillance that they are building and selling is only as powerful as their continued oligopolistic dominance. The effects of the surveillance products in academia fashioned into rankings etc., are actually much easier to see than those of surveillance advertising, which many have pointed out are less effective than claimed (Doctorow 2021). Indeed, selling targeted ads seems much more benign than selling products that can shape, determine, or

misqualify research, or that can be used by the state to police borders and identify “national security concerns” within the research community (Dimensions 2024).

Elsevier’s products in this area were grouped together with those of Clarivate and Digital Science by SPARC’s 2019 Landscape Analysis under the term “Research Intelligence” as products that have uses (and customers) both inside and outside the academy, including grant-funding bodies, policymakers, and others who rely on them to make determinative decisions via these tools’ algorithmic representations of research productivity and impact (Aspesi et al. 2019). SPARC’s report raised a series of questions about the behaviour and data practices of these companies and the systemic effects of the growth of their business lines in this area, which, five years later, have only become more pressing. Targeted attempts to address some specific problems posed by this business strategy, such as the NISO (2015) Privacy Principles and the Licensing Privacy Project (2022), need to be built on and made more potent by sector-wide action and awareness building. The (non-binding) Privacy Principles, notably, were developed with input from representatives of surveillance publishers. The reality is that publishers’ ownership of and technical expertise in managing the systems that the vast majority of researchers rely on to disseminate and receive credit and citations related to their work have created a moat that will be difficult for other models, such as library-led or scholar-led publishing, to displace. Their ownership of this data, and the insights extracted from it, determine or enable funding, hiring, and strategic directions for the academy from the top down, or from the outside in. If not relied upon explicitly by decision-makers, their irresponsible use provides an “objective” gloss, or an irrefutable logic, for decisions that have already been made, diffusing accountability (Oancea 2019). Moving away from this system may seem like a utopian aspiration, but we need to start somewhere.

As part of our work at the Triangle Scholarly Communication Institute, we attempted to map out the major players in the scholarly communications industry and categorize each company according to the degree to which their activities in data analytics make them full-fledged “surveillance publishers” according to Jeff Pooley’s (2022) model. The first category of companies that we identified are what Pooley (2022) calls “full-stack” publishers. To describe them, he compares the business model of one of the largest full-stack publishers (Clarivate) to Google’s parent company, Alphabet:

From Web of Science back to the web, in fundamental ways Clarivate’s business resembles Alphabet’s. Clarivate, of course, doesn’t feed from the advertising firehouse [*sic*] like Google does. But both companies mine behavior for data, which they process into prediction products. (2022, 40)

Currently, there are only a few publishers that could be considered full-stack (RELX and Clarivate) but, all of the major publishers have surveillance aspirations, even if they have not yet fully realized their strategies. This desire is reflected not only in the shareholder statement examples included above, but also in the portfolios and product offerings being developed by these companies. For example, while Springer-Nature itself may not have a full-stack suite of products, their parent company “Holtzbrinck, for its part, owns its own full-stack research lifecycle offerings, including the Scopus competitor Dimensions, Pure competitor Symplectic, impact tracker Altmetric, and data repository figshare (Holtzbrinck)” (Pooley 2023, 20). Pooley (2023) notes that the other companies are essentially playing catch-up: Using the example of Wiley’s Literatum journal platform, he demonstrates how oligopoly publishers are acquiring companies and launching products built around metrics, analytics, and reader behaviour (Pooley 2023).

On top of all of this, there are many other companies that have designed their business models to extract and exploit the scholarly publishing ecosystem, combining scholarly publishing with the surveillance practices used by social media companies. ResearchGate and Academia.edu, for example, encourage academics to create profiles, add their scholarly works, and build connections with other researchers. These sites run on uncompensated labour. Duffy and Pooley describe the Academia.edu business model as one dependant on users to create value for the company, all in the name of both the open access movement and “scholar visibility,” in that this work is promised to “generate (and count) the reader ‘hits’ that make for future citations” (Duffy and Pooley 2017, 5). This is reflected in the “unmistakable emphasis that Academia.edu places on analytics . . . with branded ‘PageRank’ and ‘AuthorRank’ measures on prominent display” (Duffy and Pooley 2017, 6). Similarly, ResearchGate sells advertisements, has developed its own metrics for engagement on its platform, and is increasingly working with publishers to syndicate content on its platform and bring it within the bounds of the rest of the citation ecosystem (ResearchGate 2023; Wiley 2024). Publishers themselves have begun to test out platform agnosticism, sending their content to ScienceDirect, owned by a competitor, in hope for higher usage and citation counts for their journal portfolios (Elsevier 2024b).

The newest extraction opportunity for both the traditional oligopoly publishers who desire to build the full-stack and the other companies designing their business models around surveillance is Artificial Intelligence (AI). From intellectual property to citation information to user information, companies have extracted proprietary control over information created by or about researchers that could be valuable training material for large language models. Furthermore, the potential for the farming out of human judgement and agency within the editorial process in scholarly

publishing may further erode the quality of research evaluation, amongst many other possible perilous potentialities (Gendron, Andrew, and Cooper 2022). The logic of capital, combined with the power of oligopoly publishers mean that such cost-cutting, pro-efficiency implementations of artificial intelligence could be instituted without a full discussion of their implications.

Implications and Recommendations

Based on our analysis, it is clear that surveillance publishing and the citation economy implicate academic and library workers throughout the research cycle. By doing our jobs, we participate in the extraction of even more surplus value, not only of our labour, our intellectual property, and our data, but also its further repackaging and reselling, including in the generation of data analytics products. The companies profiting from these activities do not limit themselves to academic data. Instead, the citation economy and surveillance publishing are part of a broader landscape of surveillance and exploitation that disproportionately targets the most marginalized.

Moore's Law in 1965 predicted that the "number of transistors on an integrated circuit would double every two years with minimal rise in cost" (Intel Newsroom 2023). This statement, almost 60 years later, is the standard in the semiconductor industry (Intel Newsroom 2023). As computers continue to process data faster, and data can also be extracted more quickly, publishing companies can continue to extract data from users at breakneck speeds. It is imperative for academic and library workers to educate themselves at the same pace about the ethical issues of surveillance publishing in order to combat the exploitation of academic labor and data by these companies.

So, what is there to do? We recognize that these are complex and broad-ranging systems that are often difficult to entirely refuse to participate in. In this section we take a harm-reduction approach, offering a range of actions of resistance and focusing on how to slow down and obstruct the flood of data and capital that goes toward these companies, while always building toward collective action. Our recommendations are not dissimilar to those provided by Murakami Wood in 2009, namely, regulation, transparency, and active resistance or subversion. Harm reduction reminds us that we must face structural challenges every day, and we are all empowered to make choices that keep us and our comrades safer. In this section, we will walk through how informing, saying no, and building alternative models and infrastructures can all help move us toward a fairer, less exploitative world of scholarly publishing. No single one of these actions will transform these problems; it will take many people and multiple tactics to make lasting change.

Inform

Surveillance publishing operates best in the dark, when scholars don't realize that the journal they're publishing in is part of the same company also selling data to law enforcement or selling HR products back to university administrators. Library workers are well positioned to help faculty and students understand this landscape. We take mixed inspiration from the push for open access publishing: while there has been significant movement toward making research more accessible, it hasn't fundamentally challenged the control of the industry by a small number of highly profitable commercial publishers. However, we know that nothing will change until more people understand the problems—so we start with information.

Libraries already seek to inform participants in the research cycle through workshops, seminars, reference and research support services, our websites, LibGuides, and promotional materials. In some ways, this action simply requires purposefully including information in these existing places, and this may feel counterintuitive. Libraries often focus on seamlessness for our users: as few clicks as possible to get the content you want. Providing users with additional context about the system through which they're accessing it will likely create friction.

Graduate students and senior faculty make two contrasting populations to focus this education toward. Graduate students may lack decision-making authority and may be greatly constrained by their advisor and mentors, but they also make up the future of the professoriate, such as it is. Senior faculty, on the other hand, are freed from the immediate pressures of the tenure clock, and are also likely to be navigating mid-career service as journal editors, fielding requests for reviews, and so on. While these faculty may be settled into particular habits, they are also a group with positional power and thus potential for resistance at strategic points in the research cycle. To this end, we recommend connecting with graduate employee unions, chapters of the American Association of University Professors, and other advocacy or labor organizations.

Research that exposes the scope and impacts of surveillance publishing and the citation economy are crucial. Making data flows and economic transactions transparent helps institutions and individual scholars make more informed decisions. We are grateful for the regular work of organizations like SPARC who document the landscape of scholarly publishing and build power for advocacy. We are heartened by projects like the Publication Facts Label, an exploratory initiative from Simon Fraser's Public Knowledge Project. This pilot creates brief factual labels for research articles, modeled after nutritional labels on food packaging, that address eight factors of publication that speak to research integrity, such as information about the publisher, the number of peer reviewers who reviewed an article, and any

information about funders (Willinsky and Pimentel 2023). While this label does not directly address all of the issues we raise here—notably, ties to broader data analytics and surveillance practices—we appreciate it as an attempt to provide greater context for scholarly publications.

We offer the attached mini-zine as a small step forward in informing; please use it to share with your colleagues, students, and others. While academic and library workers often understand their piece of the puzzle (e.g. researchers see the outlandish APC costs, librarians see the outlandish subscription rates, students run into outlandish paywalls), we find that few of us see the big picture clearly. Sarah Lamdan (2022) has used the Gilded Age metaphor of an octopus, as these companies have ties in many seemingly disparate industries, and it can be difficult to fully understand the activities of any single company, let alone across all fields. Recognizing the broad scope and interconnected nature of the citation economy is necessary for developing the urgency to actually make changes in individual behavior and collective action.

Say No

Academia does not make it easy to opt out of the citation economy or surveillance publishing. Typically, faculty feel pressured to publish in particular journals due to their reputation in the field, regardless of their business practices. Libraries are expected to subscribe to the same publications, continuing the citation economy unbroken. However, we must identify opportunities to decline and to support people in doing so.

Saying no also means being thoughtful about where you say yes. Encourage faculty and graduate students to consider where they publish and where they serve as editors or reviewers. In refusing to peer review an article or participate in an editorial board, they can write a letter describing why. In the future, we imagine sharing templates for this. Much as universities have used shared governance to affirm open access publishing mandates, we imagine a future where faculty may take a stand against the invasive practices of these publishers. Latinx organization Mijente (n.d.) has modeled this through their #NoTechForICE campaign, which has included a petition signed by legal scholars, law students, and librarians demanding that Thomson Reuters and RELX end their contracts with ICE, Palantir, and the Department of Homeland Security. Divestment campaigns from university students and faculty were an important tool for global pressure on apartheid-era South Africa and are a demand in support of Palestine today. What would it look like for universities to divest from surveillance publishing? We take inspiration from the 2007 campaign by academics demanding that Reed Elsevier get out of the arms business, which the company did shortly thereafter (Wedekind 2007). However, as

David Staniunas (2024) has outlined, boycotts and divestment have proven difficult to implement in libraries, and 28 US states have outlawed boycotts of Israel specifically (Impelli 2024); the political climate is hostile to this tactic. While we hold no illusions that change in this case is straightforward, academics make an important part of this landscape, and, when we come together, we can make change.

Libraries have already modeled some resistance to these companies in turning down Big Deals with big publishers. However, publishers have turned to so-called transformative agreements, particularly with increasing pressure for open access publishing from funding agencies. These agreements essentially move the subscription fee from receiving the finished publication to earlier in the process, allowing a university's faculty to publish open access in any of that publisher's journals. The shift to APCs and transformative agreements shifts the pressures; while scholars may have been willing to accept using interlibrary loan or SciHub to access publications, they may now balk at suddenly having to pay to publish themselves. One recent positive development was the Université de Sorbonne unsubscribing from one of the oligopoly-owned proprietary research measurement products (Clarivate's Web of Science), instead opting to use an open non-profit alternative called OpenAlex (Sorbonne Université 2023).

Since 2015, so many journal editorial boards have quit en masse that the scientific integrity organization Retraction Watch has started a running list, currently at 34 ("The Retraction Watch Mass Resignations List" 2023). While the specific reasons vary, concerns over editorial control and interference, focus on profits, and new corporate approaches pop up across many of the letters from departing editors. As Ivan Oransky of Retraction Watch puts it,

You have publishers—most of them are for profit—that demand and require constant growth because that's what the stock market requires. You have researchers—academics or editors, for the most part, who champion quality and maybe depth and time to review. Those are in opposition. (Sanderson 2024, 245)

The citation economy depends on the perceived prestige and allure of exclusive journals. When scholars refuse to participate, it removes some of the surplus labour value and can also jeopardize the perceived prestige of these journals.

Build alternative models and infrastructures

In order to continue scholarly research and dissemination of results, we will need new models and infrastructures throughout the research cycle. Here, we especially wish to invoke abolitionist university studies scholars, who invite us all into "reckoning with universities' complicity with a carceral, racial-capitalist society while creating an alternative, abolition university" (Boggs et al. 2019). This is to say, alternatives to the citation economy and surveillance publishing cannot look back

longingly to the systems that brought us all to this point. There are no good old days to go back to. What will research look like when we are all free?

Many thoughtful statements on researcher-driven efforts to reform research assessment guide this work, from the Budapest Open Access Initiative in 2002 to the four commitments of the Barcelona Declaration on Open Research Information in 2023. Other collaborative efforts to develop alternative approaches to research assessment include the Leiden Manifesto (Hicks et al. 2015) and the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) agreement (CoARA 2022). The Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) was drafted at the 2012 Annual Meeting of the American Society for Cell Biology. This group of scholars identified the troubling usage of proprietary journal metrics in assessing science, making a statement and recommendations that still sound radical today, such as that promotion and tenure guidelines must clearly state that “the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published” (DORA 2012). Following their declaration, the DORA team developed a new tool to support open research assessment (DORA 2024), with five principles to guide the use of metrics. Fundamentally, research assessment is tied to the prestige of the given publication in which a research outcome is made available, and work must continue to rebalance this emphasis. We envision a future where metrics reflect the ethical responsibilities and community commitments of the researchers involved with the publications at hand.

And of course, it isn’t just metrics, but all types of infrastructure. We must make institutional repositories, preprint servers, and other alternative publishing platforms more than an afterthought for many authors and institutions. While open infrastructure does often aim to remove the potential extraction of surplus value for corporate use, it is important to note that it is not necessarily focused on transforming surveillance or other forms of exploitation. We believe that linking these struggles will strengthen both.

Universities, frequently through their libraries, play a central role in supporting diamond (or no-fee) open access publishing. For example, in Europe, three quarters of diamond open access journals are published by institutional publishing organizations such as research libraries (Armengou et al. 2023), and, in Canada, libraries are associated with as many journals as associations, university departments, and scholarly societies (Lange and Severson 2021). Journal publishing that is scholar-led and library-supported is an important counterbalance to commercial surveillance publishing, and this type of values-led publishing must be a foundational piece of an ethical scholarly publishing future.

Conclusions

As we have outlined, researchers and library workers fuel the citation economy and surveillance publishing, generating data and knowledge which is extracted and sold, enabling still other forms of surveillance and monetization of data. These assets, extracted by a bloated and destructive scholarly publishing industry, only engorges these firms and further entrenches predatory systems of surveillance that most affect the most marginalized. Surveillance publishing is but one aspect of the surveillance infrastructure that these firms are building, some of which serves to imprison, injure, and kill. Those of us who are committed to carrying out the work of knowledge production and scholarly communications in an ethical manner have an obligation to engage in refusal. With our complicity in this violence, we must take fractal actions wherever possible (brown 2017) and build towards collective action. Our complicity in this process can only end through collective action. We write this in a time where university campuses turn into police states overnight (Toohey, Watanabe, and Hernandez 2024), underlining the urgency for academics to resist oppression (Levin 2024, 100) as a mandatory condition for keeping our colleagues, communities, and each other safe from state violence. Disrupting the surveillance publishing industry is an achievable action that pales in comparison to the actions we have seen students take to rip the university's benevolent facade off and expose its gleeful participation in the global war machine.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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(CARL) where he was engaged in a wide variety of library related policy issues, including privacy, copyright, and online harms/misinformation. Mark is a member of the Library Freedom Project.

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Scholarly publishing is the place where researchers publish their work to share broadly. Sounds cool, right?

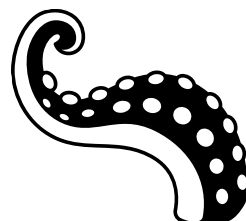
The **citation economy** describes both the extraction of academic labour and assigning value to those extracted goods through citation metrics.

Everyone wants to get more citations, even though citations are a very indirect measure for assessing research quality.

Cranford, Steve. 2020. "C.R.E.A.M.: Citations Rule Everything Around Me." *Matter* 2 (6): 1343–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.matt.2020.04.025>.



The Citation Economy, Surveillance Publishing, and You



To learn more:

Lamdan, Sarah. 2022. *Data Cartels: The Companies That Control and Monopolize Our Information*. Stanford University Press.

Pooley, Jeff. 2022. "Surveillance Publishing." *The Journal of Electronic Publishing* 25 (1). <https://doi.org/10.3998/jep.1874>.

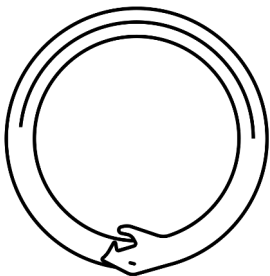
Mijente. "#NoTechForICE." <https://notechforice.com/>.



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Graphics from the Noun Project.

This creates a system where these companies offer (proprietary, expensive) tools at each stage of the research cycle *and also* shape the evaluation of research outputs.



It's like a snake eating its own tail.

See: Koivisto, Joseph, and Jordan Sly. 2022. "The Closed-Loop: Academic Publication Data Conundrum." Presented at the UMD Libraries Innovative Practice Forum, June 8. <http://hdl.handle.net/1903/28849>.

If you support research:

Talk to researchers about these issues and help them see the broader context. (You can share this zine!)

Turn down big companies where you can – libraries can quit Big Deals, universities can switch from proprietary research assessment tools to things like Open Alex.

Support alternative infrastructures: pre-print servers, institutional repositories, and researcher-led research assessment all help build the tools and practices we need.



All of this also make boatloads of money for these companies. We're talking **profit margins of 30-40%**, on par with banking and the fossil fuel industry.

Sarah Lamdan compares it to an octopus with tentacles across many industries.

See: Puehringer, Stephan, Johanna Rath, and Teresa Griesebner. 2021. "The Political Economy of Academic Publishing: On the Commodification of a Public Good." *PLOS ONE* 16 (6): e0253226. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0253226>.

Smith, Richard. 2018. "The Business of Academic Publishing: A Catastrophe." *The Lancet* 392 (10154): 1186–87. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)32353-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32353-5).

Damodaran, Aswath. 2024. "Operating and Net Margins." January 2024. https://pages.stern.nyu.edu/~adamodar/New_Home_Page/datafile/margin.html.

So what can you do?

Reconsider **where** you publish – seek out scholar-led journals published by non-profits.

Reconsider **which** journals you will do peer reviews for, serve as an editor for, or engage in other uncompensated service for.

You might take inspiration from the 30+ editorial boards who have **resigned** in mass – read their resignation letters at "The Retraction Watch Mass Resignations List." 2023. *Retraction Watch* (blog). September 28, 2023. <https://retractionwatch.com/the-retraction-watch-mass-resignations-list/>.