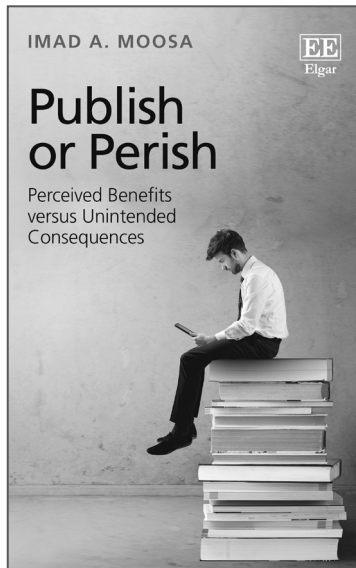


Book review

Publish or Perish: Perceived Benefits versus Unintended Consequences

Imad A Moosa, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, ISBN 978 1 78643 492 0, 232 p
Doi 10.4337/9781786434937



Academia is a POP world

“Publish or Perish” (POP) is a well documented and provocative book, written by Imad Moosa, Professor of Finance at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. It is subtitled “Perceived Benefits versus Unintended Consequences”. According to the author, there are very few benefits, and he explains how POP actually contributes to the decline in the quality of published research.

POP is a phenomenon that appeared between 1960 and 1980 as the Journal Impact Factor became the primary measurement of research productivity. Using quantitative indicators became a way of life in academia. Being able to write and publish articles within a short period of time assured improved status, merit pay and marketability. The article, then, is an economic good: it is written for the researchers themselves, and not for the public or the policy makers. At the same time, university managers become CEOs promoting indicators to attract funds. POP (publish or perish), the original designation for this market phenomenon, has since launched other acronyms: PAP (publish and perish), PBNP (publish but nevertheless perish), PWOP (publish while others perish), BMOP (bring money or perish), PAFOP (publish and flourish or perish).

Moosa’s book is international and considers science at large: topics do not cover only the Australian scene or economics and finance. The author examines life and earth sciences, and to a lesser extent social sciences and

humanities that do not use impact factors. The POP phenomena is global, and not limited to academia: international organisations and various agencies also use publications as one of the key performance indicators to assess scientists.

The ten chapters are not limited to measuring research, but describe all factors and problems involved in producing and publishing science: journals, peer review, authorship patterns, predatory journals, biased citations, poor replicability of published research, research misconduct and poor dissemination of knowledge. These are all part of the detrimental effects of POP. What was initially meant to encourage high quality research has had the opposite effect, which the author details. Unfortunately, POP is now a well-entrenched culture, and honest researchers have no choice but to submit if they want to survive and be promoted.

In conclusion, I present a selection of the author’s key messages:

- The POP culture has led to a relentless quest for publications – the sole objective being CV building rather than the advancement of human knowledge;
- Having written 800 papers is regarded as something to boast about rather than being something questionable;
- Public relations departments encourage exaggerated claims, and hard-pressed authors go along with them;
- Research and teaching cease to be complementary and become two incompatible functions competing for limited resources;
- The spread of POP is like the spread of McDonald’s which came with globalisation. Neoliberal thinking dictates that whatever is done in America is right for the rest of the world;
- Most published research has nothing to do with reality – this is at least the case with my [the author’s] disciplines, economics and finance.

Nevertheless, there are some perceived benefits to the POP model: some pressure is necessary to produce research and motivate academics; it helps to identify and reward scientists based on merit and not on favoritism and nepotism. But, Moosa contends, the benefits are illusory as academics are forced to publish something rather than caring about the advancement of human knowledge, which needs to proceed at its own pace.

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