



# Impact of publisher's commercial or non-profit orientation on editorial practices: Moving towards a more strategic approach to supporting editorial staff

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**Abstract:** This study was guided by previous research highlighting the significance of journal publishers' commercial or non-profit orientations in shaping academic editors' perspectives regarding the necessity of enhancing editorial and business practices. There is limited understanding of how the editor-publisher relationship varies based on publishers' commercial orientation. This study revealed five key factors influencing editors' attitudes towards how publishers strive to provide high-quality publications: (i) availability of high-quality publication services; (ii) sufficient technological support and access to visibility-related data; (iii) accessible marketing and indexing services; (iv) access to continuous education for the editorial team; and (v) a balance between editorial autonomy and publisher support in managing the journal. The study indicated that editors partnering with commercial publishers tended to receive more extensive and advanced services, better technological support, and more training opportunities, contributing to the production of superior end products. However, working with commercial publishers resulted in the trade-off of less editorial independence, which sometimes compromised editors' decision-making ability and made them feel uncertain about their further involvement. The study's findings highlighted the importance of publishers adopting a more strategic approach to support their editorial staff, while considering the unique needs of each journal.

**Keywords:** commercial and non-profit publishers, editorial and business practices, editorial support, editors, scientific journals

## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary journal publishing market has become significantly more complex following the transition to digital publishing,

emergence of secondary rights on electronic databases, and overlap of multiple business models (Eger & Scheufen, 2021; European Commission, 2019; Mabe, 2009). Certain journals have adapted quickly to the resultant changes by detecting and

correctly interpreting market signals (Hill, 2021; Jurchen, 2020); they have successfully met the needs of their stakeholders. Commercial publishers are believed to be better equipped to handle the transition to digital publishing (Engels et al., 2012; Larivière et al., 2015).

Since 2000, commercial publishers have become increasingly prominent in the journal publishing market, as evidenced by their large market share (Eger & Scheufen, 2018, 2021). This rise in dominance can be attributed primarily to two factors: a trend of a greater concentration of companies in the journal publishing market (Larivière et al., 2015), and the widespread digitization of academic works (Borghi & Karapapa, 2013), followed by the emergence of e-services based on the scientific content offered by publishers to support researchers (Björk & Solomon, 2013; McGuigan & Russel, 2008). In 2021, the five largest commercial publishers, namely Elsevier, Springer, Wiley, Taylor & Francis, and Sage, dominate over 50% of the scholarly journal market (Eger & Scheufen, 2021). These publishers have acquired journal ownership through various means, including the transfer of rights from learned societies and university presses as well as the establishment of new scholarly journals (Fees & Scheufen, 2016).

The commercial publishing industry operates on a profit-driven model, often with high margins (McGuigan & Russel, 2008), and a surplus of operations either reinvested in the business or redistributed to investors as dividends (Mabe, 2009; Moher et al., 2017). Unfortunately, smaller markets, such as non-English or niche scientific disciplines, are often overlooked by commercial publishers because of the limited potential profitability associated with them (Late et al., 2020). These publishers view new technologies as competitive advantages that can help implement fragmentation and lock-in strategies (EC, 2019). In contrast, traditional scientific publishers, including learned societies, university presses, and institutional publishers, prioritize fulfilling their objective over earning profits; hence, they are often referred to as non-profit entities. Although they also aim to have surpluses after expenditures, they utilize their publishing income to benefit the scholarly community (Mabe, 2009); for example, by supporting their organizational or educational goals (Waltham, 2006).

Today, the scholarly publishing landscape is characterized by a complex and heterogeneous array of (inter) national markets with distinct characteristics. This complexity is further compounded by the presence of various publisher types operating on different business models. For example, in Finland, learned societies continue to publish journals in-house (Late et al., 2020), whereas in the United Kingdom, commercial publishers frequently partner with learned societies during the publication process (Fyfe et al., 2017). Additionally, journals often undergo transitions in ownership, publishers, and business models, further exacerbating the complexity of the scholarly publishing landscape (Fyfe, 2020).

Changes in business practices have also affected journal editorial teams, who maintain scientific quality and help journal developers (Acker et al., 2021). In today's fiercely competitive and ever-changing publishing landscape, editors must skilfully navigate the expectations and needs of authors, readers,

### Key points

- Editors partnering with non-profit publishers faced excessive technical and production workloads, despite public fund subsidies.
- Respondents valued commercial publishers' timely advice on journal performance statistics, enabling them to adapt to market demands.
- Training and experience-sharing opportunities were accessible to editors working with commercial publishers.
- Commercial publishers often overrode an editorial team's vision, driving journal development, and direction.
- Editors were uncertain about their future involvement with journals, as contract extensions were at the commercial publisher's discretion.
- Adhering to the principles of editorial independence has emerged as a key new competence for editors to manage relationships.

reviewers, and publishers (Glonti et al., 2019; Hunter et al., 2022; Vrana, 2018) while addressing the complex ethical issues surrounding commercial publishing and open access (Council of Science Editors, 2020; Krawczyk & Kulczycki, 2021; Legge, 2020; Primack et al., 2019; Suber, 2008). Consequently, there has been a notable increase in the essential competencies, knowledge, and skills required for editors to perform their tasks successfully (Galipeau et al., 2016, 2017; Moher et al., 2017).

Editors' experiences vary across heterogeneous scholarly journal publication markets, including in terms of the level of support they receive from publishers (Moher et al., 2017). While certain aspects of scientific journal publishing, such as the peer review process (Severin & Chataway, 2020, 2021), have been well researched, studies examining the relationship between editors and publishers remains relatively scarce (Krapež, 2022a). However, Krapež (2022b) has highlighted the differences in the attitudes and perceptions of editors when collaborating with commercial or non-profit publishers. Specifically, the editors who partner with non-profit entities have expressed a greater need to amend the production and assessment procedures of their journals (Krapež, 2022b). Outlined research results formed a foundation for this study, aiming to uncover the underlying factors that drive editors' demand for bringing a change in the publishing industry. Specifically, it investigates the dynamics between editorial teams and publishers and compares the perspectives of two groups of editors: those affiliated with non-profit publishers and those managing journals published by commercial entities.

This study is significant because it offers insights into how a publisher's commercial or non-profit orientation can influence editorial practices, emphasizing the need for publishers to adopt a more strategic approach to support their editorial staff. This can

help ensure that publishers' journals maintain a high standard of quality while providing editorial teams with the necessary support and autonomy to achieve their goals.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Alternative journal publication models, especially open access publishing, have had a profound impact on non-profit publishers' ability to invest in editorial aspects, including training, professional development, and the adoption of new technologies and supporting services (Johnson et al., 2018). Historically, learned societies, academic presses, and other research organizations generated revenue through publishing subscriptions and membership fees; these were used to cover expenses related to scientific conferences, early career researcher support and training, and public engagement (Hewitt et al., 2017; Waltham, 2006). However, the transition to open access publishing has disrupted this traditional model, jeopardizing subscription income and membership fees and affecting the economic performance of learned societies (Morris, 2001; Waltham, 2006). In the United Kingdom, smaller learned societies may lack the resources and suitable business models necessary to transition to open access publishing; therefore, they may need time to adapt (Finch et al., 2013; Johnson & Fosci, 2015). Similarly, in Finland, only a few domestic scholarly journals are capable of operating without state subsidies, which cover the deficits in scholarly journals' publishing budgets (Ilva, 2018). This challenge is particularly pronounced for societies operating in specialized fields and publishing in national languages.

In contrast, private commercial publishers experience advantages by incorporating open access publishing through the utilization of article processing charges in hybrid journals. Khoo (2019) asserted that such publishers have demonstrated proficiency in pricing journals based on the prestige value of the title and the available funding for authors in each market. Consequently, the spectrum of services provided by publishers to stakeholders has increased exponentially. Anderson (2018) identified 102 such services, with editors being the primary or secondary beneficiaries in more than a third of them. Nonetheless, the question of whether commercial publishers are better equipped and possess more strategic proficiency in supporting editorial staff remains unanswered, underlining a notable void in present-day scholarly discourse.

Hunter et al. (2022) aimed to assist academic library publishers to better cater to stakeholders' needs. They surveyed 44 faculty members involved in editorial tasks at Florida State University Libraries, focusing on editorial needs regarding publishing services and the perceived value of publishing platform functionalities. Respondents had direct experience in working on journals published by both commercial (94% were familiar) and scholarly association publishers (84% were familiar). Survey results revealed that the most important services provided by commercial publishers, as ranked by the respondents, were the coordination of peer review, copyediting, abstracting and indexing, and author rights management. However, printing/

print-on-demand, format conversion, graphic design, marketing, and promotion were deemed the least important services. They also found that submission workflow and peer review management were the most important publishing platform features, followed by digital archiving and the preservation and ability to accommodate supplementary materials. Respondents expressed overall satisfaction with the services provided by commercial publishers (66.7% indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied, whereas only 17.9% were dissatisfied). However, the study did not differentiate between the services offered by different types of publishers or discuss editors' experiences further.

Moher et al. (2017) developed a comprehensive set of core competencies for contemporary scientific editors, focusing on biomedical scientific disciplines. Among the identified competencies, several pertain to the editor's relationship with the publisher, team, and journal owners. These competencies require editors to effectively communicate and uphold their responsibilities and rights as journal editors, including compliance with copyright and licencing regulations, adherence to the principles of editorial independence in relation to journal owners and publishers, and the recognition of legal responsibilities. Moher et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of lifelong learning for editors, achieved by setting personal learning goals, joining professional societies for editors, and participating in continuing education programs.

Moreover, O'Brien et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of an efficient model of editorial support and continuous learning for editors to meet the increasing demands of scholarly publishing. Empowering editors is essential for providing valuable guidance and encouragement to all stakeholders, including emerging authors. Early career researchers navigating the complex publishing landscape have expressed the need for editors, publishers, and societies to implement changes that facilitate easier and more effective publishing for novice authors (O'Brien et al., 2019). O'Brien et al. (2019) argued that publishers are responsible for providing a supportive and efficient publication process that considers the well-being of all the stakeholders involved.

## RESEARCH STUDY

This research study is the second phase of previous research (Krapež, 2022a, 2022b), which provided a detailed account of the improvements needed in quality assessment processes within editorial offices, using a qualitative questionnaire answered by 258 senior editors from 42 countries across scientific fields. The bivariate analysis showed several strong positive associations between a substantial (high or very high) need to change a particular quality assessment process (dependent variable) and the (non)commercial orientation of the journal publisher. Overall, the proportion of respondents who wanted to change the implemented quality assessment processes was significantly higher among the editors who worked with non-profit publishers (compared with commercial publishers) in the following areas: changing the quality of peer review reports, amending the

reviewer selection process, changing the type of peer review implemented, increasing reviewers' awareness of the required quality standards, and enhancing the overall quality of the published papers. The influence of (non)commercial orientation of the journal publisher on respondents' conduct and beliefs was indirect and not widely recognized by the respondents. These findings provide a solid foundation for the further investigation of the abovementioned associations.

The aim of the study was to investigate the perceptions of journal editors regarding their relationship with the journal's publisher. The participating editors oversaw journals managed by either (a) the three biggest commercial publishers (at the time of the study, Elsevier, Springer, and Wiley), (b) other commercial publishers, and (c) non-profit publishers. The basis for this classification within the study was the legal status of the organization: study participants who oversaw journals published by non-profit publishers were collaborating with learned societies, academic organizations, universities, and research centres. All three groups of editors were invited to share their experiences and expectations regarding the editor–publisher relationship and report on the division of roles and tasks between the editorial office and the publisher's team. They were asked to describe the decision-making processes of the journal's management and development, distribution, marketing, and indexing processes. The survey also focused on the respondents' views of academic publishers as commercial entities and the emergence of new journal distribution models (open and hybrid).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Respondents in the first phase of the study were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Out of 258 respondents, 47 (18%) provided contact information. Based on a purposeful (criterion) sampling approach (with predetermined criteria of importance; see Table 1; Palinkas et al., 2015), 24 participants (51% of respondents who provided contact details and 9% of all respondents who participated in the first phase of the survey) were selected. They represented information-rich cases that covered different types of publishers (according to their commercial orientation): the three biggest commercial publishers, other commercial publishers, non-profit publishers, and all existing journal distribution models (open, closed, and hybrid). This approach offers preliminary insights into how the commercial orientation of a journal's publisher is reflected in an editor's work. Additional sampling criteria included the participants' location (the three countries with the highest representation among survey respondents), academic discipline, and journal indexing (impact factor). Recruitment continued until the saturation of the sampling criteria.

Individual interviews were conducted in October 2015 using both Skype and telephone media, and two participants opted to provide their responses in a written format. Prior to each interview, the study objectives and procedures were clearly articulated, and any participant queries or concerns were satisfactorily addressed. All participants provided informed consent before the interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was used to facilitate the discussion (see

**TABLE 1** Sampling criteria.

Criterion	Description
Gender	Female, male
Location of editor	USA, Germany, UK, other
Academic discipline (FRASCATI classification)	Natural sciences, engineering and technology, medical and health sciences, agricultural sciences, social sciences, humanities, cross-disciplinary
Journal distribution model	Closed access, open access—pure, hybrid (partial open access, retrospective/delayed open access, open choice)
Type of publisher	Commercial—three biggest: Elsevier, Springer, Wiley, other commercial, non-commercial/non-profit (learned societies, university publishers, research centres as publishers etc.)
Journal listed in Journal Citation Report	No, yes

Data S1), which was informed by the comprehensive review of the literature, and further refined following an informal pilot focus group. All interviews were digitally recorded and notes were taken concurrently. Subsequently, all audio recordings were transcribed and imported into NVivo 1.7.1 for further analysis.

The data collected from the interviews were analysed with a focus on pattern finding according to specific criteria developed for this study. This analysis was carried out in two distinct phases. In the first phase, a deductive approach was used to develop a preliminary coding framework, drawing specifically from the results obtained in the first phase of the study, as well as from other established research and theories relevant to the study's scope. This framework was guided by pre-defined criteria (consisting of processes that study respondents identified as the ones that need changes and amendments), followed by the classification of key patterns within the data. In the second phase, an inductive approach was applied (Gehman et al., 2018), concentrating on the respondents' language. This phase involved a meticulous process of coding, wherein codes were developed based on the specific expressions and terminology used by the respondents. The codebook (refer to Data S2) was subjected to continuous revisions, integrating new insights from repeated coding, and reflecting ongoing refinements in the understanding of the data. This iterative process continued until no new information or patterns were discovered.

## RESULTS

A total of 24 respondents from 11 countries (United States [ $n = 6$ , 25%], Germany [ $n = 5$ , 21%], United Kingdom [ $n = 3$ , 13%], Russia, India [each  $n = 2$ , 8%], Sweden, South Africa, Norway, Turkey, Netherlands, and Ireland [each  $n = 1$ , 4%]) were considered, and the majority were male (92%,  $n = 22$ ). Among

the journals that the participants oversaw, 62.5% ( $n = 15$ ) were in STEM fields, including natural sciences, engineering and technology, medical and health sciences, agricultural sciences, and mathematics. Social sciences journals accounted for 25% ( $n = 6$ ), while humanities journals made up 12.5% ( $n = 3$ ) of the total sample (SSH). The journals had a variety of publishers, with 33% ( $n = 8$ ) published and owned by the three largest commercial publishers (Elsevier, Springer, and Wiley), 38% ( $n = 9$ ) by other commercial publishers (of which  $n = 5$  society owned,  $n = 4$  owned by the publisher), and 29% ( $n = 7$ ) by non-commercial/non-profit publishers: learned societies ( $n = 2$ ), universities ( $n = 4$ ), and research centres ( $n = 1$ ). Journals also used a variety of distribution models, with 50% ( $n = 12$ ) being pure open access, 21% ( $n = 5$ ) being closed access, and 29% ( $n = 7$ ) using different hybrid options, such as partial open access, retrospective or delayed open access, or open choice. Among the respondents, 50% ( $n = 12$ ) reported that their journal was listed in the Journal Citation Report, an annual publication by Clarivate Analytics (previously the intellectual property of Thomson Reuters) and had an impact factor higher than zero.

In the first phase, respondents who collaborated with non-commercial publishers expressed a heightened need to modify their existing editorial practices. The subsequent section delves deeper into the factors that influence the inclination towards revision. The participants' attitudes towards the publisher's contributions to the journal's production and assessment procedures were examined. Furthermore, comparisons were made between the attitudes of two distinct groups of editors: those who partnered with non-profit publishers and who oversaw journals published by commercial publishers, including major players and smaller alternative commercial entities.

## Factors that shape editors' inclination to journal's quality assurance processes revision

During the interviews, the respondents articulated numerous factors that played a pivotal role in shaping their perception of the necessary changes. These factors can be broadly categorized into five primary themes (F1–F5): the provision of top-tier publication services, adequate support in technology and access to data related to visibility, the availability of marketing and indexing services, ongoing educational opportunities for the editorial team, and a harmonious balance between editorial independence and the support provided by the publisher in journal management.

### F1: Availability of high-quality publication services

A bundle of conventional publishing services offered by journal publishers is indispensable; respondents agreed when asked about the extent and perceived importance of publishers' services. These services include the production, copy editing, linguistic editing, layout and proofreading, design, printing, distribution, and dissemination of scholarly content. However, there was significant variation among the respondents regarding the availability of such services. Those working with commercial publishers

reported that access to high-quality publication-related services considerably reduced their workload and allowed them to concentrate on the scientific aspects of their work.

Before [...names one of the biggest publishers...] I had to go to the printers with a soft copy to correct one issue at a time, which was very time consuming. I held two jobs: chief editor and publication agent. Now, at [...names one of the biggest publishers...] everything is taken care of with the promise that they will do it. (Editor of an open access journal, owned and published by one of the biggest commercial publishers)

In contrast, non-commercial publishers were found to provide significantly fewer services, which highlighted respondents' awareness of the importance of such services, owing to the excessive technical and production-related workload that editorial offices had to handle to ensure the successful publication of academic journals.

### F2: Adequate technology support and availability of journal's performance statistics

In addition to the conventional set of publication services, respondents who worked with commercial publishers revealed a range of supplementary solutions and services offered by publishers. These include online submission systems equipped with double submission and plagiarism checks, author background checks, software solutions for managing editor and reviewer services, and website design, management, and hosting.

We have terrific people [*on the publisher's side*] who clearly know what they are doing and have gone a long way to help us with the journal. When it comes to the services provided by the publisher, they definitely handle publishing the journal, proofreading, the entire production side, and even assist with technical problems of any kind. We have debates over cover images and colours, and they help us with all sorts of things we could not imagine when we started out. (Editor of a hybrid access journal, owned and published by a smaller commercial publisher)

To effectively conduct and oversee these tasks, the publishers assigned a technical officer and journal manager to assist the respondents.

I have a journal officer and a technical editor, both of whom are very good and responsive, especially when I encounter issues or when something is not working properly. I have found myself increasingly relying on them, particularly technical editors. Both editors are highly professional and skilled at their job. (Editor of a hybrid

access journal, owned and published by one of the biggest commercial publishers)

Respondents expressed that timely advice from publishers, grounded in journal performance statistics, was instrumental in helping them adapt to market demands.

They give us all sorts of reports and statistics, such as the locations of publication, where the journal is being purchased or read, and which journals or articles are the top downloads. (Editor of a closed access journal, owned and published by a commercial publisher)

Generally, respondents held the view that the primary responsibility of an academic publisher is to ensure the proper validation, publication, distribution, basic marketing, and promotion of scientific findings. Additionally, they expected publishers to collaborate with multiple partners to archive scientific journals. However, the respondents only expected publishers to provide basic support for the peer review process.

### F3: Provision of marketing and indexing services

Participants, regardless of whether they worked with a commercial or non-profit publisher, perceived additional services offered by academic publishers, such as extensive technology support, provision of journal statistics, advanced marketing, and indexing, as something extra and advanced. Those who received such support from their publishers believed that these advanced services significantly contributed to a higher-quality end product, the journal, in terms of both technical publishing and content. Collaboration with an academic publisher also resulted in better market positioning of the journal and increased visibility over time, as reported by editors who collaborated with commercial publishers.

They [*publishers*] care about registering for the impact factor and working towards obtaining other indexes. I would have no idea how to do this. [...] Most academic editors have little knowledge of the business side of publishing. (Editor of an open access journal, owned by a society and published by a smaller commercial publisher)

The publisher helps with marketing. It also provides market research and assists with visibility statistics and trends. (Editor of a closed access journal, owned and published by a commercial publisher)

### F4: Accessibility to continuous training and experience exchange

According to the participating editors, individuals seeking to become scientific editors must be prepared for an ongoing learning process to successfully fulfil the responsibilities of the role. The editors agreed that the greatest obstacles to professional growth were a lack of time and heavy workloads. Additionally,

editors affiliated with non-profit publishers mentioned a deficiency in financial resources as an additional challenge.

Based on my five years of experience, editing a journal and publishing scientific research is an ongoing learning process. As an editor, I believe it is essential to remain well-informed and attend appropriate conferences and seminars offered by respected organizations. (Editor of a hybrid access journal, owned by a society and published by a commercial publisher)

Participants who collaborated with commercial publishers reported that they could offer training and events to facilitate experience exchange among editors. As noted by the editors, these opportunities were perceived as contributing significantly to more efficient editorial work.

I studied medicine, and when I began writing and later became the editor of a journal, I had to learn everything about the world of publishing. To this day, I have tried to take advantage of the education offered by various organizations. This was extremely helpful. (Editor of the open access journal, owned by a society and published by a commercial publisher)

Training opportunities are particularly advantageous for junior staff at editorial offices because senior editors often lack time to transfer knowledge.

I believe that more opportunities for experience exchanges between editors and editorial board members would be beneficial. This is a serious business and not all individuals are trained in it. In addition, we need to provide younger people with opportunities to gain experience. I have recently recruited a couple of young co-editors who have completed their PhDs and are enthusiastic about the opportunity. (Editor of a hybrid access journal, owned and published by one of the biggest commercial publishers)

### F5: Decision-making power and autonomy in journal management

The issue of decision-making power pertaining to journal management provoked contrasting responses from the two groups of editors. Those affiliated with non-profit publishers expressed a desire for increased support in managing their journals while concurrently recognizing their autonomy in most aspects of journal-related affairs. In contrast, editors associated with commercial publishers reported being adequately supported in their daily decision-making but acknowledged limitations in their ability to make decisions.

When asked about their backgrounds as editors, respondents who collaborated with commercial publishers revealed that they were approached and invited to assume the role of publishers. These publishers either created or obtained journals and were committed to assembling a proficient team of scientific editors to oversee their content.

We started a journal about 13 or 14 years ago, and it was actually the publisher—a small commercial publisher at the time—who contacted my colleague and me and asked if we wanted to create a new journal. (Editor of a hybrid access journal, owned and published by one of the biggest commercial publishers)

Many journals such as ours, which were previously owned by societies or university departments, have been acquired by larger commercial publishers who publish them online. Most of these journals are subscription-based, with society members covering the costs. (Editor of an open access journal, published by a non-commercial publisher/university)

Editors who have worked with commercial publishers have received substantial support and guidance over the years in managing and maintaining their journals. Publishers often set high standards and expectations for the journal's commercial performance, which the editors were expected to meet.

When I look back, at first, we published some papers that were not that good, but we were back on schedule, and that was most important to the publisher. I had a discussion with the publisher and said that they expected it to take around five years to obtain a journal. It's not fast, because people have to see the journal, but it has to be getting more and more prominent every year [...] (Editor of the closed access journal, owned and published by one of biggest commercial publishers)

When chief scientific editors or their teams underperformed or faced unconstructive disagreements, publishers, particularly commercial editors, who took responsibility for their replacement, highlighted respondents.

Collaborating with commercial publishers may require editorial teams to make concessions, particularly in pricing and distribution, given that publishers manage the commercial aspects.

Collaborating with a big publishing house, such as [*names one of three biggest commercial publishers*] can limit your decision-making power, particularly in areas such as distribution and pricing. We have to make compromises, as there is a clear separation of responsibilities: scientific content is our responsibility, while the commercial side is managed by the publishing house. (Editor of a hybrid

access journal, owned and published by one of the biggest commercial publishers)

Negotiations became challenging when the editorial team's vision clashed with that of the publisher regarding the journal's distribution model. In some cases, the publisher owns the journal and holds more weight than other considerations.

Finally, the editors conveyed a considerable degree of uncertainty regarding the prospects of their journals given that the decision to renew their contracts rested solely on commercial publishers.

My contract as editor of the hybrid access journal expires the next year, so where I see the journal in five years is largely dependent on whether [*names a bigger commercial publisher*] decides to extend my contract. (Editor of a hybrid access journal, owned and published by one of the biggest commercial publishers)

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While the study findings clearly indicate five factors (F) that have a significant impact on editors' perceptions of the changes required to ensure high-quality publications, notable differences emerged between the realities faced by editors working with commercial and non-profit publishers.

First, *the importance of high-quality publication services* (F1) was widely acknowledged among the respondents, although the availability varied significantly. Those who partner with commercial publishers have access to an extensive array of services, including production, copy editing, linguistic editing, layout and proofreading, design, printing, distribution, and dissemination of scholarly content. The expansion of publishing services offered by commercial entities over the past decade was confirmed by Anderson (2018), although he was somewhat critical of their usability, importance, and value. Generally, the respondents expressed satisfaction with the bundle of services offered and highlighted how it enabled them to concentrate on the scientific aspects of their work. This finding is consistent with observations from Hunter et al. (2022).

In contrast, non-commercial publishers offered significantly fewer services, and editorial offices needed to handle excessive technical and production-related workloads for successful publication. Few respondents mentioned that universities receive government funding for every published article, which corroborates the findings of Ilva (2018) that deficits in scholarly journal publishing budgets in some countries are subsidized by public funds. According to respondents, state funding enabled university publishers to subcontract a portion of their editing work. A collaboration of this nature was examined by Fyfe et al. (2017). However, Late et al.'s (2020) research suggests that such collaborations are not prevalent in all markets. Despite acknowledging the need for publisher services, editors of non-profit university publishers expressed reluctance to engage commercial publishers because

of their exorbitant profit margins. These editors yearned for a more impartial and transparent scholarly journal market; hence, they were reluctant to use commercial publisher services.

The findings suggest that *adequate technology support and availability of journal performance statistics* (F2) are critical components for successful collaboration between commercial academic publishers and journal editors. Respondents emphasized the importance of timely advice from commercial publishers based on journal performance statistics, which enabled editors to adapt to market demands. Additionally, the assistance of technical officers and journal managers assigned by publishers was highly valued by respondents for effectively executing and overseeing editor tasks. The respondents' observations highlighted the necessity of an efficient model of editorial support and continuous learning for editors, as previously emphasized by Moher et al. (2017).

Respondents considered the primary responsibility of academic publishers to be the proper validation, publication, distribution, basic marketing, and promotion of scientific findings, along with collaboration with multiple partners to archive scientific journals. In contrast, respondents had moderate expectations for support from publishers in the peer review process, aligning with findings from Hunter et al. (2022), which demonstrated that this type of assistance primarily involves coordinating peer review. The findings of this study reaffirm the high level of satisfaction among editors regarding the features of publishing platforms, as indicated in earlier research (Hunter et al., 2022). Furthermore, the respondents in this study expressed their gratitude towards the increasing range of supplementary solutions and e-services offered by commercial publishers, a trend identified in previous studies (Anderson, 2018; Björk & Solomon, 2013; McGuigan & Russel, 2008) and reaffirmed by our findings. Editors highlighted the importance of these services, particularly online submission systems that include features such as double submission and plagiarism checks, author background checks, software solutions for managing editors' and reviewers' services, and website design, management, and hosting. These supplementary services are critical for assisting editors in carrying out their responsibilities effectively, resulting in the successful publication and dissemination of scientific research.

Irrespective of whether they worked with commercial or non-profit publishers, the respondents placed great value on *advanced marketing and indexing services* (F3). Those who received such support from their publishers believed that these services significantly improved the overall quality of the journal in terms of both technical publishing and content. Collaborating with (especially commercial) academic publishers has also led to better positioning of journals in the market and increased visibility over time. This practice of investing in the prestige of journals has been well documented (Eger & Scheufen, 2018, 2021), with Khoo's (2019) research illustrating how commercial publishers frequently employ such efforts to bolster pricing. In addition, some respondents highlighted that many academic editors may not have a strong understanding of the business side of publishing, particularly regarding indexing and enhancing a journal's visibility.

Publishers could greatly support editors by providing more *accessible and diverse training opportunities, as well as fostering a culture of experience exchange* (F4), both this study participants and previous research (Moher et al., 2017) have emphasized. Respondents agreed that the demands of the constantly evolving and competitive publishing industry make continuous learning essential for scientific editors, a skill set with which academics are often not equipped. Unfortunately, heavy workloads and time constraints present major obstacles to professional growth, a fact well documented in prior studies (Miller & Perrucci, 2001; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2013; Severin & Chataway, 2020, 2021).

According to Johnson et al. (2018), limited financial resources are a significant obstacle for editors affiliated with non-profit publishers. This study confirms this finding, with respondents underscoring the importance of staying current with the latest developments in their field and attending conferences and seminars offered by reputable organizations to thrive in their roles. Unfortunately, such opportunities are often only accessible to editors who work with commercial publishers.

Additionally, respondents emphasized the importance of experience-sharing between editors and editorial board members, particularly as a means of providing younger individuals with opportunities to gain experience. This finding aligns with prior research conducted by O'Brien et al. (2019) and is reinforced by this study, which revealed that senior editors often lack the time necessary to impart their knowledge to their junior colleagues. Therefore, the industry would undoubtedly benefit from providing additional training opportunities for novice editors.

This study showed that the issues of *decision-making power and autonomy in journal management* (F5) elicited different responses from editors working with commercial and non-profit publishers. Non-profit publishers expressed a desire for increased support in managing their journals, as observed by Johnson et al. (2018), while maintaining their editorial independence. However, editors affiliated with commercial publishers reported a pronounced level of control exerted by publishers over the managerial aspects of journal making, resulting in limited decision-making power.

Editors who collaborated with commercial publishers reported receiving substantial guidance on the management and maintenance of their journals. Commercial publishers set standards and expectations for journals' market performance. Editors acknowledged that they had to negotiate and compromise with publishers, particularly on critical matters such as distribution and pricing. These findings are consistent with prior research by Khoo (2019) and Hill (2021), who suggested that commercial publishers typically have a significant degree of control over these aspects of journal management.

Study's findings indicate that commercial publishers hold considerable power to ensure the replacement of chief scientific editors or their teams in cases of inadequate performance or unproductive disagreements. Furthermore, the editors stressed that commercial publishers exerted an even greater influence since they frequently owned journals, corroborating the trend identified by Fees and Scheufen (2016). This often resulted in



publishers' decisions regarding the prevailing development and direction of the journal, regardless of whether it aligned with the editorial team's vision. Overall, the editors frequently negotiated with commercial publishers and found it challenging.

Finally, the editors expressed a high level of uncertainty regarding the future of their journals as their contract extensions were at the discretion of a commercial publisher. The results underscore the acquiring of new competencies that journal editors, particularly those collaborating with commercial publishers, must master, as recognized by Moher et al. (2017). Such competencies should begin with an adherence to the principles of editorial independence with respect to journal owners and publishers.

## RESEARCH STUDY LIMITATIONS

While there were several limitations to this study, the most prominent was the lack of input from publishers, which restricted the study to only the editors' perspectives. Additionally, sampling was limited to editors who answered the questionnaire in the first part of the study. The study's sample size was limited, encompassing 258 respondents from the initial phase (Krapež, 2022a, 2022b), and included a restricted number of study participants (24). Participating editors were experienced and held the positions of editor-in-chief. Therefore, the generalization of the study's findings is limited. As the respondents reported their own beliefs, attitudes, and practices, the results may have been influenced by socially desirable responses or inconsistencies between what the editors stated and their actual practices or experiences in their everyday editorial work. These risks were mitigated by using control questions.

This study offers valuable insights into editors' perceptions and understanding of their roles, tasks, and responsibilities in relation to publishers in achieving the shared objective of ensuring high-quality publications. By identifying the factors that affect editors' perceptions of the need for changes and amendments in editorial and business practices, this study enhances our understanding of the challenges and obstacles editors encounter. Furthermore, the key findings shed light on how a publisher's commercial or non-profit orientation impacts editorial practices, underscoring the importance of publishers adopting strategic approaches to support their editorial staff.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Katarina Krapež: conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, visualization, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that supports the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article:

**Data S1** Interview topic guide.

**Data S2:** Codebook.

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