

A million ways
MDPI has changed
scholarly publishing

In December MDPI announced that it had published 1 million open access papers, claiming to be the first publisher to do so.

MDPI's article growth rate has been astonishing — its impact is felt throughout scholarly publishing.

Here's my assessment of how MDPI's success has affected our industry.

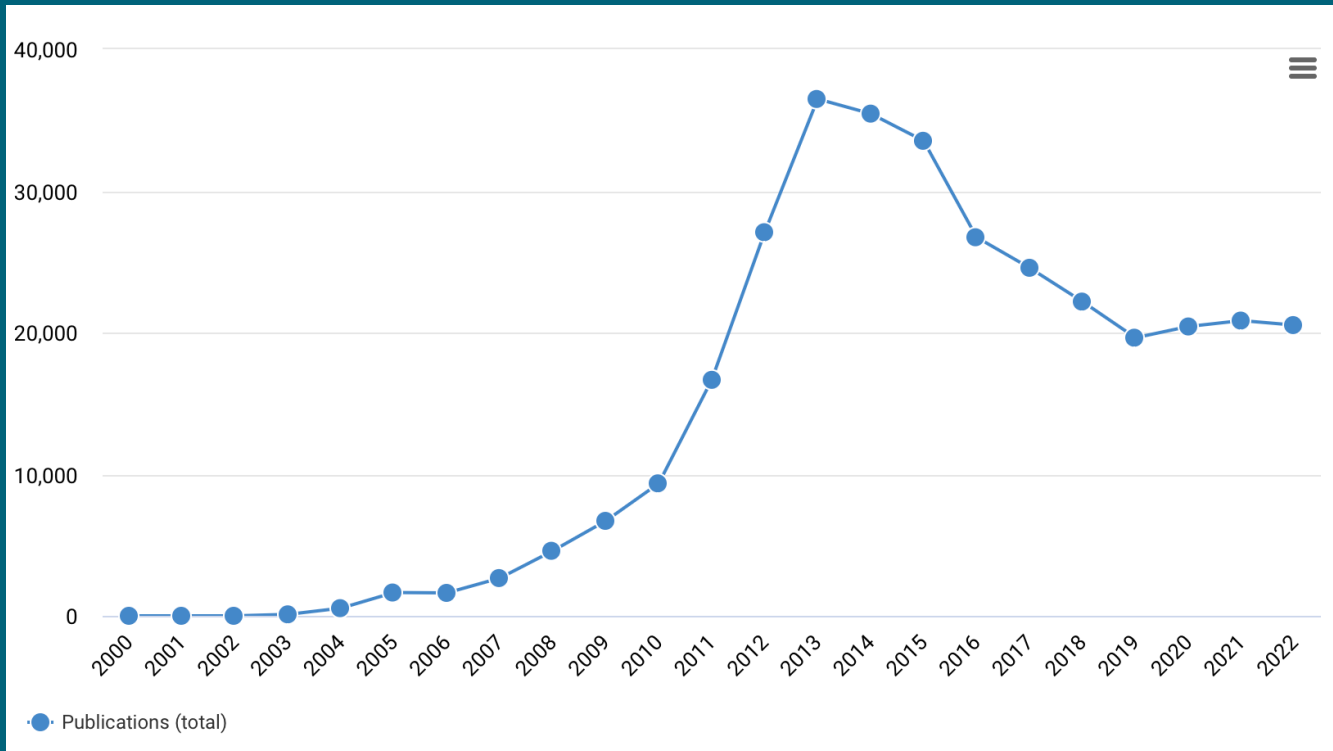
According to Dimensions, MDPI has overtaken Springer Nature in the all-time open access leaderboard.

<input type="radio"/> MDPI	1,029,542
<input type="radio"/> Springer Nature	1,015,899
<input type="radio"/> Elsevier	752,559
<input type="radio"/> Frontiers	435,740
<input type="radio"/> FapUNIFESP (SciELO)	419,058
<input type="radio"/> Hindawi	416,655
<input type="radio"/> IOP Publishing	392,163
<input type="radio"/> Public Library of Science (PLoS)	332,024
<input type="radio"/> Wolters Kluwer	228,544
<input type="radio"/> Taylor & Francis	176,384
<input type="radio"/> Oxford University Press (OUP)	170,867

Growing journals at scale is hard.

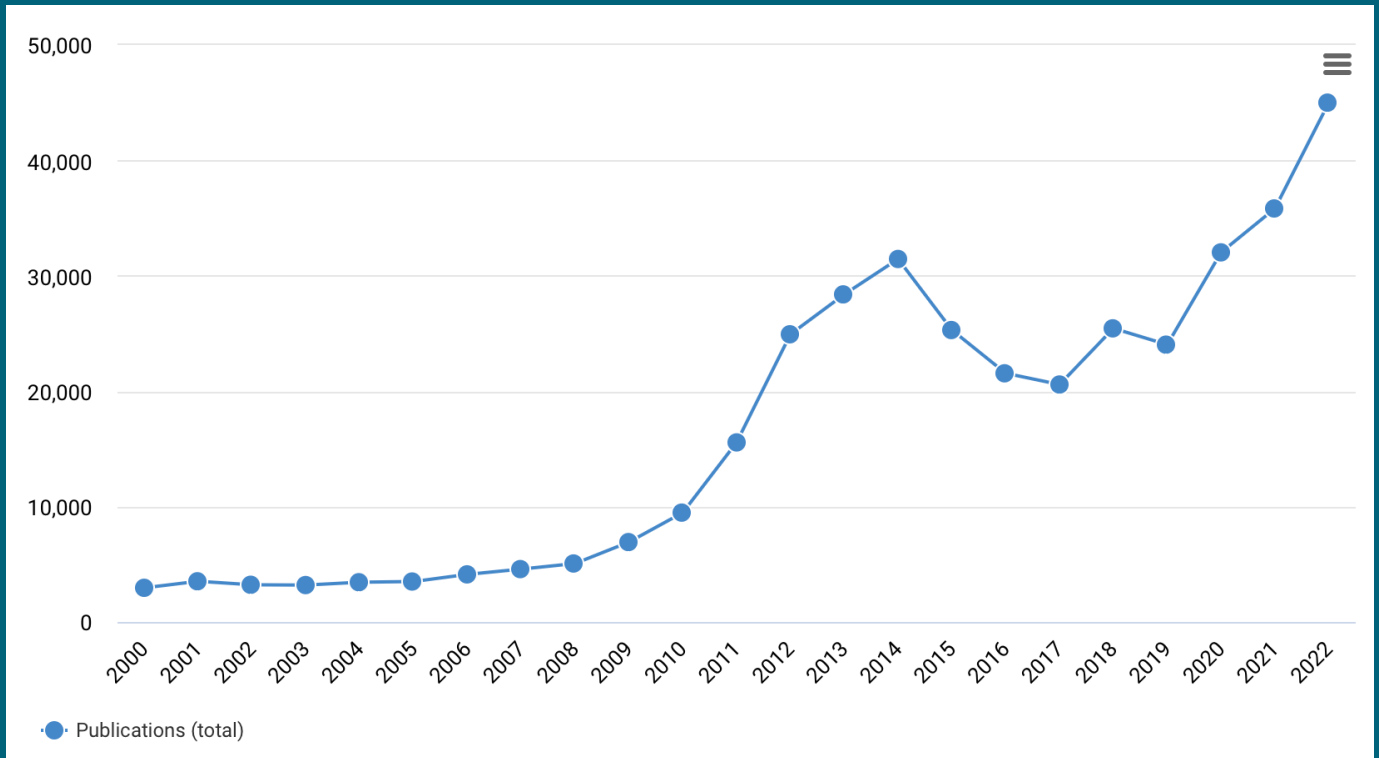
Before we look at MDPI in detail, let's remind ourselves of the article growth for other “born OA” publishers.

Exponential growth can stop abruptly,
as PLOS (the portfolio) knows only too well.



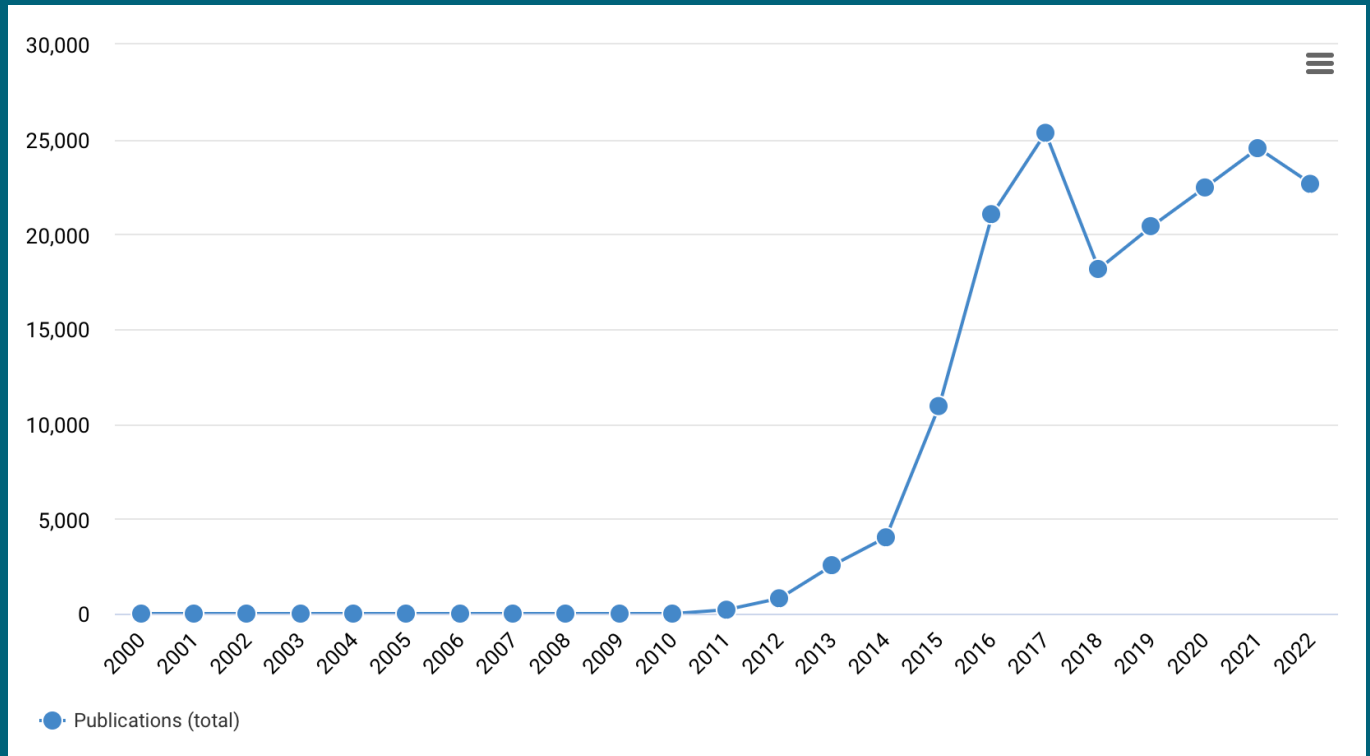
Source: Digital Science's [Dimensions](#)

Hindawi struggled for a while too.



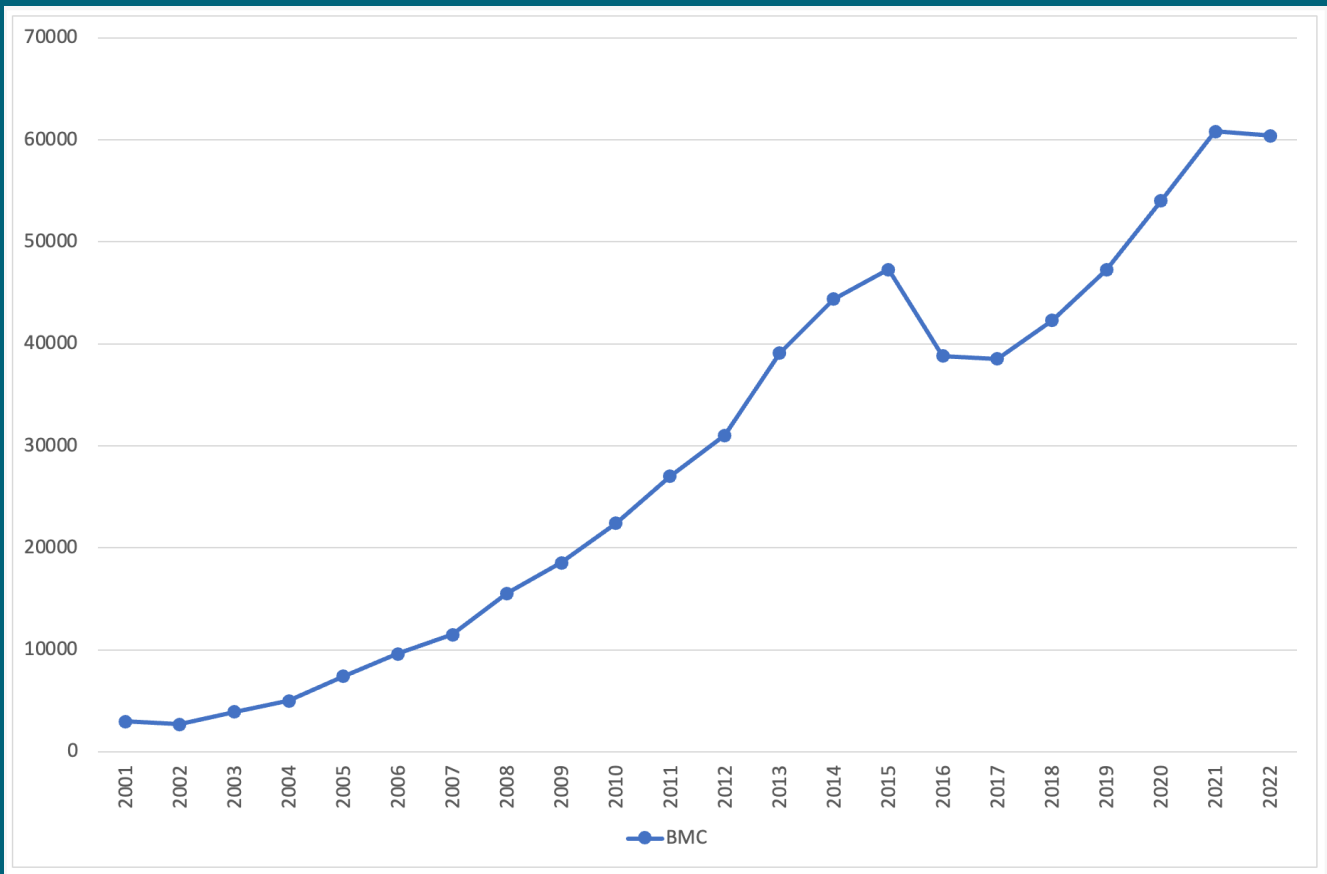
Source: Digital Science's [Dimensions](#)

As did *Scientific Reports*.
(I still bear the scars...)

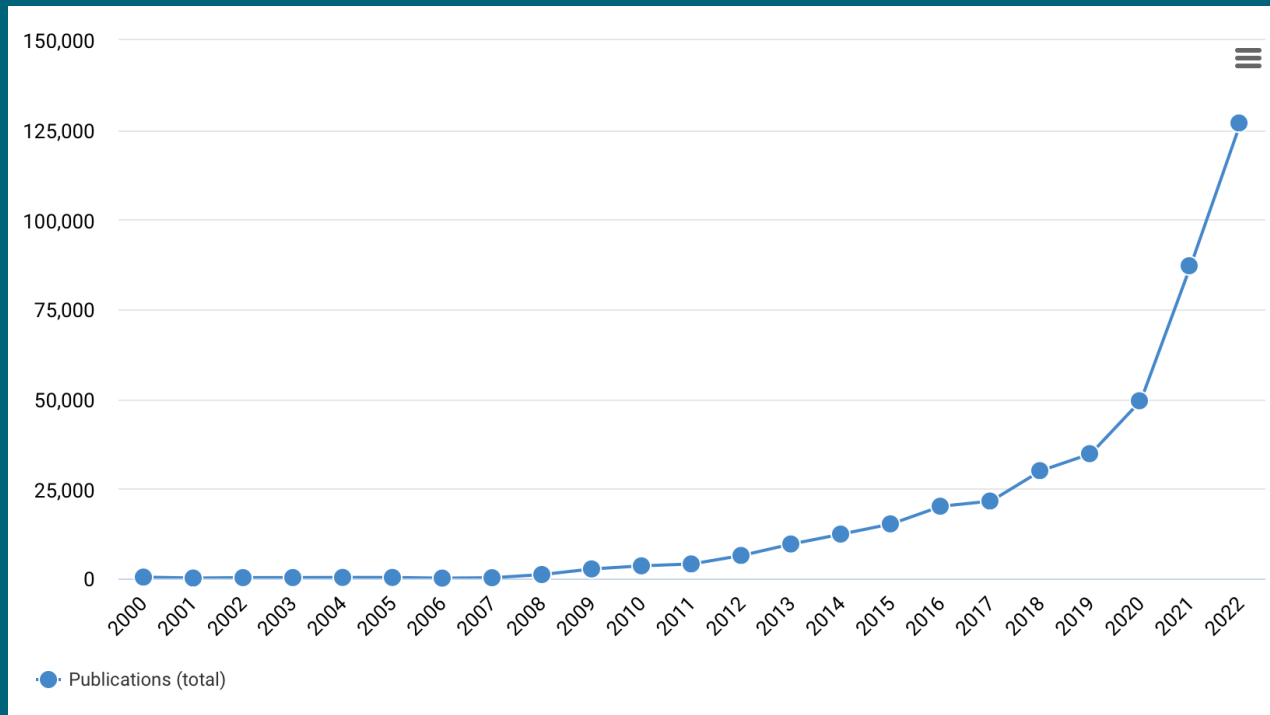


Source: Digital Science's [Dimensions](#)

BMC dipped in 2016 but has recovered.

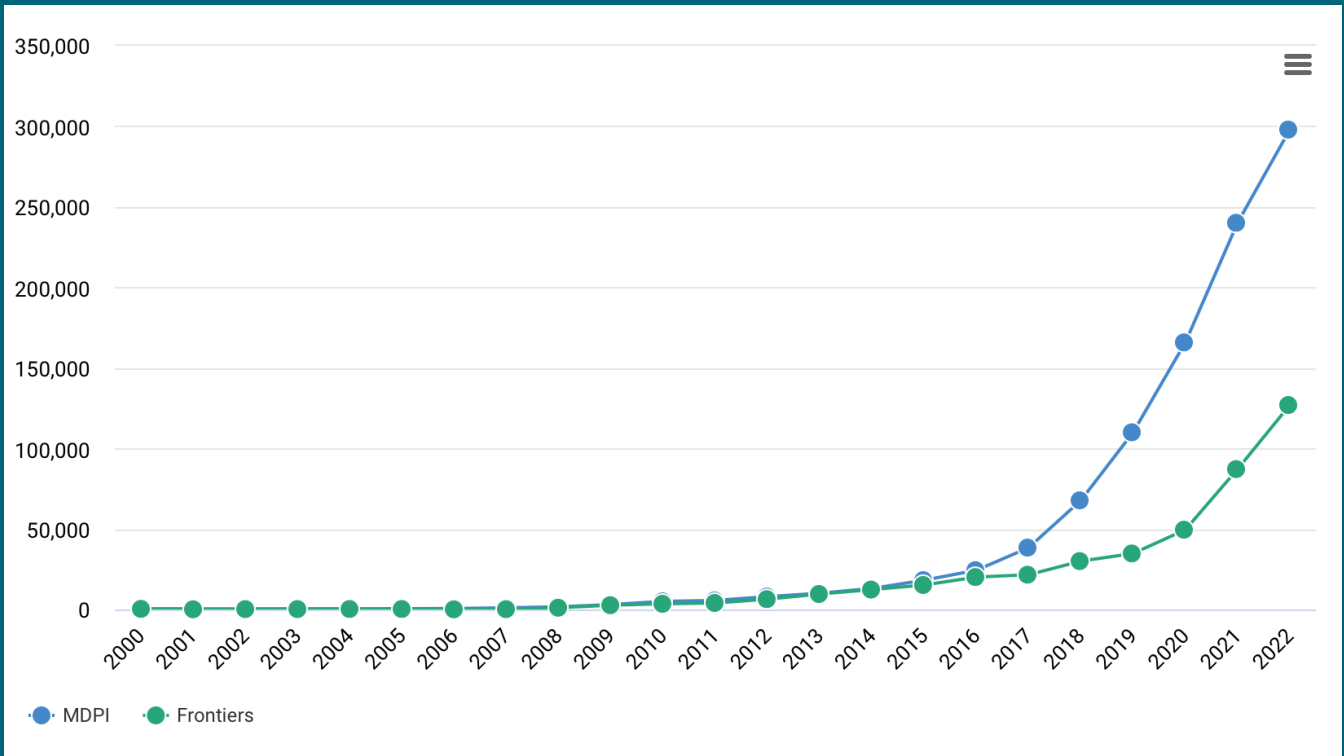


Frontiers' exponential growth continues.



Source: Digital Science's [Dimensions](#)

But MDPI is growing faster.

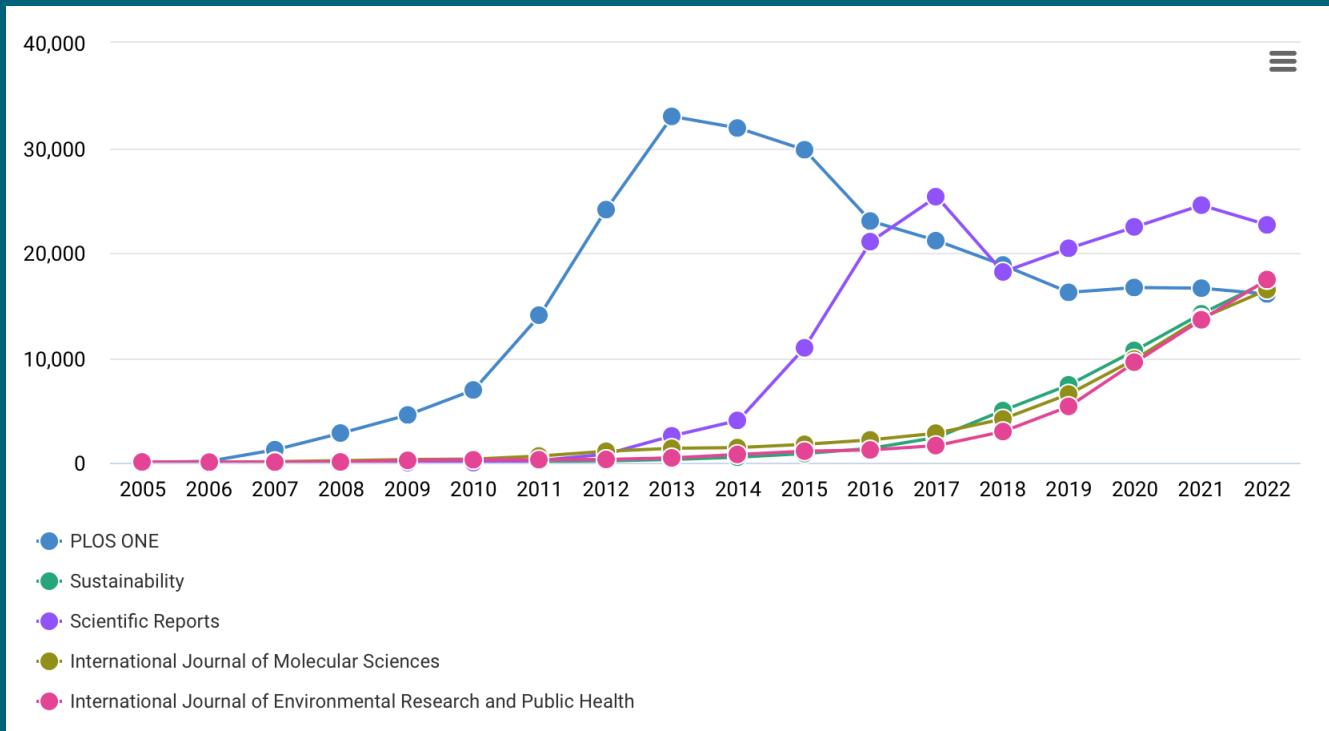


Source: Digital Science's [Dimensions](#)

Scientific Reports remains the largest journal. In 2022 *PLOS ONE* dropped to #6. MDPI publishes three of the top five.

Name	↓ Publications
Scientific Reports	22,653
Lecture Notes in Computer Science	19,261
International Journal of Environmental Research a...	17,445
Sustainability	17,278
International Journal of Molecular Sciences	16,482
PLOS ONE	16,069

Will one of the three MDPI journals take the top spot in 2023? Quite possibly.



Source: Digital Science's [Dimensions](#)

journal•ology

~~A million~~ Four ways
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scholarly publishing

(1) Authors value rapid publication.

MDPI publishes papers within 41 days of submission.*

To compete some publishers may be tempted to put speed ahead of accuracy.

(Please don't)

(2) Special issues have created ethical challenges for many publishers.

MDPI has >150,000 special issues on its website, powering its growth. Other publishers run special issues to compete.

Type “special issue” into the Retraction Watch search engine and you’ll find some truly scary stories.

(3) Shareholders' growth expectations have changed.

In 2022 MDPI output grew by 23% year on year (their revenues may not have followed the same trajectory due to waivers).

Shareholders, board members and senior executives across the industry will be asking their teams to try to keep up.

(4) Not-for-profits risk losing market share and reduced revenues.

Not-for-profits may not have the same focus on growing revenues as commercial players, but they don't want their publishing programs to shrink either.

MDPI competes in many of the major areas of research and is likely to expand its footprint.

“The new incentive for some publishers will be to persuade their editors to accept and publish more papers, but not necessarily better papers. This change in culture and incentives is not insignificant. It is actually historic. The entire foundation for the integrity of the scientific record is shifting.”

Richard Horton

Lancet 2022; 400: 983

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Clarke & Esposito's *The Brief*
is essential reading too.

Thanks to Daniel Hook for helping with the
BMC analysis. Dimensions is powerful.

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