

Peer-to-Peer Information Exchange Platform for Academic Publishing Experiences: A Prototype

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Abstract. Across multiple domains and online platforms, consumers have an opportunity to review products, services, businesses and people and benefit from the information shared by others. However, within the scholarly communication domain, such opportunity is not available due to a lack of reviewing platforms. To close this gap, we propose a peer-to-peer online platform for informal reviews of scholarly publications. We develop and test a prototype of a website where scholars could share their publication experiences and rate different publication venues across a variety of dimensions.

Keywords: Online Consumer Reviews, Word of Mouth, Scholarly Communication.

1 Introduction

The benefits of the word of mouth and its online equivalent, consumer/customer reviews, have long been discussed in the marketing literature [1]. “A glimpse of purchase and usage experience” [2] influences consumer behaviors and trust; reviews offer experiential feedback that is missing from companies’ official descriptions of goods, services, people and places. A number of popular sites host and encourage consumer reviews, including Google Maps, Amazon.com, and Yelp. Within the academic context, a website RateMyProfessors.com offers an example of a review hosting website that is dedicated to providing students with an online platform to review their professors and campuses.

However, within the scholarly communication domain, such an informal peer-to-peer review platform is lacking. In making publication decisions, researchers have to rely on publishers’ official information which usually includes journal/conference description and impact factor, bibliometrics, and a word of mouth or colleague mentoring.

We propose a prototype of a peer-to-peer information exchange website for academic publishing community. Our vision for the site is a) to give scholars a platform to share and receive information about their publication experiences and publishers, b) to give publishers a glimpse of how they are perceived by their stakeholders, and c) to contribute to the overall transparency and efficiency of the scholarly communication process. We aim to solicit feedback on our idea during the conference demonstration. While the initial prototype covers the library and information science (LIS) publications

and caters towards the LIS academic and publishing community, future plans include expansion into other disciplines and scholarly communities,

2 Literature Review

Prior research work has established the complex factors that information professionals typically consider when choosing a publication target for their work, categorized by relevant themes. These included: prestige, recommendation, readership, performance, and infrastructure [3,4]. Dalton's [4] international survey of information science researchers and library practitioners found that colleague recommendation - a dimension of journal prestige - was rated as important/very important by approximately 70% of respondents. In a broader, cross-discipline model, Knight and Steinbach [5] suggested several high-level categories impacting researchers' publication venue choices: the prospect of acceptance within a reasonable time-frame, the potential impact of the publication target, and philosophical and ethical issues.

Many of these areas for major consideration mention reliance on colleague recommendation as impactful in decision-making, for determining everything from the journal's topical fit, to the acceptance potential for a journal outside one's area, or its perceived prestige. Specific to library and information science faculty in North America, Peekhaus and Proferes [6] confirmed journal reputation and speed of publication to be the most important decision-making factors for this population of researchers as well.

Further factors that have attracted particular research interest within information science scholarly publishing have included: the motivators to choose open access journals [e.g. 7-9], publishing decisions made by interdisciplinary researchers [10], and in the LIS realm the differing publication behaviors between information science researchers and library professionals [4,11]. Given the library science field's longstanding commitment to open access (OA) principles, it is interesting to note that LIS faculty do not have a particularly high rate of OA publication, with 53% reporting having ever published in an OA journal [9].

In addition to scholarly work assessing publication decision-making, numerous websites aggregate data from publisher indexes and provide search and discovery interfaces for exploring potential journal targets. At the time of writing, these included: Elsevier® Journal Finder (<https://journalfinder.elsevier.com/>), Springer Journal Suggester (<https://journalsuggester.springer.com/>), Journal Guide (<https://www.journalguide.com/>), Edanz Journal Selector (<https://www.edanzediting.com/journal-selector>), and Journal/Author Name Estimator (JANE) (<http://jane.biosemantics.org/>). Most such services allow searching for potential journals by entering the proposed article's title and abstract, keywords and/or field of research (e.g. Figure 1, below).

JournalFinder [Find journals](#) [About](#) [FAQ](#)

Paper title
Peer-to-Peer Information Exchange Platform for Academic Publishing Experiences: A Prototype

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Across multiple domains and online platforms, consumers have an opportunity to review products, services, businesses and people and benefit from the information shared by others. However, within the scholarly communication domain, such opportunity is not available due to a lack of reviewing platforms. To close this gap, we propose a peer-to-peer online platform for informal reviews of scholarly publications. We develop and test a prototype of a website where scholars could share their publication experiences and rate different publication venues across a variety of dimensions.

Keywords
Library and Information Sciences X Online Consumer Reviews X Scholarly Communication X

Field of research
Select field of research

+ Refine your search

Find Journals >

Fig. 1. Search page for Elsevier® Journal Finder, with current article's information input.

Search results typically include the journal's impact factor, acceptance rate, open access or subscription model, and estimated time to decision (e.g. Figure 2, below). Many of the websites run by particular publishers, such as Elsevier or Springer, can offer deeper insight into the publication process and timeline, but only include information regarding that publisher's offerings. None of the websites include any direct peer-to-peer information.

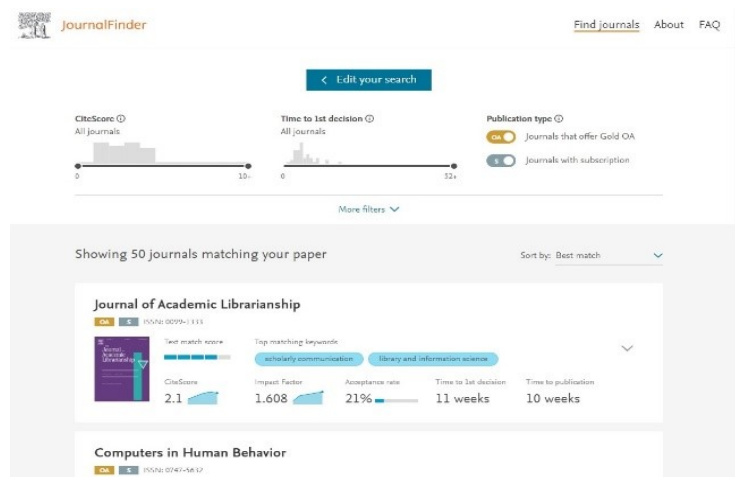


Fig. 2. Subsequent results page in the Elsevier® Journal Finder, with current article's title and abstract as search terms.

More generally, peer-to-peer consumer reviews are a common offering of commercial websites, in a range of contexts including: e-commerce, restaurants and food delivery, social media, and employment tools. It is well-established in the related literature on electronic word of mouth (eWOM) that online consumer reviews have an impact on product sales [e.g. 12] and are typically more trusted by consumer than company-driven advertising or marketing information [e.g. 13]. In the academic realm, as mentioned earlier, RateMyProfessors.com is a well-known website providing students with the ability to publicly review professors and courses.

Though such reviewing features are widespread on the web, prior research has identified issues and difficulties associated with such systems and the resulting consumer-generated content. An increasing concern, particularly in the e-commerce domain, is that of review manipulation, in which companies falsely manipulate their reviews in a positive direction, and is often difficult for consumers to identify [e.g. 14]. Within the academic context, sites such as RateMyProfessors.com, PassCollege.com, ProfessorPerformance.com, and others of similar purpose have many issues relating to bias, with faculty characteristics such as “easiness” and attractiveness associated with overall positive ratings [15].

Furthermore, there are numerous dimensions that impact consumers’ likelihood of engaging in word of mouth communications at all, with varying motivators arising from positive or negative experiences [16]. Hennig-Thurau et al. [16] found that social benefits, economic incentives, concern for others, and extraversion/self-enhancement were the primary motivators for eWOM communications and suggest that these motivators should be considered in the design of such reviewing systems. These factors and the potential for reviewing bias will be taken into consideration in the final system design and in its ultimate evaluation, which will include investigating the optimal balance between data quality and reviewers’ anonymity. The initial proof of concept prototype is described in the following section.

3 Prototype Description

To facilitate effective, informal peer-to-peer exchange of information about scholarly publications, we developed a proof of concept prototype website tentatively titled “Publish or Perish”. The site includes several components:

- About us page, description of the website objective to facilitate information exchange about academic publishing.
- Search and Browse functions to facilitate the discovery of existing reviews.
- Contribute function that would support entering a new publication (journal or conference proceeding) and adding a review for the existing publication.
- User Account set-up function to link reviews to users, add credibility to reviews and reward frequent contributors.

Prior to the prototype demonstration at the conference, we plan to conduct initial user testing of the website (e.g. as presented in Figures 3 and 4, below).

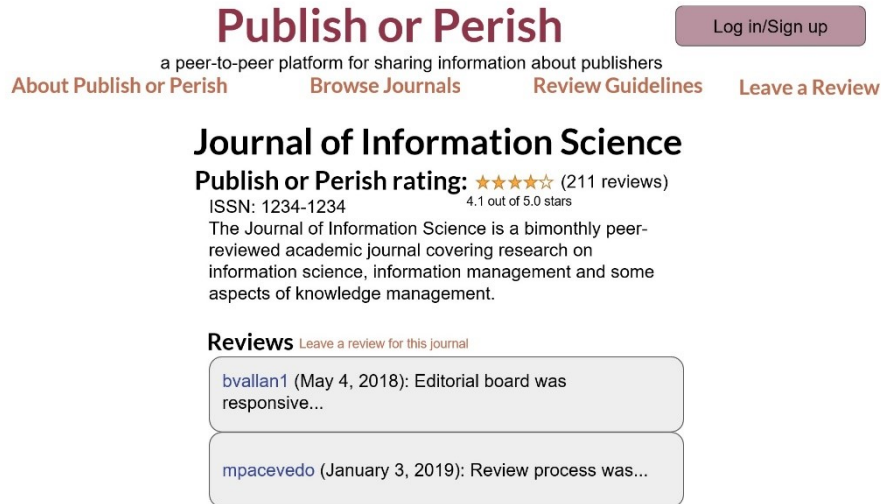


Fig. 3. Mockup of individual journal page with associated user reviews.

We plan to support the browsing function by populating it with the list of LIS journals and major conferences and circulating it among a small group of colleagues who would provide initial reviews. We intend to test two types of user reviews: structured (similar to the RateMyProfessors.com website) and unstructured (similar to Google and Amazon.com reviews); and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches for content creators and content users.

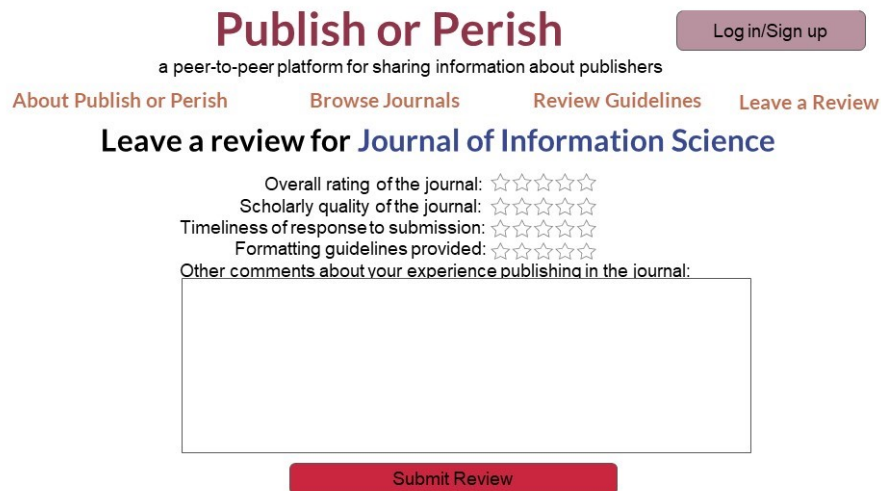


Fig. 4. Mockup of journal review submission page.

We plan to test different account creation settings to ensure that it is flexible enough to enable confidentiality of reviewers' information while finding the mechanisms of validating user accounts and minimizing spamming. We also plan to pre-test the prototype at the institutional level to solicit feedback on expanding the platform to non-LIS domains. The initial test results will be shared during the conference demonstration.

4 Conclusion

In order to assist researchers with information about publication process, we propose a prototype of a peer-to-peer information exchange platform for academic publishing experiences, including information about scholarly journals and conferences. The proposed platform can become a stand-alone website similar to the RateMyProfessors.com website or be integrated as a feature for the larger platforms like Google Scholar. The system design and evaluation will seek to mitigate known issues in consumer-generated electronic word of mouth communications, with attention to the motivators for reviewing behavior and potential for bias in reviews. Future work will also explore the feasibility of this platform's commercialization or alternative means of long-term support. The conference demonstration of the prototype will provide an opportunity to promote the platform and solicit feedback from the community of stakeholders.

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