PubPeer 2.0: Post-Publication Peer Review

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Traditionally, both informal and formal peer review happens before a paper is published in a journal (or a book). However, the peer review process is struggling to do its job properly. One key task of peer review is to identify flaws and bad science before publication.

With an emerging alternative, post-publication peer review the scientific community can engage in discussion and comment on shared research papers on relevant platforms. One such web-based platform is PubPeer. This should strengthen the self-correcting practice in science and improve its overall published quality·

PubPeer 2.0 is here!

Founded in 2012, PubPeer, an online, moderated platform for discussing scientific publications, which originally begun as a "spare-time" project, has since cemented its presence as a platform for post-publication peer review. Starting in early 2013, its users could comment anonymously as so-called "Peers". This factual and verifiable feedback has led to many editorial corrections, and even retractions because of discovered research misconduct.

Now, PubPeer has given itself an upgrade and new look. This PubPeer 2.0 is effectively a rewrite of the platform from the bottom up PubPeer has made changes and added new features for its users and readers.

How is PubPeer Better Used?

One big change is how users can identify themselves. A signed account is still available and it is not anonymous to the readers who can access the website's contents. However, choosing anonymity becomes now more secure and guaranteed. In addition, using the "tree of life" to assign pseudonyms, PubPeer users can now obtain an account with just a code (safeguarded by the user). The authenticity of your grey listed account requires vetting before approval. Therefore, it will be near impossible for anyone to know your real identity.

Another big change involves the improved reading and formatting of the peers' comments. Since it began, PubPeer users had to follow certain guidelines. All the comments go through moderation (for facts and truth). Now, these comments related to either methods, images or more will be more professional and academic. In addition, mathematicians and physicists might become more involved in PubPeer and its mission, because PubPeer 2.0 platform now supports LaTeX equations.

One new and thoughtful feature for users is the pre-viewing of comments (to detect any spelling and grammatical error). This should improve the quality of comments visible to

the readers and the public. The comments now appear in a chronological order to the readers with embedded links.

PubPeer: Pros & Cons

For-profit subscription journals generally remain uninterested in the post-publication peer review process. as it may cast doubt on the quality of their journal content. With PubPeer 2.0, it is possible to help correct and weed out the low-quality-yet-already-published science. Such platforms also offer an alternative to the traditional peer review landscape dominated by the academic journal publishers.

Moreover, PubPeer 2.0 centralizes the post-publication peer review process. This makes it easy to search from anywhere by anyone. With the help of this detailed peer review via a 3rd-party platform, scientists might become encouraged to take more care in the design, execution, and reporting of their research before publication.

A drawback still persists. By allowing post-publication peer review develop along a Facebook or Twitter model may make it difficult to share objective reviews on flaws and merits. This will not be fair to those qualified researchers trying to do sound science.

Finally, does the enhanced anonymity of the peers become a good or bad thing? Depends on who you ask. Certainly, it helps junior researchers participate in peer review without reservations when reviewing the work of their peers or experienced researchers. When coupled to an open post-publication peer review process, it can also mitigate any potential conflicts of interests. These conflicts can sometimes arise between peer reviewers assigned by the journals and authors of the paper.

Peering Ahead…

With PubPeer 2.0, the online platform for post-publication peer review has improved. A key pillar of PubPeer is strong anonymity in peer review. However, this might rub the open access promoters the wrong way. Therefore, it is likely poised to grow in influence and to get much busier.

What are your views on this model of post-publication peer review? Is it bound to find more support? Share your thoughts in the comments section!

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