

The PubPub Is Open!

Collaborative Publishing for All

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Post Url

<https://www.enago.com/academy/the-pubpub-is-open-collaborative-publishing-for-all/>

PubPub is an open collaborative publishing tool devised by three Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) graduate students: Travis Rich, Thariq Shihpar, and David Moinina Sengeh. They believed that it was time for a true revolution in [academic publishing](#)—time to re-energize the world of science and to create a more authentic publishing platform which will more accurately reflect the collaborative nature of scientific research. Thus, the concept of a “pub” emerged—a social, interactive, open-door atmosphere for members of the scientific (and public policy) community to work and publish together.

According to the website, [PubPub](#) is a free and open tool for collaborative editing, instant publishing, continuous review, and grassroots journals. The creators of PubPub believe that publishing should be author-driven, that trust and rewards for participation should be widely distributed, and that constituents should be encouraged to curate material according to specific fields of interest, creating their own “journals” where appropriate. The idea is to take the “gate-keeping” of scientific research away from the traditional journals and open it up to the scientific community, producing more robust, collaborative, and authentic science.

Four Constituents and Benefits

The four main constituents of this experiment are 1) Readers, 2) Authors, 3) Reviewers, and 4) Journals. For readers, one of the main benefits is zero financial cost.

Membership to scientific/academic societies can be expensive, especially if your field has several publications. PubPub offers a free journal experience that is interactive and open to readers’ input and commentary. This is something a traditional journal cannot offer and should serve to move scientific inquiry forward in a more enriching way.

Authors may also experience the greatest benefit from this publishing platform. The pressure to publish can be intense at many universities and having the opportunity to do research on a platform that encourages collaborative editing and finding solutions not only spreads awareness of an author’s work through reviewer commentary but also increases reference to the work amongst other scientists. This helps in building both

reputation and scholarly currency at the same time. Also, traditional journals provide only citation metrics, which authors use to develop their professional reputations whereas PubPub uses many more metrics, for instance, uploading influential data sets, leaving constructive peer reviews, making useful and clarifying comments, and performing quality curation.

Although the benefit to reviewers is less clear at the moment, the benefit to the reviewer selection process is evident. Over the years, there have been complaints within the scientific community regarding the manner in which journals select their peer-reviewers. These complaints range from the review process being too slow and conservative to accusations of discrimination against women reviewers and those of different nationalities/affiliations or whose native language is different from that of the journal. This open feedback platform erases these peer-review issues.

For journals, the situation is much the same: there is more benefit to the process of journaling and the concept of what constitutes a journal rather than upgrading the status of traditional journals. In PubPub, anyone can curate a journal. This allows for specialization and targeting of specific audiences, significantly broadening the scope of scientific exploration. Two examples of these curated journals are the [Journal of Design and Science](#) (a joint effort amongst the MIT Media Lab, MIT Press, and MIT Libraries) and [ResponsiveScience.org](#) (Kevin Esvelt, et al), which focuses on pre-experiment publication and discussion.

Expanding into Government

PubPub has expanded its reach into the field of government, in particular, the area of policy development. Using the same open collaborative model, citizens and government officials can discuss and develop policy. In Mexico City, Mexico, PubPub is piloting [GlobalCDMX](#), a platform that experiments with peer-reviewed legislation and public policy.

A similar platform is also being proposed in Freetown, Sierra Leone for constitutional review. David Moinina Sengeh, one of the creators of PubPub, is from Sierra Leone and is active in his home country. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, this proposal is still in progress with its purpose yet to be defined. Also, introducing this collaborative approach and technological platform to the government, at least in the United States, would facilitate both decision-making and civic input.

Evolution as a Core Ideal

Instead of being a static medium working towards a set goal, PubPub's goal is an ever-evolving, changing format along with technology that meets the needs of the scientific community which it serves and by whom it is run. As Travis Rich says on the [Hello, PubPub](#) page, "Publishing isn't about journals and their branding—it's about science."

Given this open collaborative format, it is possible to imagine things getting a bit out of control—people may be tempted to advocate for themselves or form political alliances,

artificially inflating data metrics. Some might see an open environment as an invitation to chaos, but the developers of PubPub hope that the spirit of author-driven publishing for the benefit of scientific progress will win out in the end.

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