PERSPECTIVES ON PEER REVIEW IN THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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What we’ll cover…

- Publishing practices across HSS
- Common challenges for editors/reviewers
- Alternative peer review models
- Focus on ‘open’ peer review
- Palgrave Macmillan case studies
- The way ahead
Palgrave Macmillan’s portfolio

50+ journals spanning the Humanities and Social Sciences

MONOGRAPHS AND PROFESSIONAL

HANDBOOKS

PALGRAVE PIVOTS
Academic publishing across HSS

• Longer-form communications important for HSS - particularly in the humanities (often single-authored)

• Relative importance of journals versus monographs varies by discipline

• Double-blind review most common for journals; single for books/monographs

• Review timeframes (and sub-to-pub) often longer than for STM

• Often slower citation rates in HSS – but published works often have longer half lives (and ‘shelf lives’) vs STM

What Palgrave Macmillan authors tell us

• Peer review is one of the top three factors authors look for when deciding on an outlet for their research

• Our authors want us to innovate when it comes to peer review:
  • 70% of authors are frustrated with peer review with turnaround times
  • 77% think traditional peer review could be more efficient
  • 67% think publishers should experiment with alternative peer-review methods

Data sources: Author Insights August 2015, Nature Publishing Group/Palgrave Macmillan (n = 3023); Survey of Palgrave Macmillan research panel, April 2013 (n = 403)
Common editorial challenges

- Efficiency of workflows – e.g. speed
- Quality and objectivity
- Transparency of editorial decisions
- Assessing non-mainstream works
- Support and guidance for reviewers
- Reviewer recognition

Improving the peer review process

- ‘Traditional’ model has imperfections
- Pressure on peer review is a result of wider system not necessarily problem inherent in traditional model
- Publishers have vital part to play in improving efficiency, workflows and taking advantage of new opportunities
- Many are experimenting with alternative peer review models – most examples in STM, but some notable pilots in HSS
- Palgrave Macmillan has conducted pilots on journal and monographs

Different peer review models

- Portable/cascades
- Crowd
- Post-pub
- Traditional
- Open
- Fast-track
- Overlay (eg. with repositories)
Evaluating research – degrees of ‘openness’

- Transparency around editorial governance
- Reviewers’ identities made public post-publication
- Single-blind/non-blind (closed) review
- Publishing (anonymous/signed) reports with final works
- ‘Private’ open peer review – comments restricted to defined group
- ‘Crowd/public’ open review - extension to any self-selected ‘peers’
- Post-publication open evaluation (‘publish then filter’)

Arguments in favour of open review

• May solve (some) problems inherent in traditional review
• Re-evaluation of concept of ‘peer’
• More transparent and interactive
• Reflects reality of intellectual and scholarly life
• More collaborative approach – may be particularly suited to some HSS disciplines
• Public evaluation has pedagogical benefits
• Complements open access movement (OA uptake much lower in HSS)
Open review – some HSS examples

- **Journal of Interactive Media in Education** (Ubiquity Press); option of OPR since early 2000s (possibly earlier? – ongoing?)

- **Shakespeare Quarterly** (Folger Shakespeare Library); OPR pilots in 2010–4 and 2011

- **Devonshire Manuscript project** (University of Victoria, Canada); introduction, biographies and genealogical tables all subject to OPR/collaborative editing (2012)

- **Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities** (Modern Language Association, USA); OA collection of pedagogical resources; OPR/editing pilot in 2015/2016

- **The Open Access Companion to the Canterbury Tales** (OACCT Editorial Collective); essays subject to crowd-sourced review (2016)

- **Sociologica** (Italian Journal of Sociology); OPR of essays including virtual meetings between authors and reviewers (ongoing)

Case Study 1 – monographs

- Trial ran January—March 2014
- Covered ten titles in economics, sociology and cultural and media studies
- Open review took place after initial review of proposals, while authors were writing books
- Proposal and sample chapters posted to a blog-based platform and open to public comment for 6 weeks
- Focus on constructive discussion and developing works – not gatekeeping
- Chapters in trial were free to access – but not OA

https://palgraveopenreview.wordpress.com/
How did it go?

- 14 open reviews posted
- Six of the 10 works received at least one review
- 29 sets of comments in total including author and Palgrave editorial responses
- Three authors received private comments via email
- Most reviewed proposal - *Creating Economic Growth: Lessons for Europe*, which received 6 open reviews
- 3,700 visits (14,000 views) over 6-week trial period
What participants said...

**Author: Shepard Masocha**
School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, University of Kent, UK

“I agreed to participate in the open peer review process because I am very keen to receive feedback… whilst I am still in the process of writing the book. Since the beginning of this trial period, I have started to receive valuable feedback… I’ve replied to the initial comments, and it will be interesting to see if this results in an ongoing conversation. It will also be interesting to see what my editor thinks!”

**Reviewer: Katherine Cartmell**
Education Studies, Liverpool John Moores University, UK

“I think that open peer review is an innovative way to engage with potential readers and experts within a given field… I think it is important to get the perspectives of others who are not too close to the project… as a reviewer I find the blind peer review process limits the possibilities of team working. For example, when it is clear that there are methodological issues I make these as clear as possible within my reports. However, it would work so much better if I could put my name to my comments and offer to expand on these issues, should the author wish to via further correspondence. Isn’t this why we get involved in peer reviewing? To help and assist others?”
Case Study 2 – postmedieval

- Using open review since 2011
- Open blog interface allows full reviewer/author discussions and transparency
- Anyone with contribution to make is invited to comment and discuss the papers publicly, under their own names, and authors are encouraged to respond openly
- Post-review, authors revise their papers before publication in final form in the journal special issue

Editors’ statement on hoarders and hordes: responses to the Staffordshire Hoard

“As a reviewer, you are charged with being part of the collaboration, part of the Hoard/Horde. Our goal in this open review process is not to change the form of these experimental contributions, but rather to collaborate to expand, clarify, and refine. The crowd review mirrors the dialogic and collaborative form of the volume itself, and so we have generated an interface that allows for threaded comments in which readers can respond to one another as well as to authors directly. Our hope is that a lively month-long discussion will become its own kind of response to the Hoard, and we intend to archive the threaded comments on the Material Collective website. Authors may also incorporate suggestions into individual essays before final publication of the volume in summer of 2016”.

(http://thematerialcollective.org/postmedieval/)
Published special issues

- 'Becoming Media' (published Spring 2012)
  - Three-month online crowd review on six essays
  - Over 50 individual and detailed responses totalling some 24,000 words – nearly half the total of length of the essays themselves
- 'Comic Medievalisms' (Summer 2014)
  - Collaboration with MediaCommons Press at New York University
  - New review platform and more supple commenting templates
  - Over 250 comments from over 30 reviewers
- 'The Holocaust and the Middle Ages’ (Autumn 2014)
  - Over 80 comments from a range of reviewers
- 'The Staffordshire Hoard' (Summer 2016)
  - Hosted at The Material Collective - collaborative of art historians and students of visual culture
  - Interface allows threaded comments - readers can respond to one another as well as to authors directly

*postmedieval: http://www.springer.com/literature/journal/41280*
Palgrave’s pilots – key lessons

- Authors were enthusiastic about possibility of encouraging debate and receiving additional feedback
- Reviewers broadly enjoyed experience - 75% of reviewers in monograph pilot keen to participate in a future exercises
- Editors sometimes felt comments were not sufficiently detailed or comprehensive to substitute for traditional peer review – monograph pilot
- Often hard to secure open comments – may work better attached to an existing online network, or via standard review requests
- Future pilots could allow authors to choose the point in the writing process at which open review used
Open review - solving some problems but creating others?

- Open review could pose (new?) challenges for editors, authors and reviewers:
  - Editorial decision making
  - Willingness to critique in open forums
  - Handling rejection in open forms
- Pilots to date (Palgrave and others) have identified other teething problems
- Mixed evidence it can overcome some of the problems inherent in traditional model
- Open review and OA publishing complementary – but challenges for publishers when used in conjunction with closed access publications

Summary

• HSS and STM editors face many common challenges
• Demand for improvements and experimentation with innovations – not necessarily a demand to completely ditch traditional model
• Alternative approaches can help confront particular problems with traditional model – but may in turn create new ones(?)
• Other models may be well suited for particular projects, fields or interdisciplinary works
• Publishers should be open to experimenting with alternative review models as part of broader drive to improve reviewer and author experience
• The way ahead - British Academy report (2007) recommended a system of ‘decentralised diversity’ that aspires to the universal ‘principles of timeliness, transparency and verifiability’

THANK YOU!