

The *Journal of Electronic Publishing*: Serving Academic Communities for 30 Years

CHÉRIFA BOUKACEM-ZEGHMOURI

Abstract: The anniversary of an academic journal is always an important moment, for the publication itself, for its editorial committee, and for the community of researchers and professionals that has formed around it and that thrives on the texts it publishes. Such a milestone allows us to take a step back and appreciate how much has been achieved, the work that is currently underway, and what remains to be done.

The *Journal of Electronic Publishing* (*JEP*), launched in 1995, celebrates its 30th birthday this year. Over three decades, the journal has served a professional and scientific community deeply engaged with the issues facing academic publishing as it transitions to the digital world. For a scholarly journal, this demonstrates an ability to remain relevant over the long term, addressing and documenting the processes, mechanisms, difficulties, obstacles, uncertainties, and advances of a great leap into the unknown: the shift to digital publishing, understood at the time as publishing through the internet. Supported by the University of Michigan Press, *JEP* was an early example of an open access journal that used what is now known as the diamond model, free for readers and authors alike. As the core of its editorial focus, it chose the very process of electronic communication and publishing that enabled its existence and that it was experimenting with.

The two issues published in the journal's first year illustrate the range of questions that preoccupied researchers and professionals in publishing and librarianship at the time. As the first article of its very first issue, *JEP* decided to reprint Vannevar Bush's important piece from 1945, "As We May Think"—a highly symbolic choice, establishing the order of discourse (Foucault 1971) in which *JEP* intended to situate itself.

Since its inception, *JEP* has set out to document active debates within the academic and professional community (both publishing and libraries) over issues involved in the transition within journal and book publishing to the "World Wide Web," as people called it at the time—including technical questions (formats, languages, etc.), socio-political questions (practices, norms, copyright, and author's rights), and economic questions (free access, costs, and pricing).

Within two years, the journal had attracted a community of readers and a pool of authors that included researchers from the humanities and social sciences, such as John Unsworth, who began contributing in 1997; Carol Tenopir and Andrew Odlyzko in 1998; Bo-Christer Björk in 2000; Peter Suber in 2007; and many others—alongside library and publishing professionals and independent consultants now recognized for their expertise, such as Joseph Esposito and Roger Schonfeld.

JEP served as a leading scholarly forum in the period when conversations about scientific publishing in academia and the media were dominated by the “serials crisis,” offering high-quality, peer-reviewed material for readers, researchers, and professionals who wanted a robust intellectual framework for thinking about such questions.

I became a devoted reader of *JEP* between 1998 and 1999, at the very beginning of my doctoral research. My thesis addressed the evolution of university libraries in light of the integration of then-novel electronic journals into their collections, and *JEP* offered articles that explored the transition to digital publishing and all the challenges involved. I still remember the effect that Edward J. Valauskas’s “Waiting for Thomas Kuhn: *First Monday* and the Evolution of Electronic Journals” (1997) had on my thinking. For a young researcher studying a field that was so full of uncertainties and undergoing such long-lasting changes, *JEP* offered a broad and rigorous framework for my thought.

The journal’s distinctiveness—and its strength—comes from the decision to focus from the outset on issues surrounding scholarly journals and books. As an open access publication, *JEP* is first and foremost independent, subject to no influence beyond its own academic choices, something reflected even in its editorial style. As a multidisciplinary journal, *JEP* gives ample space to information sciences and librarianship, with authors such as Carol Tenopir and Anne Okerson dealing specifically with the issues involved. In a period when the “Internet Revolution” was being proclaimed almost daily, *JEP* nourished ongoing theoretical and critical reflection, notably through its focus on the political economy of scientific communication, something demanded particularly by specialists in France (Chartron and Salaün 2000).

JEP publishes think pieces, research articles, first-person accounts and testimonials, book reviews, and informal texts in which authors can raise questions and share their well-reasoned perspectives. It also features reprints of previously published articles as well as versions of conference and symposium presentations, allowing them to reach a wider audience. Finally, it publishes recommendations for technical and editorial improvements from experts among the journal’s own readership. *JEP* remains what it has always been: a forum for sharing a rich and diverse range of texts, a catalyst for academic debate, and an object of reflection and experimentation.

In 1997, the journal began focusing more closely on the socioeconomic and socio-symbolic issues arising from the transformations underway in scientific

publishing, taking a multifaceted approach that left room for experimentation. In particular, *JEP* approached questions about the value of the academic publishing sector from an interdisciplinary perspective, tackling it from different angles, including the crucial question of its organizational structures. The same applies to the related question of certification and peer review, which has been a constant across all 30 years of the journal's existence.

In a period when digital scientific publishing was still in its infancy, *JEP* was more than a journal: It was a forum for discussion and for sharing expertise, where all those involved could reflect on, examine, and share their experiences. As mailing lists began to develop in the Web 1.0 era, *JEP* offered a common space for everyone interested in the implications of the shift from paper to digital publishing to develop their empirical and theoretical knowledge. This editorial approach allowed the journal to publish groundbreaking articles on a wide range of questions, as in an early piece from 1998 that clearly identified the challenges that digital publishing posed to standards such as DOI.

The *Journal of Electronic Publishing* both records and contributes to contemporary debates, with communities coming together around its areas of focus. It serves as a record of these debates, letting us observe how they evolve over time. For instance, its earliest issues from the late 1990s focused on the economics of electronic publishing, gradually giving way to questions about the socioeconomics of the publishing process. The journal continued to address technical issues (e.g., hypertext), but from the 2000s these were accompanied by issues related to electronic documents, such as downloads and citations, and since 2006 by questions about search engines.

The journal paused publication between 2003 and 2005, but only to come back stronger than ever. Judith Axler Turner, then editor in chief since 1997, explains that *JEP* returned in order to ask some of the most pressing questions in the field of scientific communication, which has seen unprecedented development in terms of funding, new journal titles, and doctoral dissertations in Europe and North America. These questions included peer review, preprints, the reality of digital libraries, and the shift toward an editorial role for libraries in response to the developing landscape of open access scientific publication (9.1 [2006]; 20.2 [2017]).

The terminology used in articles has also evolved, with “digital” sometimes replacing “electronic” and the introduction of terms such as “cyberinfrastructure” and “cyberscholarship” for the human sciences (2007). Open repositories and open access more broadly now play a central role. But some things remain constant: journal and book publishing, which are given equal importance (the latter seeing special issues in 2017 and 2018); the evolution of university presses, with whole issues on the topic (e.g., 13.2 [2010]); and standards that have emerged in digital publishing as it continues to undergo new technical developments (14.1 [2011]).

In 2016, *JEP* published a special issue on a topic important not just for humanities and social science researchers involved in scholarly publishing (both books and journals) but also for the position of the journal itself, which had just celebrated its 20th anniversary: “Disrupting the Humanities: Towards Posthumanities.” One exemplary text was that of Janneke Adema (currently the journal’s co-editor) and Gary Hall (2016), who discussed a number of concepts and terms—*disrupting humanities*, *digital humanities*, and *posthuman humanities*—in light of a critique of the digital. Their argument reflected a symbolic and political concern with what it means for the humanities to engage in forms of digital knowledge production and what these new forms of publishing and editorial practice mean for the human sciences. The issue’s 14 contributions, both theoretical and empirical, helped to consolidate and shape the identity of the journal, which for 20 years had worked to advance the field of digital scholarly publishing in these areas.

After a challenging period in the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a profound impact on academic publishing, the *Journal of Electronic Publishing* regained its momentum with the full support of the University of Michigan Library. In 2022, under the leadership of Michael Roy and David W. Lewis, the journal expanded its editorial committee to members from European and Latin American countries and began accepting articles in French and Spanish as well as English. I readily accepted an invitation to join the editorial committee, becoming part of a collaborative team dedicated to a leading journal in the humanities and social sciences, boasting a rich history and high standards of quality and rigor. As an open access journal since its founding, *JEP* has firmly indicated that it welcomes other communities of authors and readers, enshrining its values of inclusivity within its editorial policy.

The journal published its 25th volume in 2022, with an issue that set the tone for its future trajectory, addressing the most pressing issues in globalized scientific publishing. This included a masterfully clear presentation of the importance of rights retention (Suber 2022) and a new examination of scientific publishing from the perspective of surveillance (Pooley 2022), which prompted my own reflections on the subject (Boukacem-Zeghmouri 2022). Finally, one of the journal’s co-editors, David W. Lewis, revisited contemporary digital publishing through four key issues, including self-publishing (Lewis 2022).

As in the past, the journal takes on topics rarely discussed in the journals of major publishing groups, providing a nuanced look at subjects such as predatory journals and the realities of digital open access publishing in developing countries. Alongside economic, social, and political questions, it also increasingly emphasizes the cultural issues that shape digital publishing.

The call for articles for volume 27, coordinated by the new co-editors, Alyssa Arbuckle and Janneke Adema, focused specifically on a scholarly discussion of multilingualism

in scientific publishing. The issue came out in September 2024, with an editorial and articles in English, French, and Spanish and texts by leading scholars such as Lynne Bowker (2024). Once again, *JEP* showed that its concept of inclusivity goes far beyond the norm. As Arbuckle and Adema (2024) explain, they envision the journal as a collection of authors (and their ideas), carefully selected and brought together to foster a long-term dialogue across successive issues—what they call a “discursive community.” Such editorial leadership does not just offer scientific and symbolic value but ensures the order of discourse and contributes to knowledge production in a constantly evolving field where uncertainty reigns.

A recent special issue (28.1 [2025]) explores those things that make up the day-to-day of researchers’ collective and collaborative life but remain invisible, ephemeral, and in a sense almost imperceptible. The questions posed are fundamental for researchers interested in collective sources of knowledge production, particularly in the context of digital technologies. By focusing on the collective, collaborative dimension, the issue extends what Muriel Lefebvre (2014) in her Habilitation called “the infra-ordinary of research.” Once again, *JEP* has covered a topic rarely explored in the scientific literature, using an anthropological approach to shed light on changes underway in scientific thought and research practice.

For 30 years, *JEP* has successfully navigated the delicate task of maintaining its editorial approach, based on the transition in academic publishing to the digital world, without sacrificing rigor, quality, or editorial independence. Simultaneously, *JEP* has evolved to cover the vast array of new research topics that has emerged from these changes, thanks to work by the research community (readers and authors alike) that it has brought together.

A decade ago, in an effort to understand how scholarly journals have developed, Casey Brienza (2015) proposed a typology based on their socio-political goals. She identified three types: journals of record, activism, and professional legitimation. On the occasion of *JEP*’s 30th birthday, we can return to Brienza’s typology and ask ourselves: What sort of journal is *JEP*? For the communities involved, is it a journal of record, activism, or professional legitimation?

We can confidently say that, at the grand age of 30, the *Journal of Electronic Publishing* embodies all three roles. It is a journal of record, continuing to nurture discussion and research about changes in scholarly publishing in the digital age. In this sense, the journal helps to transmit and archive the ideas that have shaped and structured the field. *JEP* is also an activist journal, because it has used its editorial policies to champion—and continues to champion—ideas and visions that are reflected not just in its articles and special issues, but in the economic model that ensures its continued existence. By remaining with the University of Michigan, the journal has preserved its commitment to the open access model it promoted from the outset. Finally, *JEP* is also

a journal of professional legitimation, contributing to the recognition of new research topics, groundbreaking approaches, and emerging skills, both for researchers and for professionals in libraries and academic publishing.

At a time when new forms of industrialization, based on digital technologies and artificial intelligence, are making themselves felt in international scientific publishing, *JEP* has many more decades ahead of it, providing a free and independent forum for discussion and research about the fresh changes underway. In the meantime, let us wish *JEP* a happy and prosperous birthday and all the best for the future!

References

- Adema, Janneke, and Gary Hall. 2016. "Posthumanities: The Dark Side of 'The Dark Side of the Digital.'" *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 19 (2). <https://doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0019.201>.
- Arbuckle, Alyssa, and Janneke Adema. 2024. "On Journals and Communities: A Note from JEP's Co-Editors." *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 27 (1). <https://doi.org/10.3998/jep.6251>.
- Boukacem-Zeghmouri, Chérifa. 2022. La communication scientifique, sous surveillance? Entre stratégies techno-industrielles et imaginaires des chercheurs. In *XXIIIème Congrès de la SFSIC (Société Française des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication) - La numérisation des sociétés*. Société Française des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication, June 2022, Bordeaux, France. <https://hal.science/hal-04256250v1>.
- Bowker, Lynne. 2024. "Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication: How Far Can Technology Take Us and What Else Can We Do?" *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 27 (1). <https://doi.org/10.3998/jep.6262>.
- Brienza, Casey. 2015. "Activism, Legitimation, or Record: Towards a New Tripartite Typology of Academic Journals." *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 46 (2): 141–57. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jsp.46.2.02>.
- Bush, Vannevar. 1945. "As We May Think." *The Atlantic* 176 (1): 101–8. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1945/07/as-we-may-think/303881/>
- Chartron, Ghislaine, and Jean-Michel Salaün. 2000. La reconstruction de l'économie politique des publications scientifiques. *Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France* 45 (2) : 32–42. <https://bbf.enssib.fr/consulter/bbf-2000-02-0032-003>.
- Foucault, Michel. 1971. *L'ordre du discours: leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970*. Gallimard.
- Lefebvre, Muriel. 2014. "L'infra-ordinaire de la recherche. Écritures scientifiques personnelles, archives et mémoire de la recherche." *Sciences de la société* 89:3–17. <https://doi.org/10.4000/sds.203>.
- Lewis, David W. 2022. "Digital Publishing's Four Challenges." *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 25 (1). <https://doi.org/10.3998/jep.2012>.
- Pooley, Jeff. 2022. "Surveillance Publishing." *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 25 (1). <https://doi.org/10.3998/jep.1874>.
- Suber, Peter. 2022. "Publishing Without Exclusive Rights." *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 25 (1). <https://doi.org/10.3998/jep.1869>.
- Valauskas, Edward J. 1997. "Waiting for Thomas Kuhn: *First Monday* and the Evolution of Electronic Journals." *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 3 (1). <https://doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0003.104>.