Editorial: The Grand Challenges for Academic Journals

Welcome to the final issue of Information Polity for 2022. For us, as Editors-in-Chief of the journal, this marks a five-year milestone of our stewardship. During this period, we have overseen a number of changes in the way that the *Information Polity* is managed and governed. We are delighted with the progress that has been made and feel that this is an excellent reflection of the strength of our academic community and scholarship in the area. At the same time, the position and role of academic journals is in a turbulent situation and in this editorial, we would like to take the opportunity to reflect on five 'grand challenges'. These challenges are not especially new, and there are others, but these are primarily issues that we have been navigating in recent years and which, we feel, will shape the future of academic journals

Challenge 1: (Open) Access versus Economic Sustainability

Whilst our primary concern as Editors-in-Chief of the journal is academic quality and integrity we do have to keep in mind both (open) access to high quality academic work and the economic sustainability and viability of the journal. Open access is of great importance, as it makes papers available to worldwide academic audiences, including those who cannot afford expensive subscriptions. At the same time, a journal needs to generate income to be sustainable. Of course, these are matters of considerable importance to the publisher, IOS Press. There is a 'live' discourse about how publishing costs should be met and the best business model to achieve this, taking into account the publishing costs for authors who do not have access to institutional funding. There are a number of different approaches, with an overall movement to authors paying for publication via 'article processing charges' and 'open access' for readers. This poses questions about how to set these charges and the application of fee waivers and discounts – especially when the fee can range from €500 to €4,000. For *Information Polity* we are delighted that the publisher has given us a key say in how these arrangements will be set in the future, so that authors from low income countries and others with no access to institutional funding will be able to publish in the journal

Challenge 2: Open Data Access Requirements: How Far Do We Want to Go?

The move to open access within academic publishing takes a number of forms. Beyond the already mentioned 'open access' publication fees, is also a move for contributions to provide access to data sets - as means for making the knowledge generation process more transparent and to ensure the reliability and robustness of research findings, in that the latter can be checked and audited. This poses a raft of issues for individual researchers, research projects, funding institutions and journals alike. There are issues about the ownership of the data, whether the data can be anonymised, who should be allowed access and what form publication should take. There are also considerable differences in the effort required to make numerical and qualitative data sets 'publicly' available. For journals, the issue here is whether this should be a requirement for publication and how to accommodate different practices in different disciplines and geographic jurisdictions. At *Information Polity*, we now give authors the option of providing a link to relevant data sets, or to make a statement about the data sets used and their wider availability.

Challenge 3: Valuing Peer Review versus Anonymity

At *Information Polity* we use a 'double blind' peer review process, by which the authors and reviewers are not known to one another. This process is critical in allowing independent reviews that ensure quality and a robust exchange of views about an academic contribution. The reputation of an author thus has no influence on the review and the reviewer can freely speak their mind. This process goes against the current trend where reviewer's identity is disclosed with a view to encouraging openness and transparency and to acknowledge the key contribution of reviewers to academic publications (see also our editorial about the unsung heroes of *Information Polity* (Webster & Meijer, 2020)). This disclosure may be voluntary or compulsory and can include the reviewer's identity and review. Whilst we acknowledge the intentions behind this trend, we would also note that such a process may discourage reviewers from participating in the review process and influence what they say. Instead, we have adopted a pragmatic compromise, whereby, we retain the double blind review process, and at the end of a calendar year publish a list of reviewers that have completed reviews in that year.

Challenge 4: The Influence of and Dependence on Big Tech's Social Media

Beyond the dissemination of academic work in a journal format, social media channels have become increasingly important for disseminating messages and for communicating with a variety of audiences. Academia has not been immune to this trend and *Information Polity* now has an internet platform and social media presence, as well as Website and Social Media Associate Editors. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Mendeley, are becoming critical to facilitating debate, visibility, awareness and impact. At *Information Polity* we have recently started to ask authors for their Twitter identities, so we can formalise and generate content on this platform, but we have a long way to go to maximise our profile across the range of social media platforms available to us. A key challenge is how we can use the strength of these social media without being captured by the same big tech companies that we often critique in our academic work.

Challenge 5: The Rise and Rise of Journal Metrics: Playing the Game

Measures of citations and impact factors have dominated the journal landscape for over twenty years, and influence an author's decision about whether to publish in a journal, as well as the overall perception of the standing of a journal in an academic field. Whilst there is a strong critique of the use of metrics in academia (Janssen et al., 2004), we also acknowledge that we need to 'play the game' and to ensure that *Information Polity* is a highly ranked publication outlet. This situation has been challenging for journals operating beyond core disciplinary areas and those in emerging topic areas. Whilst the metrics for *Information Polity* are excellent in Scopus, we have waited for many years, as a designated 'emerging journal', to be included in the Web of Science. With this is mind, we are actively pursuing strategies deigned to raise our impact factor in order to make our journal a more attractive publication outlet for academics working in certain disciplines in certain countries.

From the five challenges presented here it is evident that the landscape around academic journals is changing quickly, and publishers and editors will need to keep abreast of these changes if they are to ensure that their journal remains relevant and governed in such a way that they can continue to make intellectual contributions – and much of this goes beyond overseeing good quality scholarship. At *Information Polity*, we will endeavour to navigate this environment in the interests of our academic community and we are always open to ideas and suggestions on all of these issues.

The final issue of *Information Polity* for 2022 is a special issue dedicated to '*Inclusion and eGovernment'*, with a focus on diversity and social equity. We would like to thank the special issue guest

editors, Erna Ruijer (Utrecht University) and Suzanne Piotrowski (Rutgers University), for assembling such an interesting collection of articles and book reviews. Combined, they assert the view that inclusion, as a concept and a set of practices in eGovernment, can only be fully understood in their contextual settings, and that these contexts determine outcomes, effectiveness and more broadly equity and equality in society. This is a powerful message and one which will only become more pertinent with the global rush to further adopt artificial intelligence in eGovernment.

Professor Albert Meijer
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References

Janssen, D., Rotthier, S., & Snijkers, K. (2004). If you measure it they will score: An assessment of international eGovernment benchmarking. *Information Polity*, *9*(3-4), 121-130.

Webster, C. W., & Meijer, A. (2020). The unsung heroes of Information Polity. *Information Polity*, *25*(4), 407-408.