Brief Reviews of Books and Products

The Scholarly Communication Handbook: From Research Dissemination to Societal Impact *[EPUB version was reviewed].*

Karen Burton

BRIEF REVIEWS OF BOOKS AND PRODUCTS

The Scholarly Communication Handbook: From Research Dissemination to Societal Impact is an expression of author Lai Ma's wish for a comprehensive resource that guides newcomers to academia through the minefield of academic publishing. Ma is currently an assistant professor at the School of Information and Communication Studies at University College Dublin, where she teaches scholarly communication; her research interests include research infrastructure, research evaluation, and the political economy of information. *The Scholarly Communication Handbook* was written with two assumptions in mind: that all academic researchers need to be knowledgeable about scholarly communication and publishing, and that better-informed researchers will make career-enhancing publishing decisions. Drawing on her eye-opening first academic publishing experience while a PhD candidate, Ma provides a practical and easy-to-understand overview of scholarly communication. Guided by the question of where to publish, *The Scholarly Communication Handbook* is organized into digestible chapters that each cover an area of scholarly communication. Ma successfully makes this book a multidisciplinary introduction to and overview of scholarly communication, but the accessible length does not allow her to address many specific disciplinary norms regarding scholarly publishing.

Ma begins the book with an extensive list of abbreviations and their definitions; readers familiar with scholarly communication will appreciate the review and perhaps even learn some new acronyms, while newcomers will avoid confusion in future chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 offer a comprehensive introduction to types of scholarly publications and introduce what Ma terms the "key actors" in academic publishing. The information she provides about discipline-specific preprint servers will be especially helpful for researchers who need to comply with funding mandates for immediate public access to the products of their research. Chapter 3 explains in detail the myriad types of open access (OA) and offers an overview of each, while chapter 4 introduces the complicated concept of copyright, puts it in the context of academic scholarship, and explains why academics should care about this often overlooked side of

publishing. Ma also introduces the reality that publishing OA does not guarantee that authors will retain their rights and elaborates on the differences between exclusive and non-exclusive licenses to publish. She suggests close reading of licensing terms and offers guidance on how authors can advocate for retaining rights to their publications.

Chapter 5 illuminates the peer review process, which is an often overlooked subject in graduate education. The examples Ma provides of peer review forms will be helpful to novice researchers, as will the description of the peer review workflow for journals, conferences, and monographs. It would have been even more helpful if Ma had included visual flowcharts here, but this is still a very informative chapter. She also points out that the time from submission to publication can be an important factor, depending on where a researcher is in their career, so one may need to take that into consideration when choosing a publication venue. The idea of open peer review is fairly recent, and Ma describes numerous models along with the advantages of and problems with each. Comprehensively covering peer review could easily be an entire book, but Ma does an excellent job of giving a primer in *The Scholarly Communication Handbook*.

Chapter 6 tackles the confusing and ever-changing world of research metrics and attempts to bring clarity to these misunderstood numbers that are often so influential to a researcher's career. This is an especially important topic for anyone who may be in a tenure-track position since these metrics are often used to evaluate performance. Ma explains how journal-level metrics work and the different sources of these metrics, and she touches on the dilemma of specialized journals that may not be included in indices or tools that issue metrics. Ma also makes the point that, while often used for this purpose, journal metrics are not appropriate for evaluating the impact of individual articles or researchers. Author-level metrics such as the H-index are discussed, along with their deficiencies. Altmetrics are briefly mentioned, but a more robust discussion of these would have been both appropriate and appreciated. Ma concludes this chapter with a discussion of responsible metric use and provides an extensive list of resources for additional reading. The final chapters discuss research integrity and the future of scholarly communication and touch on paper mills, retractions, the finances of scholarly publishing, and issues with non-traditional research outputs (such as data and computer code) not being recognized as publications.

The strength of *The Scholarly Communication Handbook* is its conversational tone and accessible language that simplifies complicated concepts and makes them easy to understand for a broad audience. The self-contained chapters allow a reader to jump straight to a topic, and many chapters include a list of online resources for additional learning. Since this book was published less than a year after ChatGPT was made available to the public, and presumably the book was written long before its publication date, Ma only briefly touches on the

potential uses of generative AI in the peer review and editorial processes. If there is a second edition or update to this book, it would be good to hear more from Ma on this topic. The one subject the book fell short on is guidance for identifying predatory publishers. Offering more resources on that subject would have been helpful since most researchers will receive a suspicious-looking email soliciting an article submission at some point in their career. However, this book is still a comprehensive, multidisciplinary introduction to scholarly communication and should be on a required reading list for early-career researchers, graduate students, and especially library school students who are interested in learning about scholarly communication. For seasoned researchers, *The Scholarly Communication Handbook* will be a refreshing update on how the publishing landscape has changed, and for graduate students and early career academics, this will be the primer they need to successfully navigate publishing throughout their careers.

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Karen Burton is an assistant librarian at Clemson University Libraries, where she is the liaison for the College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Life Sciences. Burton graduated from Clemson with a Bachelor's of Science in Entomology and received her Master's of Library and Information Science from the University of South Carolina. She has worked in many different roles at Clemson over the years from raising beetles to providing academic support to student athletes. Before joining Clemson Libraries, she worked for the University of South Carolina School of Medicine Greenville, where she supported the Continuing Medical Education program for Prisma Health Upstate. Her research interests include scholarly communication, open access, and predatory publishing.