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STM response to Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS) *'Evaluating big deal journal bundles'*

A recent article in PNAS suggests that commercial publishers deliver less value than not-for-profit publishers on the basis of a price-per-citation analysis. While price-per-citation is one metric from which value can be assessed, readers should be cautioned against drawing conclusions from this data. The primary problem with relying on citation analyses is that different fields of study have widely variable citation behaviors. For example, in many fields, articles are used more, and cited less, and vice versa.

The study also suggests that all bundled deals are the same, when in fact there are a variety of contract terms that explain the difference between what similar schools may pay, and these terms have little to do with confidentiality agreements, (which are far less common than the authors suggest, likely explained by such agreements being used far less today than 2009). Primarily, the terms of the contract themselves, such as whether or not the customer rents or owns content, volume/length discounts, amount of print copies, consortium-negotiated deals and other institutional research activity characteristics that influence the amount of higher or lower priced content consumed.

Any discussion concerning the costs of scholarly content should in-turn include the value customers derive from receiving content curated and delivered via publishers. Commercial and nonprofit publishers both perform a vital service for the research community and society in general, providing access to, and preservation of, scientific discovery and knowledge. This adds real value to the evolving needs of academic communities, and is not borne out in a simplistic comparison of a solitary metric.

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