

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding and interacting with a tablet computer. The person is wearing a light blue denim shirt. The background is a blurred library with bookshelves filled with books. A solid blue diagonal shape covers the top-left corner of the image.

Techno-colonization of scientific knowledge production

Digital Humanism Sept 22, 2026

Stefan.Klein@uni-muenster.de

Let me introduce: Elsevier

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... a carefully crafted and maintained image

Narrative of the beginning



The original Elsevir printer's mark introduced by Isaac Elzevir in 1620.

ELSEVIER

1880 Elsevier founded in Rotterdam by five Dutch booksellers They took the name from the publishing house of the Elsevier family, which was established in **1580** and published such early scholars as Scaliger, Galileo, Erasmus and Descartes. [Reed Elsevier Timeline](#)

Romanticized symbiotic relationship narrative

“... the intertwined tree and vine represent a fruitful relationship – and the story therefore carries a moral. As Erasmus said, referring to the classic metaphor of tree and vine: **"Like the vine which, though the most distinguished of all trees, yet needs the support of canes or stake or other trees which bear no fruit, the powerful and the learned need the help of lesser men."**

Viewed this way, the logo represents, in classical symbolism, **the symbiotic relationship between publisher and scholar**. The addition of the Non Solus inscription **reinforces the message that publishers, like the elm tree, are needed to provide sturdy support for scholars, just as surely as scholars, the vine, are needed to produce fruit. Publishers and scholars cannot do it alone. They need each other.** This remains as apt representation of **the relationship between Elsevier and its authors today – neither dependent, nor independent, but interdependent.**

[What does "Non Solus" mean in Elsevier's logo?](#)

The riddle

”[M]argins in the journals business [are] ‘extremely high’. One could argue that they are unjustifiably high - bluntly, we believe that the **professional publishers add little value to the research process**. We suggest that readers consider the margins (just momentarily) as taxpayers rather than investors. How happy are you, as taxpayers, that your governments are enabling private sector operators, with very little invested capital, to earn 40% operating margins? (p34)

What the Open Access debate has done... is to refocus attention on the large margins made by commercial publishers, including REL, in the journals market. **The industry structure can only be described as bizarre** - the state funds most research, pays the salaries of most of those checking the quality of research (in peer review processes), and then buys most of the published product. This has been rather elegantly described as the “triple-pay” model.”

Europe
Media Publishing

Deutsche Bank



11 January 2005

Company Review

- How has Elsevier/ RELX managed to evade disruption and excel?

Outline

1. Research history and context
2. Method
- 3. Elsevier's emerging role in scholarly publishing: an evolutionary technography**
- 4. Techno-colonialization of knowledge production**
5. The way forward

1 Research history and context .

“Skin in the game of scholarly communication”

- **Co-Editor in chief** of Open Access Journal (eJOV: 2005 – 2010): discontinued because unsustainable in current environment;
- Numerous international editorial, reviewer and conference committee roles;
- **Senior editor** for Journal of Strategic Information Systems (Elsevier) (2016 - 2017).

*In December **2016** the Chancellor of Uni Münster informed university staff about **imminent German-wide boycott of Elsevier** (discontinuing subscriptions 2017 - 2023) in response to the stalled DEAL negotiations triggered our research.*

Prior joint work and recent publications (open access)

Organization

Open access | CC BY-NC-ND | Research article | First published online February 3, 2026

Techno-colonization of scholarly communication: A call to reclaim control

[Simeon Vidolov](#)   and [Stefan Klein](#) [View all authors and affiliations](#)

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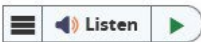
views

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citations to date

4

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Empirical Research

Platform capture of scientific knowledge production: publishers' dominance, generative AI and Subsumption of academic labor

[Ojelanki Ngwenyama](#)  [Stefan Klein](#) & [Frantz Rowe](#)

Received 19 Oct 2025, Accepted 05 Mar 2026, Published online: 19 Mar 2026

[Cite this article](#) <https://doi.org/10.1080/0960085X.2026.2642660> 

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The Open Prison of the Big Data Revolution: False Consciousness, Faustian Bargains, and Digital Entrapment

[Ojelanki Ngwenyama](#) , [Frantz Rowe](#) , [Stefan Klein](#), [Helle Zinner Henriksen](#) 

Published Online: 31 Oct 2023 | <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.2020.0588> 

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Volume 35,
Issue 4

December 2024
Pages iii-x, 1507-2085, C2

2 Methodological approach for reconstructing strategic trajectories.

Evolutionary technography is an “analysis of primary and secondary sources such as (platform) documentation, press releases, media or industry reports, and corporate blog posts,

- ... to develop a “critical understanding of the mechanisms and operational logic of software” (p. 61).
- “ ... to critically analyse specific strategies behind the technological development of a platform within a particular field such as AI.” (Luitse, 2024, p. 5)
- To identify “suggestive qualities of sociotechnical systems and infrastructures, i.e. how these systems and infrastructures work, and more importantly, who they work for” (Galloway, 2004).

Aims:

- reconstructing the dynamics of digital and strategic transformations
- identifying pattern of Big Tech strategies (datafication, platformization, surveillance), playbooks, and trajectories
- Exploring the co-evolution of scholarly infrastructures and scholarly practices.

Data collection

- Direct involvement with Elsevier (JSIS SE, until 2017)
- Direct communication
 - IJsbrand Jan Aalbersberg, SVP of Research Integrity for Elsevier <https://researcheracademy.elsevier.com/node/3012>,
 - Data Protection Officer (ELS-OXF) [<dpo@elsevier.com>](mailto:dpo@elsevier.com),
 - Max Voegler, VP of Global Strategic Networks Dach <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/contributor/max-voegler>.
- Three GDPR Data Subject Requests
- Extensive and diverse set of primary and secondary sources ... Elsevier documents, press releases, media [Guardian] and industry reports [scholarly kitchen, ITHAKA, ...], and corporate blog posts, interdisciplinary literature (media & communication studies, information systems, political economy, philosophy, ethics, management, organization studies, economics ...).

Two caveats

1. The Elsevier Web site is regularly updated (a moving target).
2. The wording in Elsevier's communication (Web site, reports, press releases) is notoriously vague, complex, tautological, ambiguous. It often appears to be written by a team of communication experts and lawyers.

3 Case and analysis: Evolutionary technography of Elsevier's emerging role in scholarly publishing

Why Elsevier?



ELSEVIER is the largest of the Big Five academic publishers

Facts & Figures

Scale of publishing operation in 2025

- ... owns over **3,000 journals** and
- ... has published more than **795,000 articles**,
- ... from almost **4,2m submitted** [19% acceptance rate];
- ... **285,000 Open Access** articles (35%);
- ... **37,000 editors** and over **1,9m reviewers**,

Elsevier journal articles accounted for over **18% of global research output** and **29% of citations**.

Operating margin [profit / revenue] = **38%** | **Revenue 2,714 GBPm, Operating profit 1,035 GBPm** (RELX 2026, 17-19)

... a **RELX** company

First wave of digital transformation (1995 onwards)

Avoiding digital disruption through Digitalization and platformization of publishing

The Internet culture of free access to content was perceived as a potentially disruptive innovation for commercial academic publishers. [Buranyi, 2017; Schmitt, 2015]

Yet, the publishers digitized publishing and publications and reinvented their business models.

1. The transformation is epitomized by **ScienceDirect** as **content repository** for access and dissemination (launched 1997^[1])
2. **Scopus** (launched 2004^[2]) as basis for **datafication and metrification** of publication, research, journal and research rankings.



ScienceDirect®

^[1] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ScienceDirect>

^[2] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scopus>

Platformization of publishing



ScienceDirect

- Digital content repository (24 million articles and book chapters) for search and retrieval,
- recommender and
- marketing platform,
- enables behavioral monitoring

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 ScienceDirect

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1 Preserving **humanism** in a **digitally** transforming world
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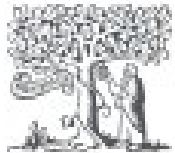
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2 Principles of **digital humanism**: A critical post-humanist view
[Journal of Responsible Technology](#), March 2024
Erich Prem
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FEEDBACK

First wave of digital transformation: Datafication and bibliometrics



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Principles of digital humanism: A critical post-humanist view

Journal of Responsible Technology • Article • Open Access • 2024 • DOI: 10.1016/j.jrt.2024.100075

Prem, Erich

The University of Vienna, Institute of Philosophy, Philosophy of Media and Technology, Universitätsstraße 7, Vienna, A-1010, Austria

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Between Principle and Practice: A Critical Post-Humanist View Through the Lens of Digital Humanism

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Article • Open access

Principles of digital humanism: A critical post-humanist view

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Scopus metrics

Scopus track five key areas—usage, captures, mentions, social media, and citations—offering a broader view of research impact beyond traditional citations.

Citations 22 (93th percentile) Field-Weighted citation impact 2.48

View Citation overview

SciVal Topics

Topics are unique areas of research, created using all Scopus publications from 1996 onwards. Learn more.

Topic name Myopia Prevalence and Eye Refraction Insights

Prominence percentile 99.134

PlumX metrics

PlumX Metrics on Scopus track five key areas—usage, captures, mentions, social media, and citations—offering a broader view of research impact beyond traditional citations. They provide real-time insights into how research is engaged with and shared across platforms.

Captures

Readers 115

Mentions

News Mentions 1

22 93th percentile
Citations

2.48
FWCI

Field-Weighted Citation Impact is the ratio of citations received relative to the expected world average for the subject field, publication type, and publication year.

Learn more

Scopus metrics

SciVal Topics

PlumX metrics

Author profile

Prem, Erich

TU Wien, Vienna, Austria • Scopus ID: 55076640500 •  [0000-0002-4380-3722](#) 71

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Vulnerability as a Design Ethics for Digital Humanism

[Prem, Erich](#)

[Lecture Notes in Computer Science](#), 2026, 16319 LNCS, pp. 529–536

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Principles of digital humanism: A critical post-humanist view

22



Scopus

<https://www.scopus.com>

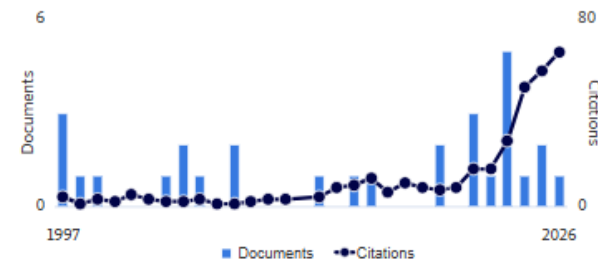
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Outcome

- **Transformed model of publishing:** digital publishing, platformization and monetization of mega bundle subscriptions;
- **extending scale of operation:** **Number of** peer-reviewed Elsevier **journals** increased: 1.200 in the mid-1990s to 3.000;
- **datafication and metrification** of publishing, journal **rankings** as ‘gold standard’ of research quality;
- **libraries** become enforcers of publishers' digital rights management solutions;
- **Editors** and editorial boards maintain false sense of ownership, while publishers own and control;
- increasing **concentration** of the scholarly communication market (Big Five oligopoly) (Larivière et al., 2015).
- **evaded digital disruption** (Buranyi, 2017, Schmitt, 2015);
- **Value added:** “We help ensure quality research accelerates progress for society ... by helping **validate, improve and disseminate** ... scientific articles” (RELX 2024)



Value capture

- **Monetizing** public goods (article content, monopolistic pricing): copyright or open access fees (APC/PAR), “walled-garden strategy” (Gray et al., 2022, p. 20);
- **exploitation** of voluntary academic work (reviewing, editing);
- **surveillance** and extracting of behavioral data (search, downloads);
- **assetization** of Scopus data.

“In modern capitalism, value-extraction is rewarded more highly than value-creation ...”
(Mazzucato 2018)

Second wave: Transforming research workflows (2010 onwards)

Digitalization and transforming the academic research infrastructure

“In this current **second digital transformation**, many of the **structures, workflows, incentives, and outputs** that characterized the print era are being **revamped** in favor of new approaches ...

- More concentrated marketplace,
- Competition in platform, analytics, and services business.” (Bergstrom et al., 2024)

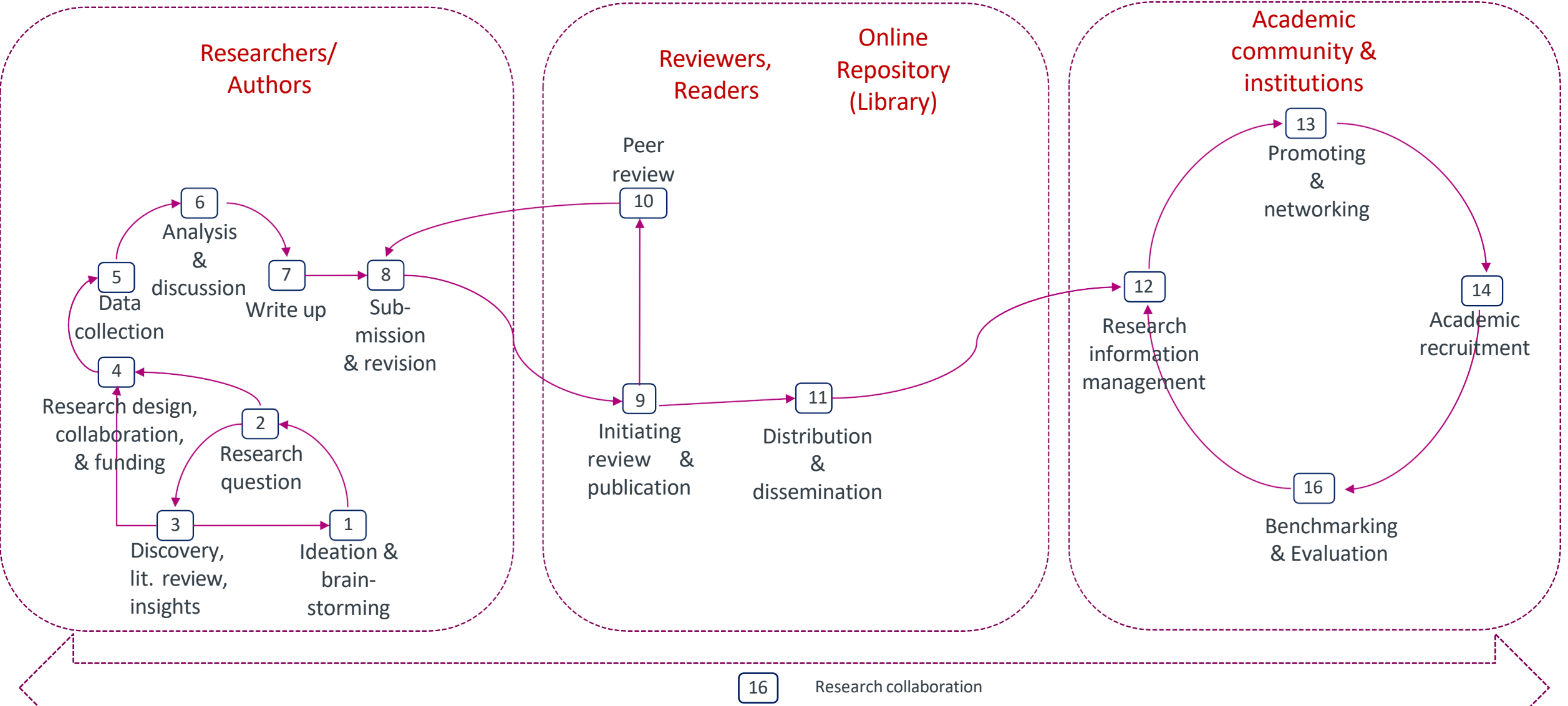
Elsevier has become the provider of critical infrastructures for many academic institutions, extending the provision of “content repositories” to “research environments”.

Stylized academic knowledge production workflow & lifecycle

The Evaluation, Impact and
Research Management
Process

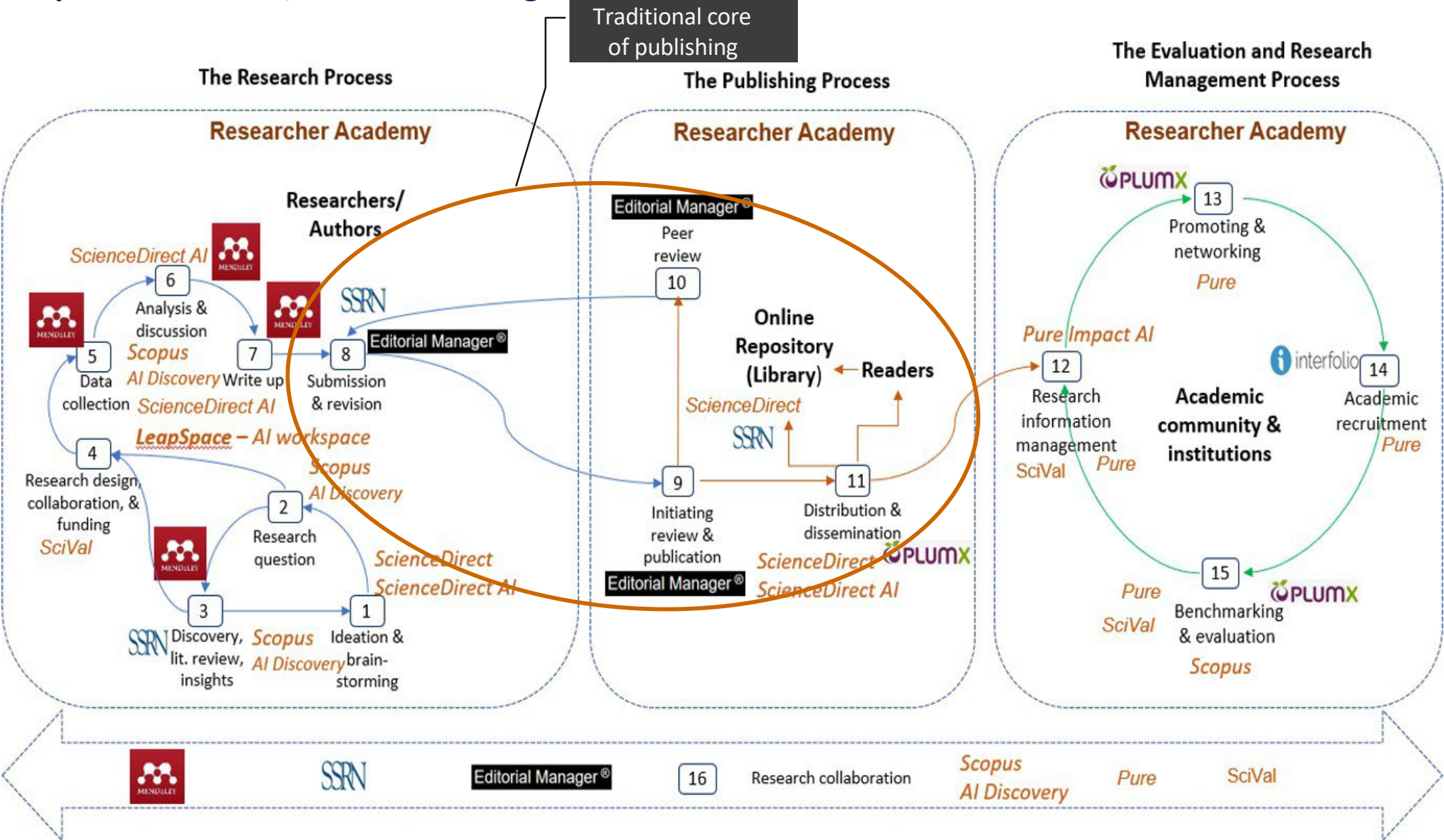
The Research Process

The Publishing Process



Workflow platformization/ infrastructuring with embedded AI tools

Acquiring, developing and vertically integrating
scholarly infrastructure



A core incentive: appropriation of user data usage rights

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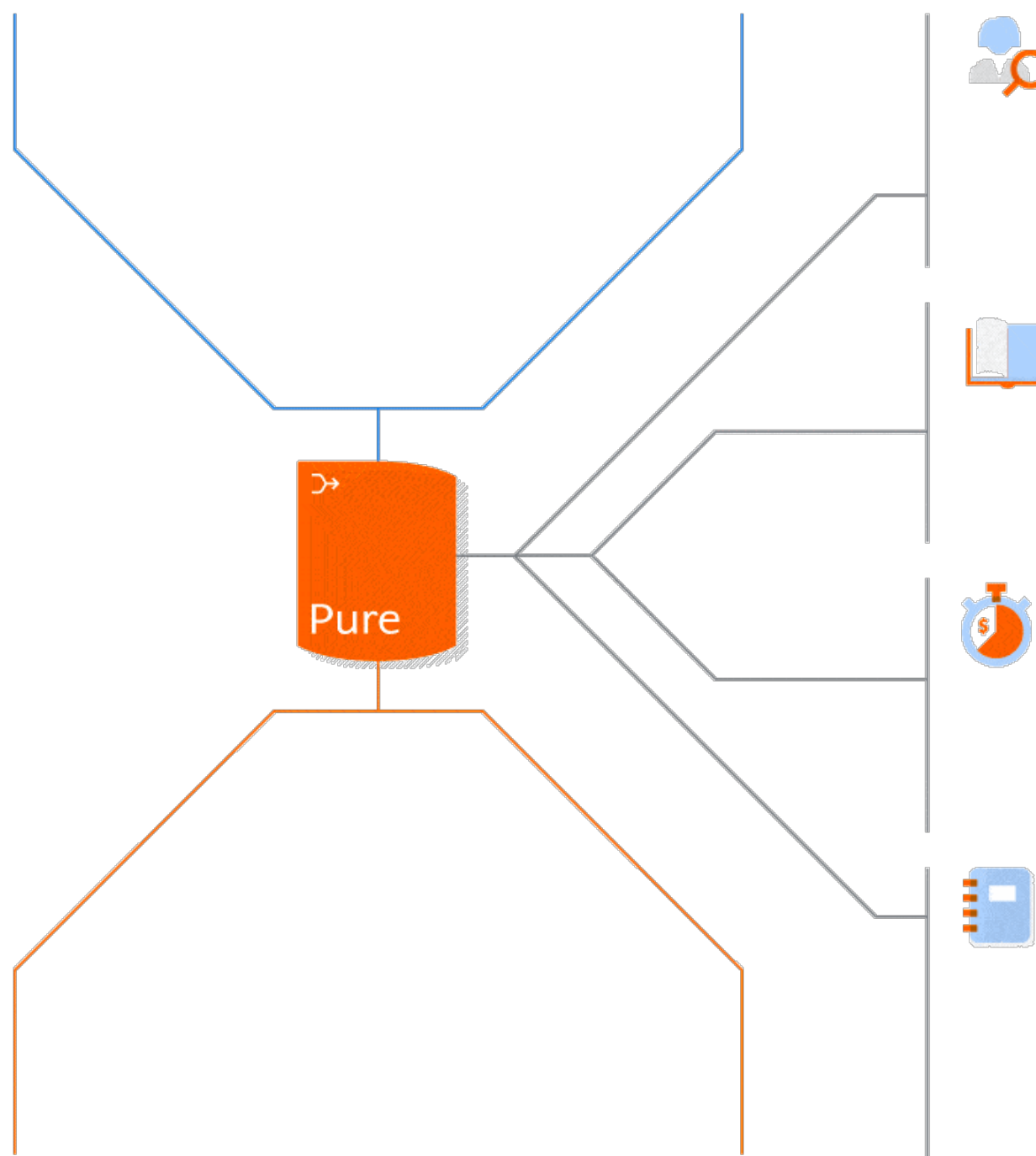
Featured products:

- InsightGraph
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- Analytical Services

Data Appropriation

Elsevier Research
Information Mgmt.
(CRIS) - Pure

“... platform that aggregates and curates your data effectively, you benefit from an insight-based execution of strategy, leading to increased funding, more international collaboration, and greater research visibility for your institution”



*Some import sources require subscription

Outcome

- Elsevier has become **critical infrastructure provider** for researchers and academic institutions, and
- **Information analytics business**: extending the scope of (analytics) services and clients (educational institutions, funders, government, industry);
- **behavioral visibility** enables **monitoring and surveillance** of research workflow;
- **shaping research practices** across the entire research workflow, portrayed as: 'good research' and geared towards successful publications;
- **infrastructural control**: content selection, embedded incentives and nudges, tight/ closed data loop, shaping direction of research,

Value capture

- **Monetization** of services (mainly via institutional clients);
- **Data** appropriation and assetization (positive data network effects for E. -> Pure data model | data flywheels and feedback loops -> data is collected throughout the ecosystem, one service's data feed other services);
- Transforming **research practices** (researcher academy) to increase infrastructure use.

Third wave: Redefining Research (2020 onwards)

Data, analytics, and AI tools (Elsevier & RELX)

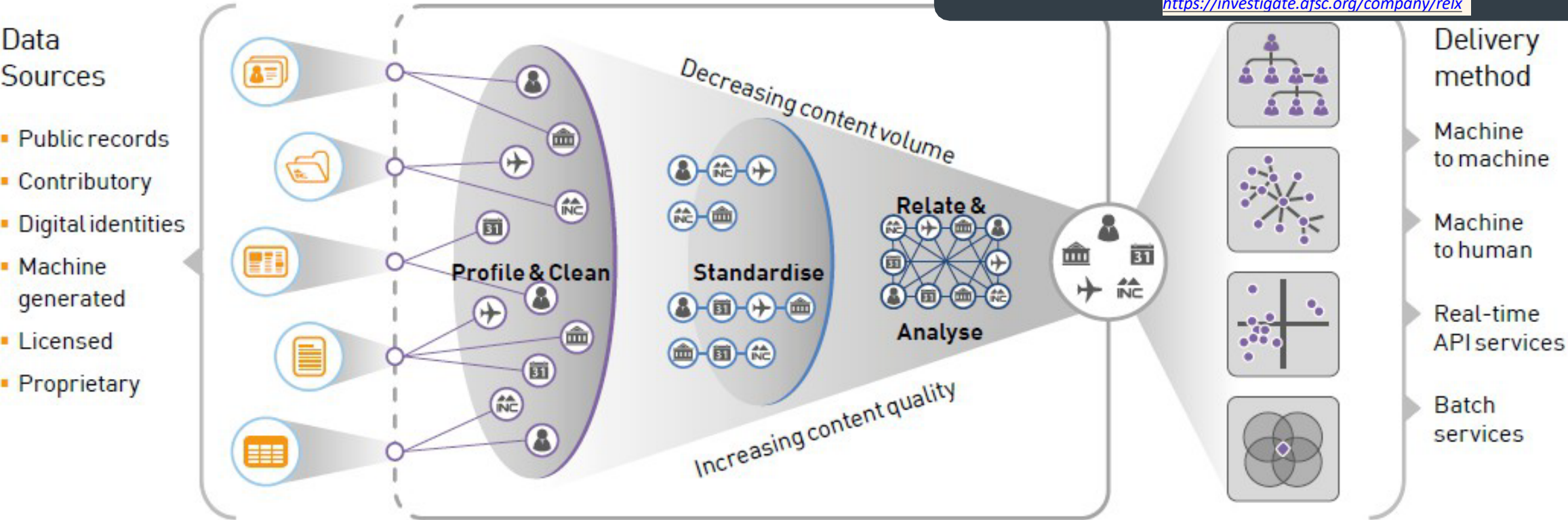
[Redefining Research: Elsevier Announces Next-Generation AI-Powered Researcher Solution](#)

Elsevier as global leader in advanced information and decision

“Elsevier’s **research intelligence portfolio** of products combines **quality, curated content with extensive data sets and responsible AI and large language model technology** to help **researchers, academic leaders, policy-makers, funders and R&D-led corporations** to

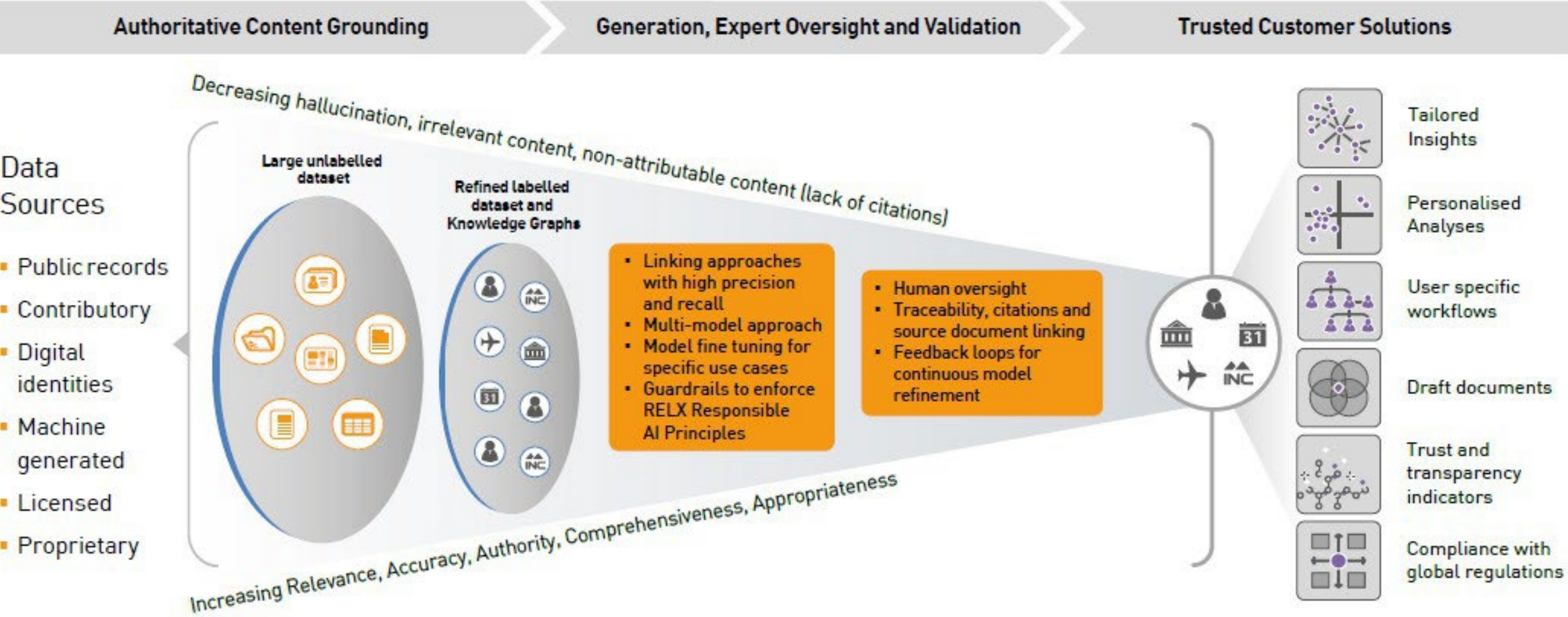
- generate insights,
- set and implement research strategies,
- evaluate impact,
- drive innovation and
- make critical decisions with confidence.” RELX [Annual Report 2024] 2025, 16

<https://www.poynter.org/business-work/2026/law360-reuters-newsrooms-letter-against-ice-dhs/>
<https://investigate.afsc.org/company/relx>

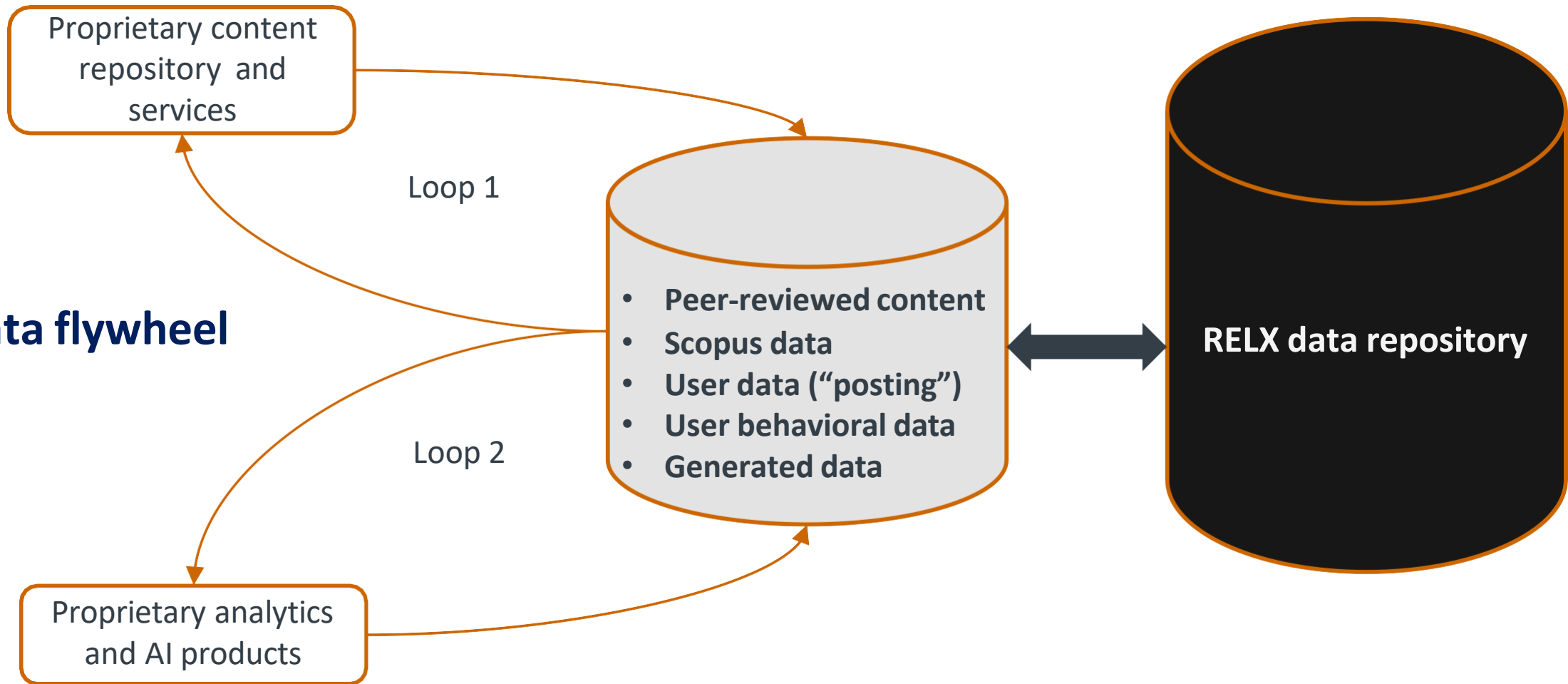


Unstructured and structured content	Big data platforms	Analysis applications	Customer single point of execution
- High-quality data from a wide array of sources in multiple formats - Over 130bn transactions analysed annually - More than 105m scientific publication records - More than 207bn legal and news documents and records	- Grid computing with low-cost servers - Linking algorithms that generate high precision and recall - Machine learning algorithms to cluster, link and learn from the data - High speed data ingestion, recall, and processing - Rapid development cycles - Platforms to facilitate AI/ML	- Proprietary algorithms - Predictive modelling - Machine learning and artificial intelligence	- Modular product suites - Flexible delivery platforms

ADDING VALUE WITH GENERATIVE AI



Data flywheel



- Loops indicate continuous extension and refinement through information production, use and feedback; yield positive data network externalities for Elsevier.
- Loop 1: e.g. a1) Content feeds repository, b) repository use yields user (behavioral) data, a2) which used to improve and customize services;
- Loop 2: e.g. a1) content corpus used for LLM, b) AI tool use monitored for service improvement (AI training).

Research Intelligence Portfolio

- ❖ AI workflow companion
- ❖ AI workspace
- ❖ [AI generated content](#)
([ScienceDirect_Topics pages](#) | [Elsevier](#))

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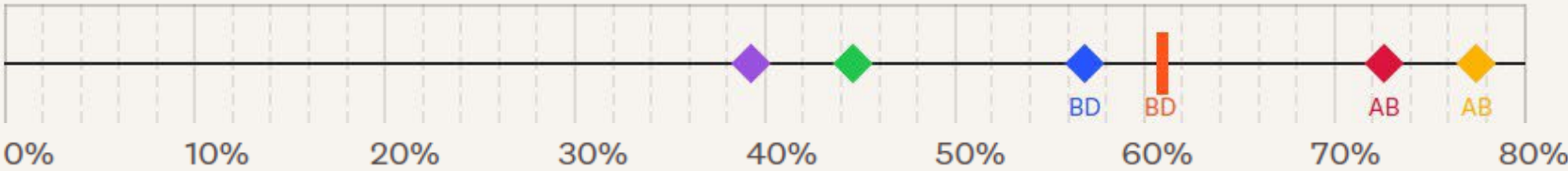


ScienceDirect AI is a workflow companion that enables researchers to instantly surface, cite, compare and explore trusted evidence from deep within the peer-reviewed literature. It makes knowledge discovery more efficient, practical and rewarding.

AI as driving force for knowledge generation

Researcher of the future study

AI will be the creative force driving new knowledge in the next 2-3 years



Exploring the future of AI driven research and knowledge generation

Elsevier B.V. (2025). *Researcher of the future: A confidence in research report*.
<https://www.elsevier.com/insights/confidence-in-research/researcher-of-the-future>

Modes of use	Use %	Current use	
		% use frequently	% use occasionally
...find and summarize the latest research	61%	23%	38%
...perform literature reviews	51%	17%	34%
...write or draft grant proposals	41%	12%	29%
...analyze research data	38%	11%	27%
...write or draft research papers or reports	38%	10%	28%
...manage research projects (e.g., planning, scheduling)	37%	12%	25%
...identify grant opportunities	32%	8%	24%
...generate new research hypotheses	32%	6%	26%
...design experiments or studies	30%	7%	23%

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epistemic



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administra-
tive



Identify collaborators and topic experts

Surface relevant researchers based on indexed publication records and metadata.



Discover funding opportunities

Explore international and local funding opportunities drawn from curated institutional data.



Upload and analyze your own documents

Combine personal materials with scholarly literature to add context to research exploration.

Outcome

- Elsevier explores and designs the **future of research**, aims to **redefine research and research strategy and knowledge**.
[<https://www.elsevier.com/about/press-releases/redefining-research-elsevier-announces-next-generation-ai-powered-researcher-solution>]
- AI as **business model accelerator**: increasing the performance of researchers and number of articles, infrastructure dependence, data capture & monitoring, monetization.
- AI twins of research services deeply embedded in the research workflow as “layer of **epistemic infrastructures**” (Baum, 2026) offering “references, summaries, concept maps, hypothesis suggestions, and emerging themes”, i.e. production (topics pages, research reports), interpretation and **synthesis of knowledge**;
- Elsevier uses **AI washing** (research-grade AI workspace, RELX “responsible AI”, “human control”, only vetted content, publisher neutral) to claim academic credentials, without, however, committing to or adhering to fundamental principles of scientific research (independent validation, transparency, openness, research ethics ... or Merton’s (1973) CUDOS).

Value capture

- Extensive, integrated **data collection** across the scholarly communication ecosystem, including behavioral data about AI tool use, integrated into the RELX data pool;
- **Reuse of data** across services, diversified service portfolio and customer segments;
- Potential use of appropriated data, e.g. reviews or submissions for model training;
- STM services as basis for **industry solutions** (transfer): AI tools, datasets, professional services;
- **Extended monetization** of analytics and decision tools (RELX, H1 2026 progress, 7):

Elsevier 2026 outlook: “We expect good to strong underlying revenue growth with underlying adjusted operating profit growth exceeding underlying revenue growth.” RELX 2026, 19

Elsevier's business model innovations as strategic responses and appropriation

Wave	Trends in academia	Elsevier's business model
1	Managerialism: metrics-based (research) management	Bibliometrics and analytics tools (Pure, SciVal) for evidence-based decision support
	Journal article as dominant genre	Redefining academic publishing: Scaling journals and subscription-based/ paywalled ScienceDirect as content repository. Collusion of leading publishers to define rules & price range.
	Journal ranking as performance metric	Scopus listed performance metrics of journals. Journal ownership de facto guarantees visibility and ranking (de facto duopoly: Elsevier Scopus and Clarivate Web of Science).
	Research performance	Scopus provides journal ranking based profiles and comparisons. Editorial boards implement strategies to improve rankings.
	<i>Open Science as initiatives of science organizations</i>	Developing Open Access (pay-to-publish) revenue models: APC, PAR/ transformational agreements
2	Digitalization of academic research infrastructure and tools, e.g. Mendeley or SSRN	Acquisitions of research tools and integration into the Elsevier infrastructure and ecosystem. Developing proprietary research infrastructure .
3	Research specific gen AI solutions (critically viewed by publishers)	Redefining research: Developing AI extensions to research infrastructure. Claiming transparency, publisher neutrality, human oversight.

- Elsevier has responded strategically to market trends, innovations and challenges in academia,
- has acquired successful academic solutions (prominently Mendeley and SSRN) and
- Continues to successfully monetize the increasing dependency of universities and research management.

Synopsis – Strategically successful innovation capture path

... extending roles in scholarly ecosystem and increasing value capture

- I. Digitization – Digitalization (*first digital transformation*): paywalled content mega-bundles & bibliometrics
- II. (Gold) Open Access (reabeled as: pay-to-publish) strategy
- III. Proprietary digital infrastructure for research, publishing, and research management (*second digital transformation*)
- IV. Information analytics business: global leader in advanced information and decision
- V. Proprietary, black-boxed AI research companion and workspace for knowledge production (*third digital transformation*)

RELX's AI strategy analysis (Klover.AI): “ ... The convergence of its unique data assets, advanced AI product development, dominant market position, and formidable financial strength positions the company ... to become **the definitive intelligent operating system for the world's most critical professional domains**. ...

The interactions of millions of researchers with these AI tools generate invaluable data on which scientific questions are most pressing and which information is most relevant. This **feedback loop** allows Elsevier to continuously refine its AI offerings, ensuring they remain indispensable to the global scientific community and **further solidifying its central role in the ecosystem of research and discovery**.” (Kitishian, 2025)

4 Discussion: Techno-colonization of knowledge production .

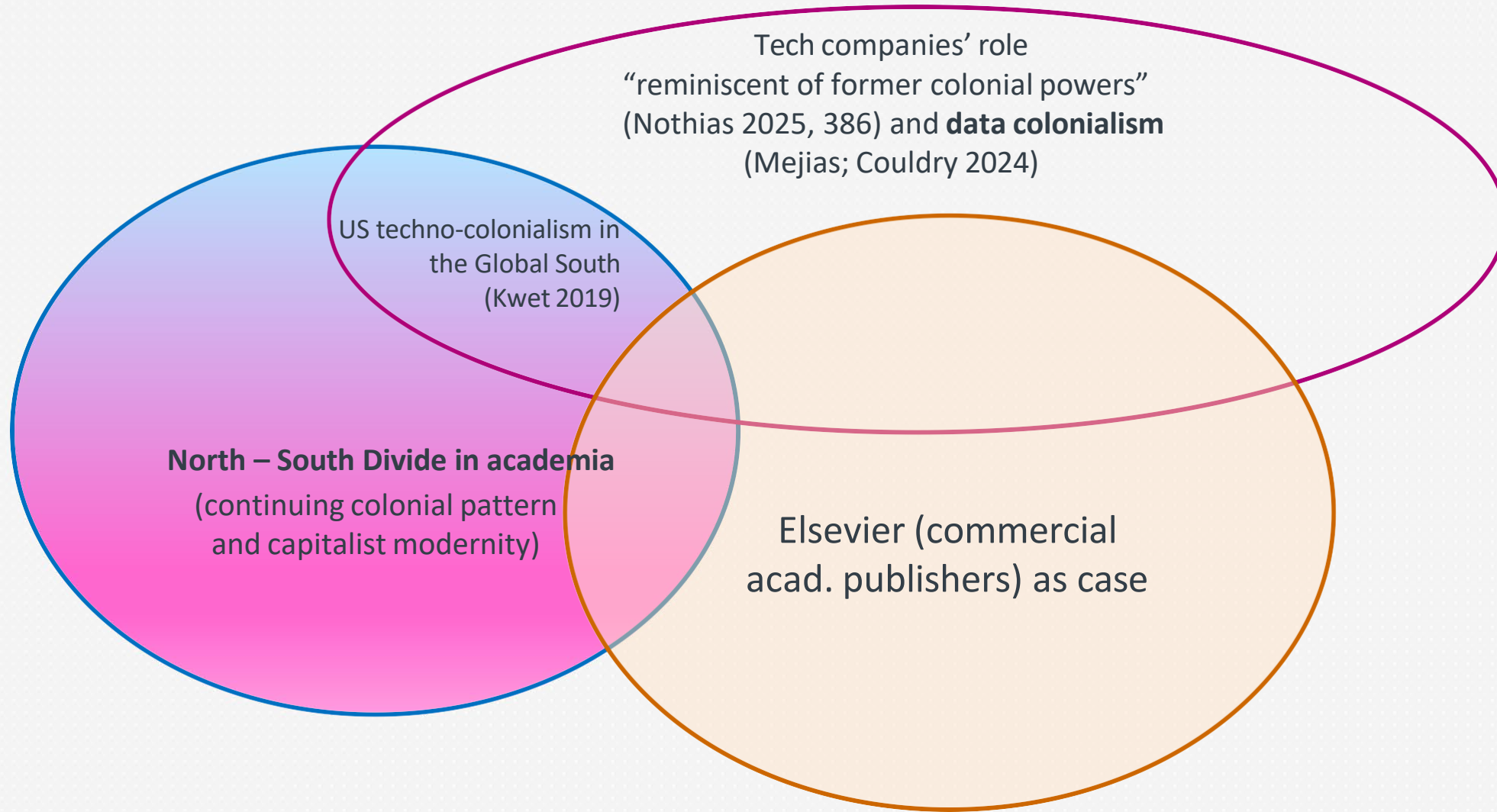
The **technography reconstructed the pattern, techno-colonization explains how Elsevier took, extended and retained control over knowledge production.**

“**Colonialism** may have proceeded by different methods at different times and different places in history, but in the end it always boiled down to the same thing:
a seizing of land (and the riches and labour that went with it) perpetrated by force or deception.”
(Mejias; Couldry, 2024, 9)

Nothias’ (2025, p. 389) **typology of digital colonialism mechanism**: “... key actors, through digital technologies,

- operate on a global scale (**unequal concentration of power**) and
- extract profits, data, labor and natural resources (**extraction**);
- ensure dependency on their products while reproducing, accelerating or even creating new forms of violence, and imposing distinct cultural norms and values (**cultural imperialism**) –
- all of it in the name of progress and helping (**benevolence**).” (Typology - Nothias,

Digital colonialism discourses



Elsevier's repertoire of colonization strategies – seizing academic knowledge production

(1) Intrusion: as commercial publisher claiming “central role in the ecosystem of research and discovery” (Kitishian 2025)

- Blurring and crossing the boundary between the academic realm (research and academic infrastructures) and corporate realm. Assuming academic legitimacy, without academic credibility based on transparency, reproducibility, independence ...

(2) Exploitation and expropriation: Research (content), data, and voluntary work

- Exploitation of content, research, and voluntary work;
- (AI-)Platform data capture, behavioral visibility, and surveillance enable positive data network effects (data flywheel);
- Data monetization/ weaponization: Large scale analytics as basis for AI, decision support and consultancy;
- Monopolistic revenue model(s).

(3) Domination: extending influence - scale and scope, systemic entrenchment of academic institutions, benefitting wealthy institutions

- Number and ranking of journals and articles, size of repository make access a necessity;
- Extended functional scope of proprietary platforms and services (research workflow, analytics and decision support, AI enabled knowledge production) increases infrastructural control for Elsevier and dependency of academic institutions;
- Growing scope and diversification of business (customer) segments extends power base.

(4) Metrification: controlling reputation as tether

- Metrification of articles, authors, journals and related performance metrics have become „targets“(Goodhart's Law);
- Journal rankings as self-fulfilling prophecy (positive feedback loop) (Kaczmarek 2025);
- Scopus as gatekeeper, data source for analytics services, and third-party rankings (e.g. SCImago, university rankings).

Repertoire of colonization strategies: consolidating power

(5) Epistemic colonization: shaping knowledge production

- Analytics tools provide decision support for research management and sustain “epistemic coloniality” (Mills, 2022, 474) of elite universities;
- AI tools contribute to knowledge synthesis, interpretation, and generation; they may diminish epistemic agency;
- AI tools decide what becomes visible and prominent, change “not only how we know but also who gets to know and who decides what counts as knowledge.” (Coeckelbergh, 2026, 67).

(5) Cooptation and **collaboration**: Academic partnerships providing legitimacy, mimicking a serving role

- Faculty as authors, reviewers, editors, platform users, and providers of testimonials;
- Academic institutions as research collaborators.

(6) Extending and solidifying the economic and political **power base**

- Increasing market concentration dynamic: journal ranking and scale;
- Prominent role in scholarly communication ecosystem, collective action, e.g. STM association and collusion on review remuneration (Lieff et al., 2024);
- Legal/ regulatory: enforcement of copyright, controversial sales and contracting practices, conflicts of interest; transformational contracts;
- Political: lobbying, growing the institutional customer base.

Repertoire of techno-colonization: Discursive strategies

(8) Cultural imperialism: Colonizing the norms, values and images of the future

- Claiming ‘thought leadership’ through pseudo-academic studies ([Article of the future \(2012/2014\)](#), [Research futures \(2019/2022\)](#), [Accelerating academia \(2024\)](#), [Researcher of the future \(2025\)](#)), which inform marketing and product design;
- “Peak performance” promoted as logic for academia futura.
- Shaping and normalizing research and publication practices (Researcher Academy);
- Redefining research (LeapSpace as AI workspace);

(9) Legitimization through discursive construction of a benevolent image

- History, mission and value claims as anchors: “Advancing human progress” and symbiotic collaboration with academia;
- Rhetoric of “trusted AI” distracts from inherent biases and choices made during training;
- Portraying an ethical façade (OA, responsible AI, UN SDG).

(10) Strategic corporate (mis-)communication: marketing image

- Dual-headed hydra: partner of science and corporation with legitimate economic interests;
- Marketing rhetoric insinuating scientific quality of LeapSpace derived from peer-reviewed corpus without independent verification;
- Elsevier does not meet the standards it sets for authors: e.g. transparency, conflict-of-interest disclosure, independent oversight;
- Complex, ambiguous, murky policies and standards;
- Delay, deny, deflect (Frenkel et al., 2018).

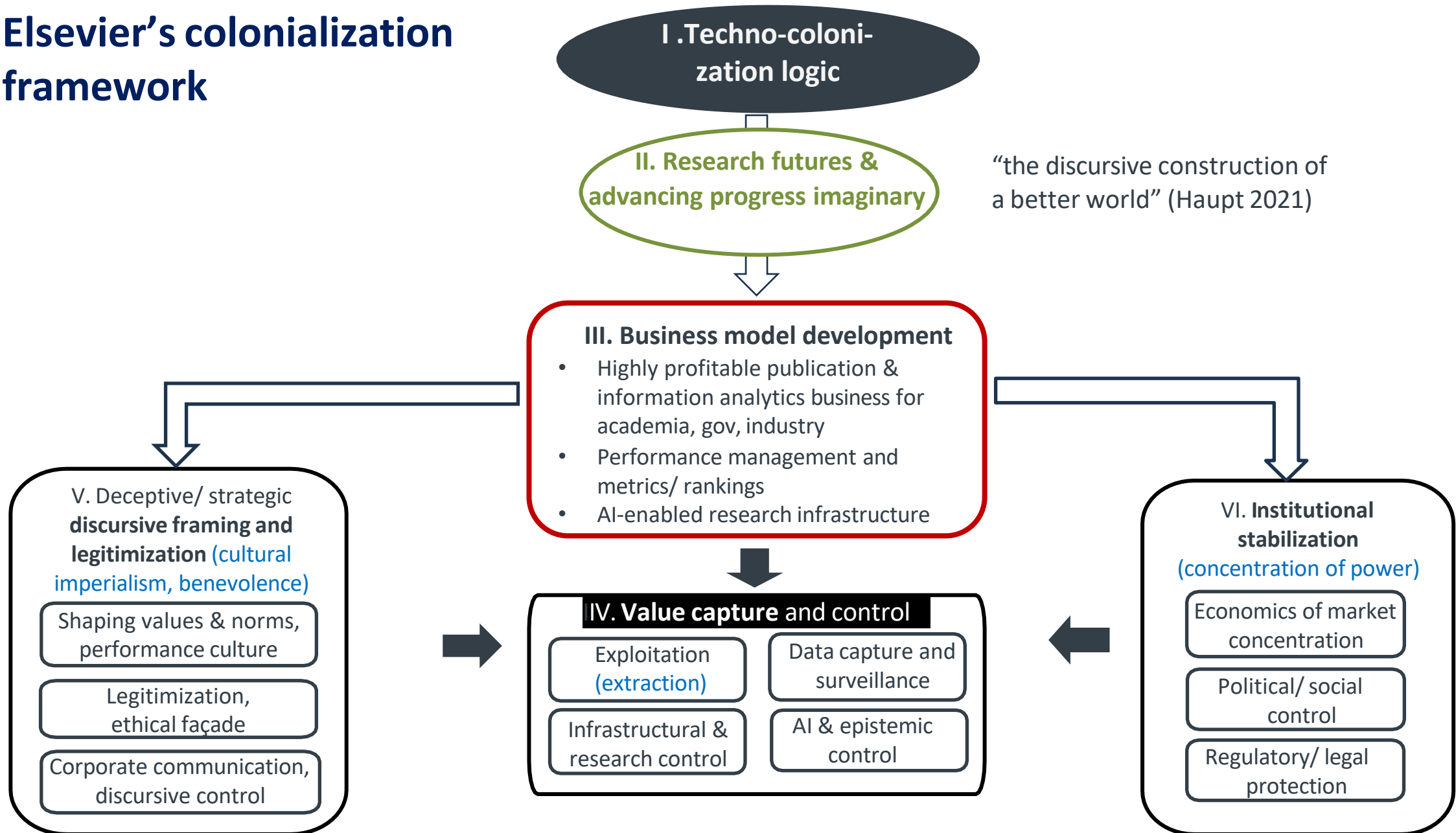
We partner with the scientific and health communities to create a fair and transparent environment in everything we do.

- Clear standards guide ethical publishing and partnerships
- Integrity, inclusion and responsible innovation at our core
- Developed in collaboration with global research and health communities
- Covering ethics, accessibility, sustainability and more

Review our policies and discover how we build trust across science and healthcare.

[About Elsevier](#) | [Advancing human progress, together](#)

Elsevier's colonialization framework



IV. Value capture and epistemic control: epistemic authority

The gen AI challenge: “Scarcity is shifting from cognition to credibility. ... The governance task is to replace vague appeals to “honesty” or “trustworthiness” with auditability, legibility, and revisability.” (Baum, 2026, p. 1; 8-9)

The response: Instead, Elsevier claims **epistemic authority** for its AI tools: “faster, deeper insights, research excellence” based on the quality of its content corpus.

The rebuttal: Peer-reviewed content is not a sufficient condition for the scholarly quality of AI output and Elsevier is in no position to judge “research excellence” and its business model and communication strategy undermine its academic credibility.

Epistemic control

LeapSpace is an example of **epistemic control**: it has been designed as **AI-assisted workspace** to **transform the research workflow**. It shapes **how literature is discovered, explored, compared, and synthesized**, it generates **research reports**. [[LeapSpace](#) | The research-grade AI workspace].

The research output is presented as result of (publisher-)neutral and objective algorithmic processes that define what becomes visible and what not:

“Results are ranked based on relevancy with a small boost for recency. LeapSpace always prioritizes the content that best matches your query – regardless of publisher ownership or discipline.” [[LeapSpace](#) | Research-grade AI for universities and industry R&D]

Rebuttal: The claim is incredible: a) the LLM full text corpus is almost exclusively based on Elsevier’s corpus. The neutrality claim refers to the Scopus corpus of abstracts, b) the notion of “relevance” is not (or: tautologically) specified: “Results are scored for **topical** relevance to your query.” [[How does LeapSpace select and cite references?](#) | LeapSpace Support Center]

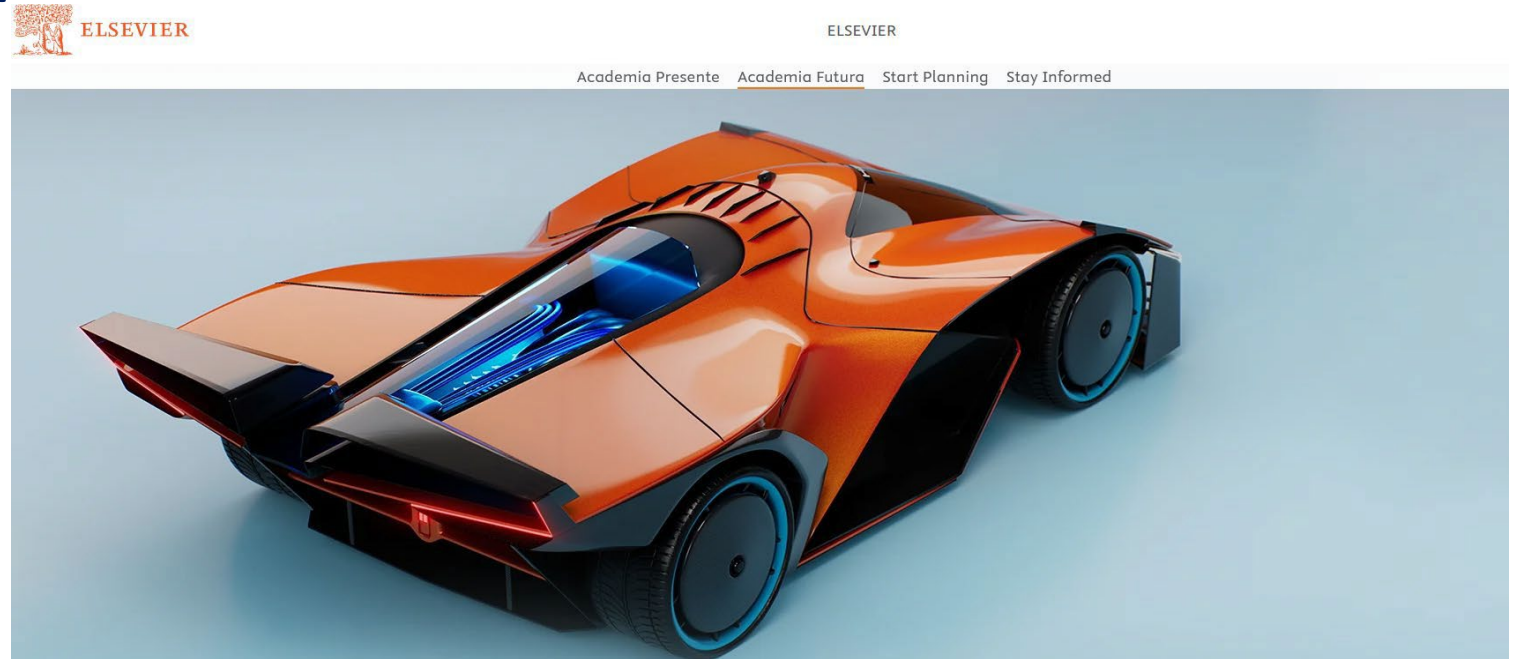
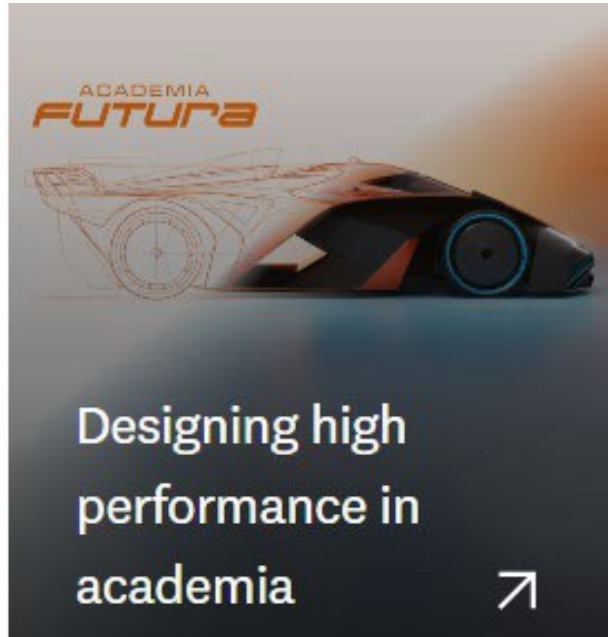
IV. AI and epistemic colonization: the target group and epistemic agency

The AI research tools are promoted as **optimized for (publishing) performance** (and Elsevier's profit), rather than building users' research capabilities, comprehension of methods and theories and the ability to critically judge research results. They appear to be targeted at **less experienced researchers**, who might be particularly receptive to LeapSpace's guidance and support, and likely to become dependent.

However, **epistemic agency** (Coeckelbergh, 2026) - of some, particularly inexperienced users – risks to be diminished.

Ke, et al. (2026) describe the risk of **never-skilling** in medical education: “trainees who rely on AI during the early formative years of clinical education may fail to develop the foundational reasoning skills that safe, independent practice requires.” **Therefore:** “[Humans] must form independent judgments before encountering AI outputs, rather than verifying them after the fact.” (Baum, 2026, p. 8-9).

Narrative control: Promoting a performance culture



izing academia through this lens — as a complex system of interdependent components — we hope that it becomes possible to understand the issues more contextually. Cars, like universities, face an increasingly competitive and changing environment. In response, **such systems must continue to transform and optimize to maintain high performance, building their capabilities and capacity, and drawing on the latest technological advances to gain efficiencies.**

Called *Academia Futura*, this concept car represents an academic institution at peak performance — one that flourishes when achieving excellence across all top priorities. It reveals how technology, sustainability and global networks can be leveraged and work together to overcome an ever-evolving terrain and move forward with pace and purpose. In the dynamic world of academia, high performance should never stop transforming.”

[2024 Academic Transformation Survey Highlights](#), also Researcher of the future ([AI in research and higher education | Elsevier](#))

Discursive framing: Public Access Plan (2024) and STM Association's response

NSF Public Access Plan 2.0

Ensuring Open, Immediate and Equitable Access to National Science Foundation Funded Research

Gates Foundation

“from the start of 2025, published research funded by the **BMGF** must **be made openly available as a preprint, with no embargo**, under a CC BY license.

The **BMGF will no longer pay any publishing fees** (article processing charges — APCs), but grantees may choose to publish in any journal – OA or not.” (Michael, Pollock 2024)



“we view public access requirements as having a positive effect on not only equity and inclusion in science, but also on the quality and integrity of the scientific record,

but **only if implemented with appropriate support**, including **funding**, and in collaboration with the full research community, which includes our publisher members.

Our members can help ensure the success of the Plan ... **only if they can maintain revenues that allow them to invest in the same.**”

[STM Response to Request for Information](#)

International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers

The verdict

“It is possible to have surveillance capitalism, and it is possible to have a democracy.
It is not possible to have both.” (Zuboff 2022).

Relatedly, my claim is:

It is possible to have **research information analytics capitalism**, and it is possible to have a **scholarly communication system shaped by academic values** (research that matters, infrastructures that foster innovation, equitable access to knowledge for all).

It is not possible to have both.

5 The way forward

(1) Acknowledging complicity and need for reorientation

“Scholarship is said to be a global public good insofar as increasing access to knowledge globally does not diminish the value of knowledge to anyone else, and it is expected to be high quality and trustworthy, generating broad public support for the expertise that it reflects. It has become clear in recent years how far away we are from the ideal.” (Bergstrom et al. 2024), e.g.

- “... a professional amnesia we have developed: We have forgotten that we are here to advance social understanding and well-being.” (Giacalone, 2009, p. 123)
- "Self-governance of science was supposed to mean freedom of inquiry, but it also ended up serving the business model of scientific publishers while undermining the goals of science policy." (Neff, 2020, p. 35)
- "the careers paths of university scientists, and the directions of science itself, have grown subservient to science-quality metrics designed to serve the business model of the publishing industry, not the knowledge needs of society." (Neff, 2020, p. 42)
- Ranking-based publish-or-perish culture and rankings are contagious (and hereditary) in research communities.
- Scholars have become “publishing technicians” (Huse, 2020, p. 2).
- AI challenges academic research and knowledge practices: e.g. “IS research fails to meet the conditions its own claims require: that findings can be checked, corrected, built upon, and used by the people the research claims to inform ...” (Doyle 2026b, 1)

(2) Recognizing academic values and rethinking scholarly identity

- “Our first priority must be a reorientation of social science research from the omnipresent requirement to continuously publish in “high-quality journals” to the **overriding goal and purpose of creating original knowledge that matters to society.**” (Alvesson, Gabriel, & Paulsen, 2017, p. 85)
- “It argues for **new scholarly identities** and many different ways of fashioning them, in which research is one, but not the only, important practice. Teaching, outreach activities, and academic citizenship, it is argued, are also important aspects of scholarship. So too are thinking and reading in depth and breadth, writing textbooks and book reviews, journalistic pieces and blogs.” (Alvesson et al., 2017)
- “a **communal approach to scholarship** that comprises an open, innovative and impact-driven attitude to research that can change the academic game” (Huse, 2020)

“**When the knowledge practices that constitute organizational identity are challenged** by a competing epistemic regime, the organization faces a question about its very reason for existence.” (Sergeeva et al., 2026, 6)

(2) Waves of change: examples of resistance

	Examples	Response/ impact
Individual	Individual boycott: http://thecostofknowledge.com/ :	Relatively little resonance: 20641 Researchers Taking a Stand
Editorial boards	Mass walkout at global science journal over 'unethical' fees	Small number of editorial boards, quickly replaced by new editors
Research funders	US NSF (on behalf of all federal agencies funding research): Public Access Plan 2.0. Ensuring Open, Immediate and Equitable Access Gates Foundation: papers resulting from grants must be open access, as of 202405: APCs will not be paid	Contribution to consultation: if publishers revenue is maintained ...
Action program	(Fress and immediate) Open Access as model for scholarly communication (Plan S, Smits 2022)	Gold Open Access as lucrative option, which undermines the ideals of Open Access
Robin Hood	SciHub, LibGen	Legal action
Collective action	Collective action for transformative agreements (DEAL, Germany, U of California, JICS, NL)	Growing number of transformative agreements, yet doubts about positive long term impact.
India	Delhi High Court may protect LibGen and SciHub access on grounds of broad(er) interpretation of fair use of academic papers for research and teaching	Elsevier Ltd., Wiley India Pvt. Ltd., American Chemical Society's successfully claimed copyright infringements
EU	800 European Universities ask Margrethe Vestager, European Commissioner for Competition, to stop the monopoly of scientific journal publishers (2018)	Suspected anti-trust violations

The Score:

How to stop playing somebody else's game

"Scoring systems are also at the center of our corporations and bureaucracies-in the form of **metrics and rankings**.

They tell us exactly **how to measure our success**.

They encourage us to **outsource our values to an external authority**.

And they push on us **to value simple, countable things**.
Metrics don't capture what really matters; they only capture what's easy to measure.

The price of that clarity is our independence.

The Score asks us **is this the game you really want to be playing?**" Nguyen, C. T. (2026)



"A philosophical look at how we make choices in life.
If you love gaming, this is the best book on the topic you'll ever find."
—STEVE WOZNIAK, COFOUNDER OF APPLE

(3) An imaginary: What if ...

- ... academia **rethinks scholarly identities**, the responsibilities related to self-governance of science, freedom of inquiry and the purpose and values of academic work;
- ... many individuals file **data subject access requests** (GDPR Article 15) as a simple act of sousveillance;
- ... we **exclude journal rankings** from the academic reward system, specifically all assessments of individuals (recruitment, performance, promotion);
- ... we drop the concept of **journal as prime genre** of academic publications ... and think about alternative genre of scholarly communication (bibliodiversity);
- ... we require that all publicly funded **publications will be made accessible immediately and for free**;
- ... **(critical) research infrastructures** were governed as cooperative, commons, or publicly funded infrastructures and became the standard;
- ... the EU extends **regulation to protect researchers against (mostly opaque) data assetization and surveillance**;
- ... antitrust regulation recognizes the need to **split up highly integrated publishing/ information analytics companies** and enforces the separation of publishing from ranking and analytics services?

We hold the power ...

“But if science is self-governed, we scientists can change the metrics by which we assess our own work, and [we can change our relationship to an industry that damages science](#).

- Many of us in academic institutions have a hand in writing and implementing tenure and promotion guidelines.
- We serve on grant review panels, and we serve on committees advising universities and libraries.
- We provide our free reviewing and editing labor to corporate publishers.

We scientists therefore hold the power to [help restore to science](#) both a notion of self-governance that is consistent with the ideals expressed in Science, the Endless Frontier [Bush, 1945] and a notion of quality that is appropriate for a world whose improved well-being depends on the creation of useful new scientific knowledge.” (Neff, 2020, 34)

Conclusion

- (1) The technography illustrates how Elsevier has not only defended its publishing model of “**disastrous capitalism**” (The Guardian Editorial, 2019) but stabilized by rankings and expanded into knowledge production and research management.
- (2) Defiantly, Elsevier’s corporate communication attempts to maintain an **ethical façade** claiming benefits to science and society, while the colonization of academia continues.
- (3) The impact of **AI-enabled knowledge production** is not yet fully visible, however the risks to the future of academic research are formidable.
- (4) And: **Academic managerialism** and the promise of ranking-based reputation have provided an effective tether and justification for academics’ complicity.
- (5) Universities and academic freedom are in a precarious situation.

Digital humanism provides an alternative vision of academic research and a call to (collective) action for taking back control:

“Universities are the place where new knowledge is produced and critical thought is cultivated. Hence, they have a special responsibility and have to be aware of that.”

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