

爱思唯尔的衰落——我在其中的角色

Elsevier — my part in its downfall

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荷兰人办的出版公司爱思唯尔（Elsevier）出版了许多世界上最知名的数学期刊，包括《数学进展》、《法国科学院报告》、《离散数学》、《欧洲组合数学》、《数学史》、《代数》、《逼近论》、《组合数学理论—A卷》、《泛函分析》、《几何与物理》、《数学分析和应用》、《数论》、《拓扑学》和《拓扑学及其应用》。然而多年来，它的运作方式却招致业内人士的强烈批评。这些批评可以大致归纳为以下几点：

1. 它的价位奇高——远高于平均值而至今未受惩罚，这简直是个奇迹。
2. 它侥幸成功的秘诀之一是“捆绑式销售”。出版商事先包装好的“包”，用户或者全要，或者全不要，不给图书馆自己选择期刊的余地。这样一来，为了几个必须的期刊，图书馆就不得不花大价钱去购买包罗万象的“包”。这里面大部分期刊根本不是用户所需的（比如声名狼藉的《混沌、孤立子和分形》是一个被许多数学家认为荒唐的杂志，然而世界各地的图书馆却不得不订购）。受到经费的限制，

The Dutch publisher Elsevier publishes many of the world's best known mathematics journals, including *Advances in Mathematics*, *Comptes Rendus Mathématique*, *Discrete Mathematics*, *The European Journal of Combinatorics*, *Historia Mathematica*, *Journal of Algebra*, *Journal of Approximation Theory*, *Journal of Combinatorics Theory Series-A*, *Journal of Functional Analysis*, *Journal of Geometry and Physics*, *Journal of Mathematical Analysis and Applications*, *Journal of Number Theory*, *Topology*, and *Topology and its Applications*. For many years, it has also been heavily criticized for its business practices. Let me briefly summarize these criticisms.

1. It charges very high prices — so far above the average that it seems quite extraordinary that they can get away with it.
2. One method that they have for getting away with it is a practice known as "bundling", where instead of giving libraries the choice of which journals they want to subscribe to, they offer them the choice between a large collection of journals (chosen by them) or nothing at all. So if some Elsevier journals in the "bundle" are indispensable to a library, that library is forced to subscribe at very high subscription rates to a large number of journals, across all the sciences, many of which they do not want. (The journal *Chaos, Solitons and Fractals* is a notorious example of a journal that is regarded as a joke by many mathematicians, but which libraries all round the world must nevertheless subscribe to.) Given that libraries have limited budgets, this often means that they cannot subscribe to journals that they would much rather subscribe to, so it is not just libraries that are harmed, but other publishers, which is of course part of the motivation for the scheme.
3. If libraries attempt to negotiate better deals, Elsevier is ruthless about cutting off access to all their journals.

用户经常无力订购那些所需的杂志。这样一来受害者不仅仅是图书馆，也包括其他出版商，这当然也是爱思唯尔整个阴谋的一部分。

3. 假如图书馆想讨价还价，爱思唯尔会毫不留情地取消其所有期刊的订购。

4. 爱思唯尔支持许多阻止互联网开放阅读的方案，比如“研究成果议案”。他们还为 SOPA（Stop Online Privacy Act, 即停止网络盗版）以及 PIPA（Protect IP Act, 保护知识产权法）的通过进行了大量的游说。

我可以列举更多，但这已足够了。

真的难以理解，数学家们（包括其他科学家们）抱怨了这许多年，人们竟然允许这种状况持续至今。为什么不能告诉爱思唯尔我们不想在他们那里发表任何东西？

部分答案是：我们可以说不。众所周知（并非唯一）的例子是《拓扑学》整个编委会的集体辞职以及《拓扑学杂志》的创立——网站 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topology_\(journal\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topology_(journal)) 可以找到此事件的简单陈述。然而这毕竟是个例。问题在于，为什么我们听任如此不公正的待遇到了登峰造极的地步？我们为什么不想想没有他们事情会简单的多。

一个可能的解释是：改变现状需要联合行动。仅有一个图书馆拒绝订购是不足以动摇爱思唯尔的根基的。如果

4. Elsevier supports many of the measures, such as the Research Works Act, that attempt to stop the move to open access. They also supported SOPA and PIPA and lobbied strongly for them.

I could carry on, but I'll leave it there.

It might seem inexplicable that this situation has been allowed to continue. After all, mathematicians (and other scientists) have been complaining about it for a long time. Why can't we just tell Elsevier that we no longer wish to publish with them?

Well, part of the answer is that we can. A famous (and not unique) example where we did so was the resignation of the entire editorial board of *Topology* and the founding of the *Journal of Topology*. But as the list above shows, such examples are very much the exception rather than the rule, so the basic question remains: why do we allow ourselves to be messed about to this extraordinary extent, when one would have thought that nothing would be easier than to do without them?

A possible explanation is that to do something about the situation requires coordinated action. Even if one library refuses to subscribe to Elsevier journals, plenty of others will feel that they can't refuse, and Elsevier won't mind too much. But if all libraries were prepared to club together and negotiate jointly, doing a kind of reverse bundling — accept this deal or none of us will subscribe to any of your journals — then Elsevier's profits (which are huge, by the way) would be genuinely threatened. However, it seems unlikely that any such massive coordination between libraries will ever take place.

What about coordination between academics? What is to stop all the other editorial boards of Elsevier journals following the example of the board of the *Journal of Topology*? I actually don't know the answer to that: I can only assume that not enough people on those editorial boards care to make it worth it to them to go through what is likely to be a somewhat unpleasant and time-consuming process.

If top-down approaches to the problem don't work, then what about bottom-up approaches? Why do any of us publish papers in Elsevier journals? Let me answer that question in my own case. I have a paper in the *European Journal of Combinatorics*, which I submitted about 20 years ago, before I knew anything about the objections to Elsevier. And what's more, I didn't know it was an Elsevier journal until a few days ago. (Part of my reason for listing the journals at the beginning of this post was to

