

# Breaking boundaries in academic publishing: launching a new format for scholarly research

As technology in publishing moves forward, the boundaries of scholarly content are changing. The community has already seen changing business models and now traditional formats such as the monograph and the journal article are being evaluated. Talk of a renewed demand for the mid-form output has been growing in recent years and 2012 saw the launch of Palgrave Pivot, an innovative format for scholarly research. This initiative was conceived after a programme of research carried out by Palgrave Macmillan, which identified the unmet needs of researchers in scholarly publishing.

## Introduction

Prompted by changes in the scholarly publishing landscape, in 2011 Palgrave Macmillan undertook a programme of research designed to explore the needs of the scholarly market. Questioning over 1,000 researchers across the humanities and social sciences (HSS), the research revealed insights into the ways in which academics both consume and produce research. It drew attention to traditional publishing boundaries and prompted questions on why they still exist, specifically the dominance of the widely-accepted formats: journal articles and monographs.



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## Traditional publication lengths

Traditional industry expectations have led to certain standard formats:

- most scholarly journal articles are between 7,000 and 8,000 words in length
- most scholarly print books published are between 70,000 and 110,000 words in length.

As a direct result of the research, Palgrave opted to challenge the assumption that research could only be published at these lengths and, in October 2012, launched Palgrave Pivot, a digital initiative offering a new mid-form format for the publication of scholarly research. Palgrave Pivot offers authors the flexibility of publishing at lengths between the journal article and the conventional monograph, enabling research to be published at its natural length.

## Past, present and future of 'mid-form'

The concept of a mid-form publishing outlet is not new; pamphlets or unbound booklets being popular from as early as the 17th century, when educated pamphleteers spread their views on social, political and religious matters. Pamphlets remained a significant part of the reading diet into the 19th century, but fell into decline as printing costs fell and longer publications took over.

Printing costs and printing production processes have long played a role in determining the length and format of scholarly research. A typical monograph has traditionally been defined

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at around 256 pages (70-110,000 words): deemed to be the optimum length, given the practicalities and costs of printing, binding and paper. Journals have been similarly limited by the number of printed pages that could fit into a single issue, a typical journal containing five to ten articles with each article being 7-8,000 words long. Of course, not all research naturally fits the length defined by existing printing practices. Indeed, it is not uncommon for publishers to reject good journal articles that are too long or good monographs that are too short. Until now, researchers have been forced to either cut up their research into multiple journal articles, thus fragmenting research that might be better disseminated as a whole, or to hold back their research until they have more words to add to meet the imposed word limit.

The rise of digital publishing offers the opportunity to remove many of the restrictions imposed by print. Digital printing offers increased flexibility and, in the world of e-books, the restrictions of paper and printers are completely removed.

Several articles and discussion pieces have been published discussing potential new opportunities of format, including *Publishing Through the Wormhole: A New Format for the Born-digital Publisher*<sup>1</sup> in April 2011. The mid-format has been explored by other publishers over recent years but Palgrave Pivot is the first initiative to offer a mid-form format for original research, rather than summaries, to the HSS community.

In November 2010, Springer announced a new product line – SpringerBriefs – for works between 50 and 125 pages in length. SpringerBriefs are concise summaries of cutting-edge research and practical applications across a wide spectrum of fields.

The following year, 2011, saw the launch of Princeton Shorts, brief selections taken from previously-published influential Princeton University Press books and produced exclusively in e-book format.

With so many developments within the publishing landscape, perhaps it is time to ask some questions. What is a book? What is an article? Does it matter the label as long as what's published is good sound research?

## Research panel

In order to begin addressing these questions and to better understand the attitudes and behaviours of the scholarly community, Palgrave Macmillan undertook two streams of market research, both qualitative and quantitative. In October 2011, a Palgrave Macmillan Research Panel was established. With representatives from across the whole HSS community, this panel comprised 1,268 HSS researchers recruited from across a wide geographical range and a variety of disciplines.

To enable the building of a robust and extensive data set, all panellists provided a range of demographic information alongside their responses to the surveys issued. Information obtained included: area of academic interest (as shown in Figure 1), location (Figure 2), job title and publishing history.

The greatest number of respondents – 165 – were academics in the field of business and management, the fewest – 14 – in the field of religion. There were 595 from Europe, with 11 from South America. The depth of demographics obtained enabled the publisher to build an extensive data set that could be interrogated and cross-referenced across individuals, sub-populations and research topics.

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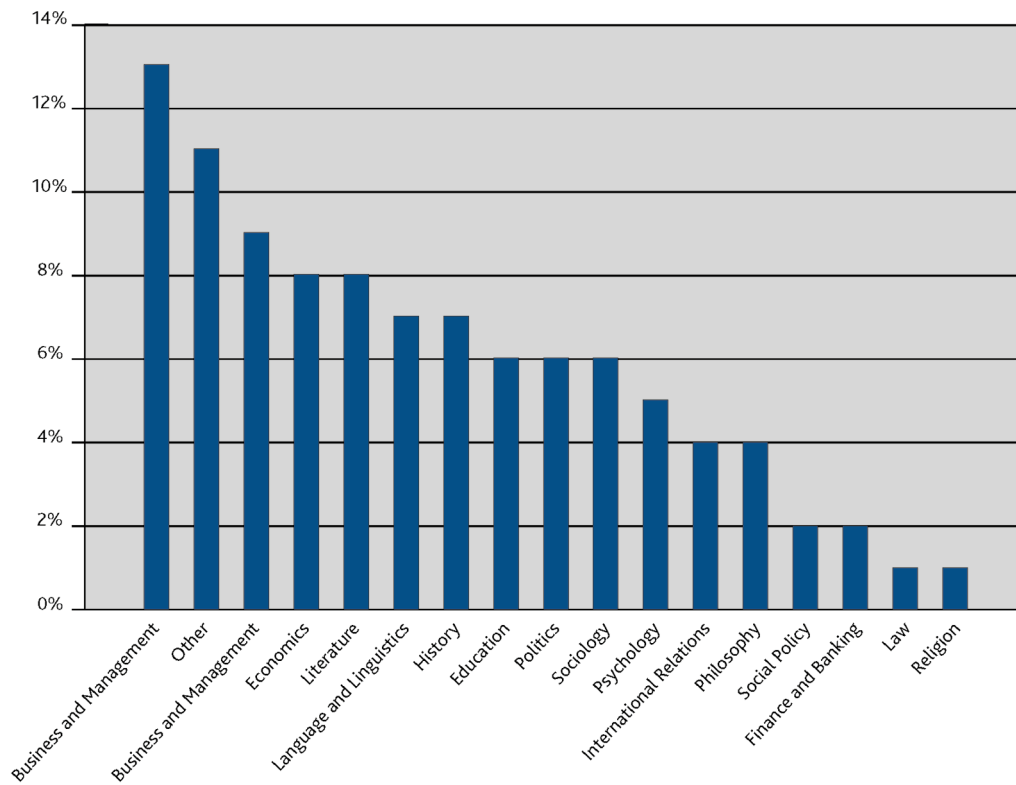


Figure1. Research panel members broken down according to areas of academic interest

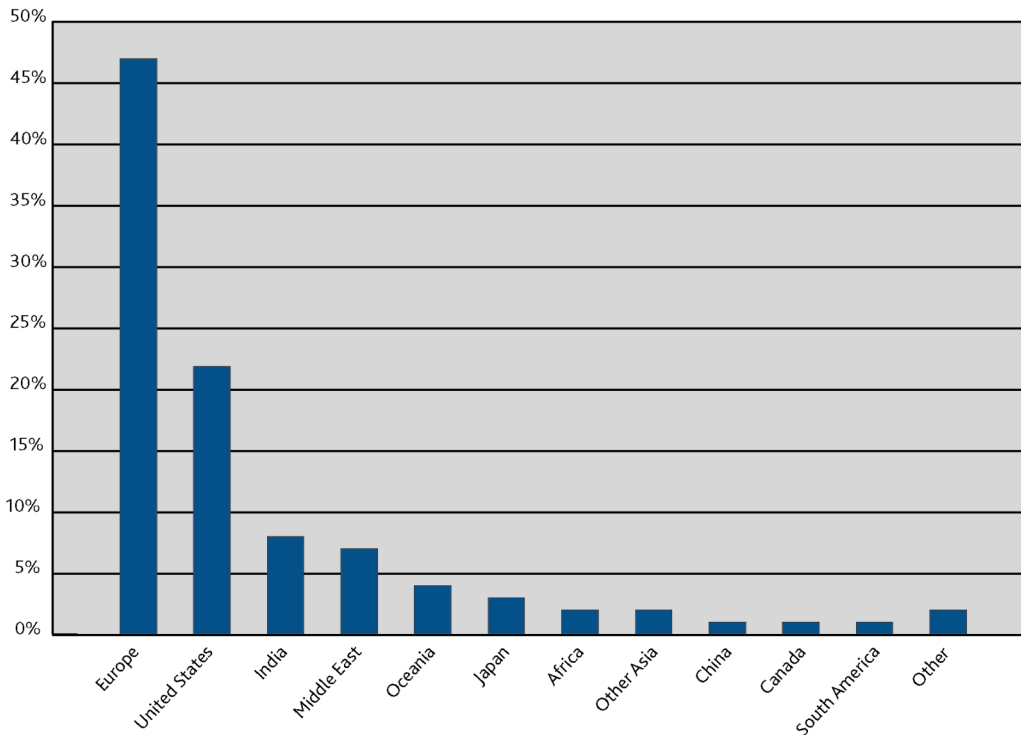


Figure 2. Research panel members broken down according to location

## Market research

The panel has participated in four quantitative studies, with a fifth currently in development. The first survey explored researcher views on the accessibility and quality of content within HSS and their behaviours regarding the consumption of this content.

73 Some findings:

- the researchers spend on average ten hours per week reading academic literature for specific research purposes
- the most frequently read publication format is research articles, followed by monograph chapters
- 93% of the responders have published one or more peer-reviewed research article in the last five years
- 54% have published a peer-reviewed monograph in the last five years.

## The mid-form

One of the key elements this study assessed was the community's perceptions regarding the length of these two different publishing formats (journal articles and monographs). Almost two thirds (64% of the 870 who responded to this survey) felt that the length of journal articles was about right, while for monographs this figure was slightly lower at 50%. The results demonstrated that a number of authors (36% journal article authors and 50% monograph authors) are not satisfied with the formats available to them, with almost all those who felt that the designated length was not right saying (in both cases) that the length was too long.

The survey went on to explore the concept of a format at lengths between the journal article and monograph – a mid-form – by gauging initial reactions from respondents. The results showed that 16% believe that current outputs (journals articles and monographs) are sufficient. Those who felt that a mid-form was a good idea or who were neutral, were asked how likely they would be to publish research in this format: 84% (n=705) indicated that they would be likely to publish (Figure 3).

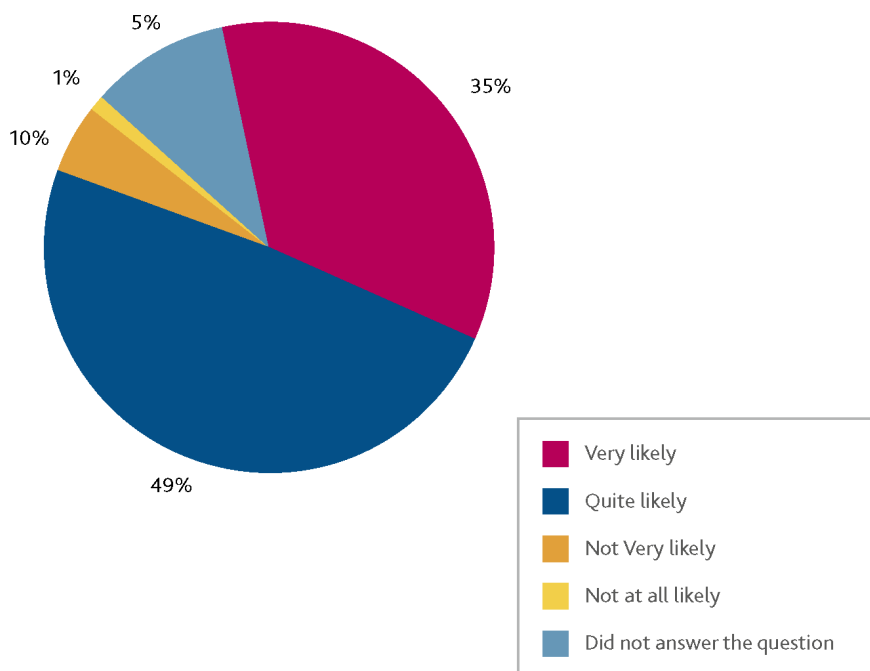


Figure 3. Likelihood that research panel authors would publish in a mid-form publication

74 The quantitative research showed that a significant percentage of the panel felt they were not sufficiently serviced by current publication formats. This was reinforced by qualitative research undertaken with academics, who echoed the need for a new mid-form output for HSS.

John Walton, Research Professor at the Basque Foundation for Science, told Palgrave Macmillan, “The artificial difficulty of publishing work that is longer than a conventional article and shorter than a book has been an anomaly for many years”. His views were widely supported by others and echoed by Professor Cary L Cooper, CBE, Distinguished Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health, Lancaster University Management School, UK, and Chair of the Academy of Social Sciences, UK, who commented, “The typical scholarly article can be too short to get a comprehensive understanding of the research, and books tend not to be the right format for all specific and idiosyncratic pieces of research”.

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## Speed of publication

Academics also shared their frustration with the fact that the dissemination of research in HSS is often delayed by long production processes.

Qualitative market research in this area demonstrated significant support for faster publication times. Neil Chakraborti, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Leicester, UK, commented on the needs of ‘scholars seeking to disseminate their research while it is still fresh and current’. The need to publish and have research read and cited by other academics was at odds with the sometimes lengthy publication times of research monographs and ranked scholarly journals.

Support for faster publication in HSS extended beyond academics. Jane Fitzpatrick, Acquisitions Librarian at CUNY Graduate Center, USA, described the need “for timely research in the digital world. The Humanities and Social Sciences have been left behind in the immediacy of published research [...]. As we know, ‘speed’ and ‘innovation’ are key in the current world of scholarly research”.

## Innovative publishing

In response to both the quantitative and qualitative market research, Palgrave Macmillan looked to launch a new product that addressed the HSS community’s needs both in terms of format and speed of publication. Palgrave Pivot launched in October 2012.

Palgrave Macmillan questioned and (where necessary) amended key areas of the publishing process in order to ensure it was possible to produce and release mid-form publications (both digitally and in print) within 12 weeks of acceptance. In order to meet the demands of this fast publication time, all departments (Editorial, Production, Marketing, Sales, Technology and Finance), examined workflows and dependencies to create an innovative infrastructure within which to publish mid-form outputs rapidly. For example, one of the areas that usually takes time in the production process is that of confirming the cover design, so rather than having bespoke cover designs, Palgrave Pivot authors are required to choose from a wide range of templated designs. Authors also have to agree to answer any queries from copy-editors and typesetters very quickly.

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In some cases, authors requested that Palgrave Macmillan publish particularly topical research more rapidly to enable it to have the opportunity to have greater impact. *Sporting Times* by Professor Kath Woodward of the Open University, UK, was written during the London 2012 games and put the new processes at Palgrave Macmillan to the test: the title was published within just weeks of the closing ceremony.

## Traditional values

While innovating in order to publish quickly and at a new length, Palgrave Macmillan also wanted to ensure that its usual high quality standards were maintained. All Palgrave Pivot publications are subject to Palgrave Macmillan's professional and rigorous peer-review process.

The publisher also liaised with key external stakeholders in order to ensure that Palgrave Pivot publications would meet the requirements of both the book industry and the research community. The Bibliographic Services Team worked with library suppliers and booksellers in order to ensure that these new mid-form publications would be promptly announced and correctly classified, in light of their new format and shorter publishing schedule. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) confirmed that research outputs published with Palgrave Pivot are eligible for the UK's 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) – subject to all other criteria being met.

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## Launching Palgrave Pivot

The first 21 Palgrave Pivot titles were published on 30 October 2012. The format allows quality new research to be delivered rapidly, and at its natural length. Once accepted, new research is published within 12 weeks, reaching the market quickly and thus allowing scholarship to move forward quickly. Titles are focused on new and important research and are typically between 25,000 and 50,000 words long. All Palgrave Pivot publications are available as e-books, and in order to meet the needs of customers who prefer a print copy, are also available in print.

Palgrave Macmillan has to date received a large number of proposals and published 27 titles in 2012. The feedback from eminent scholars has been positive. Akira Iriye, Professor of American History, Emeritus, Harvard University, USA, stated that he was “fascinated by the [Palgrave] Pivot project and shall spread the word...[Palgrave Pivot] strikes me as an excellent way to publish innovative works as quickly as possible, not so much as full books but as ‘think pieces’.”

Kelly A Forrest, Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences at the University of Washington, USA, described how “of all the presses I've looked into, none compared to the excitement I had when I discovered [Palgrave Pivot]. I think it's an amazing idea [...]”.

## Palgrave Pivot: 2013 and beyond

The surveys exploring the needs of the scholarly community undertaken by Palgrave Macmillan throughout 2011 and 2012 will continue to feed the development of products and services.

In 2013, over 100 Palgrave Pivot titles will publish and Palgrave Macmillan has recently announced an open access option for authors of Palgrave Pivot publications, as well as for research monographs.

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### Reference

- Esposito, J, 26 April 2011, Publishing Through the Wormhole: A New Format for the Born-digital Publisher, Scholarly Kitchen blog: <http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2011/04/26/publishing-through-the-wormhole-a-new-format-for-the-born-digital-publisher> (accessed 6 December 2012).

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