

Reflections on the demise of First Monday

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Abstract

The journal *First Monday*, an early Open Access journal without article processing charges, announced recently that they would cease publishing with their May 2026 issue, after 30 years of publishing. This calls for some reflections. *First Monday* has been a well-respected, much-used journal of standing in its field. It has published relatively much over a long period. That such a journal does not see fit to continue publishing is a sign of problems in institution-based publishing, primarily lack of sufficient institutional financial backing for Diamond OA journals.

Keywords

First Monday, diamond journal, funding, sustainability

Through a comment by Martin Paul Eve on Bluesky February 7th (Eve, 2026), I became aware that the journal *First Monday* had announced that they would cease publishing when the May issue had been published. *First Monday* (FM) was a free to read, free to publish in, online journal devoted to various aspects of “life on the internet”. I have understood it to be kind of a “cult” journal in some circles, and it has published quite a number of important articles on many aspects of the internet. If you wonder about the journal’s name, it comes from the *Philosophical Transactions of The Royal Society*. The council of the Royal Society in 1664 ordered that “the Philosophical Transactions, to be composed by Mr Oldenburg, be printed the first Monday of every month, if he have sufficient matter for it” (*Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 2025).

This announcement made for some reflections. The impending demise of an important – not least to myself – journal saddened me. And I also see the fate of FM as a symptom of how little institutional engagement has been put into the creation and sustainment of scholar-led publishing activities in academia – something that was the obvious way of publishing not that many decades ago.

One such reflection is that the “careers” of FM and myself have some similarities. The first issue of FM was published on May 6th, 1996. According to Wikipedia (*First Monday (journal)*, 2026), the foundations of FM were laid during the summer of 1995. I became interested in scholarly publishing when I in 1995 was asked to write a report on – mainly – the publishing activities of my university, now UiT The Arctic University of Norway. The report was delivered on May 13th, 1996 (Frantsvåg, 1996). The foundations of this report were laid during early summer 1995. My background in economics and information science led me to conclude in the report that the university should aim to publish its science on the internet, making it available for free. It might be needless to say, but this was at that time so radical that the report didn't have any impact. Nonetheless, UiT today is an institution that prides itself on its work in Open Access (OA) and other Open Science areas, being a leader in Norway and actively participating internationally.

FM announced on January 6th 2026 (*First Monday @ 30*, 2026) that the May issue would be the final issue, after 30 years of serving the community. I have recently informed my boss that I intend to take part retirement, commencing this autumn. I haven't served the Open Access community for 30 years, but I have been interested in these issues since I started to write the report in 1995 and have been working full time on OA since the summer of 2006. Over time, my interest in scholarly publishing led me to study for half a BA and a full MA in Documentation Science.

I believe my first encounter with FM must have been in 2001; if I am not mistaken an article in the first issue (Brown & Duguid, 1996) was on the reading list for my Documentation Science course. After that, FM was a journal I browsed every now and then, as they often had content relevant to me and my work or studies. In 2009 I was part of a Nordic project investigating various aspects of OA. As part of this, I had performed a study of the use of advertising in OA journals and thought my findings could be of some interest to the community. Looking for somewhere to publish this, I found FM could possibly be a venue – so I submitted there just before Christmas 2009 (Frantsvåg, 2010a). After submitting, it dawned on me to check if FM was an accredited journal in the Norwegian system, where a large list of journals was accredited based on an evaluation of their quality assurance system. Publishing in accredited journals resulted in “points” that translated into funding for the author's institutions. Most journals were accredited on level 1, while a minority of journals were assigned to level 2, giving three times as many points as those on level 1. Not only was FM accredited, it was among the select journals on level 2 in the system! So, when my next manuscript on the structure of OA publishing was ready, I submitted that too to FM (Frantsvåg, 2010b). Both articles were accepted, and the last of them has to some extent been the basis of much of my subsequent research. In early 2011 I got an e-mail from the faculty informing me that if my MA thesis didn't appear before them by May 15th, 2011, I

would be struck from the student register. My planned thesis was sent to the garbage bin and the two articles, plus a third manuscript (never polished for publication) became the main content of a new thesis, submitted well before the deadline. In short, FM has been the basis of my semi-academic career, concentrating on OA-related matters, since 2010.

The focus of FM has been, from the start, the Internet and what happens there and around it. This is clearly set out in Editor's Introduction in the first issue (Valauskas et al., 1996) and is also clearly visible in the Table of Contents in the first issue (*First Monday Table of Contents*, 1996).

Over the years, 367 issues have been published, see (*Archives*) lower right corner. This includes some special issues, bringing the number of issues above 12 in some years. In addition to scholarly articles, we find interviews and book reviews, this becoming scarcer sometime around 2015. Data received from CrossRef says FM so far has issued 2751 DOIs. Interviews and book reviews have also been issued DOIs, this indicates that it is realistic to estimate the number of scholarly articles over 30 years to about 2,500.

FM started out so early that Creative Commons (CC) licenses and DOIs hadn't been thought of yet – FM even pre-dates the term "Open Access" even if it embodies the realities of OA. And PDFs hadn't yet become the de facto standard in OA publishing. FM published in HTML, which is actually still a good idea – it is difficult not to have a structure in an HTML document, unlike Word and PDF. 1996 was also before Open Journal Systems (OJS) was launched, at some point FM started using OJS as a publishing platform. All content has been migrated to this platform. DOIs have been added retroactively, and PDFs have also to some extent been added – they are PDFs made from the webpages, not from Word or other text programmes. And the article landing pages contain the text "Authors retain copyright to their work published in First Monday. Please see the footer of each article for details." In early issues, there is little information to be found except for this notice, and a conflicting "© First Monday". Sometime between 2010 and 2013 CC licenses were introduced.

While FM was an early mover in OA, I see signs they haven't been able to stay at the forefront. Among the signs are few ORCID, even fewer RORs, references not part of the metadata, no usage or citation statistics or such-like information visible. I hope that the journal has a solution for long-term archiving (e.g. via using a built-in feature in OJS), so that readers have access to the content of FM after the final issue is published.

And in 2021 I discovered FM was no longer listed in DOAJ – it had been removed in June 2017 with a standard explanation of "Journal not adhering to Best Practice". This can cover a number of problems, on a scale from "easily solved" to "deeply problematic". As far as I have been able to understand, they have not re-applied to DOAJ. In my book, a serious OA journal is one registered in DOAJ. Not being there is a symptom of something. Recently, there has been some discussion in Norway – still ongoing – whether journals removed from DOAJ also should be removed from the list of accredited journals in Norway, effectively stopping Norwegian authors from publishing there. Plan S also has a DOAJ listing as a criterion for OA journals ("Part III: Technical Guidance and Requirements,") paragraph 1.2. This means FM has, over years, become a less ideal journal for many European authors.

So, what went wrong? In my opinion – based on hundreds of observations over years, connected to my work and my research – there is nothing to blame the FM editors for. FM is a classic Diamond OA journal ("First Monday," 2011) tells us they in 2011 had a rejection rate of 85%, but no income or bank account. A manual count indicates they published 74 articles in 2011, corresponding to receiving about 490 manuscripts. In addition to showing FM is a quality journal, it also shows it is completely dependent on in-kind contributions. I assume their publisher University of Illinois Libraries let them use OJS for free and paid their CrossRef costs. But the major cost is the work needed for such a large journal (in a world where most journals publish 25 or fewer articles per year, FM is a large journal). This work is done for free, in the "spare time" of academics. After 33 years in an academic institution I must say I have rarely observed any academic with spare time on their hands, quite the opposite – they have always had more than enough to do.

In the old gift-exchange system, scholars took turns being authors, reviewers and editors. This has been replaced with a system where authors get recognition, while editing and reviewing – despite being necessary for the publishing system to function – are ignored and have become an impediment to an academic career. At the same time, we are lamenting the huge profits the commercial publishers are extorting from academia.

I am reminded of an old joke about the farmer who was disappointed – he had gradually nearly weaned his cow from eating, reducing the food gradually, straw by straw. But when success was nearly assured – he was down to two straws a day – the cow died!

I am not a First Monday insider, but I fear FM is such a cow, having existed at less than the existence minimum for a long time and finally giving up. There are thousands of Diamond OA journals out there, living on the same terms: lots of work, and virtually no support except from overworked academics.

When will academia start feeding their cows, instead of feeding the fat cats of the commercial publishing industry?

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