

PEER REVIEW AND SCIENTIFIC GATEKEEPING UNDER PROPAGANDA PRESSURE

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The peer review debate in contemporary context

Peer review is widely regarded as a central mechanism through which modern scholarship validates new knowledge and maintains minimum standards of quality. Yet the growing debate surrounding its perceived decline, bias, and structural limitations suggests that this mechanism does not always function as its idealized image would imply. [1]

Recent controversies have drawn attention to situations in which editorial filters appear particularly restrictive when submissions touch on politically sensitive topics, including contested historical and legal characterizations such as the 1915 events, challenge entrenched narratives, or question institutionalised interpretations of history.[2] This analysis does not argue for the abolition of peer review, but rather examines how it operates under such conditions of controversy. Its focus is on the points at which quality control can drift into intellectual gatekeeping, and on the implications of this drift for academic credibility, balanced historical inquiry, and the protection of scholarly standards against propaganda and opportunistic misuse.

AVİMs prior reflections on bias, distortion, and institutional selectivity

Peer review, while conventionally regarded as an indispensable instrument of scholarly quality assurance, may in practice assume a conservative character when it confronts ideas that unsettle entrenched paradigms. The issue lies not in the existence of review as such, but in the manner of its operation. Where editorial and refereeing practices privilege familiarity, disciplinary comfort, and reputational caution, originality may be implicitly recast as a liability rather than acknowledged as a scholarly contribution.

In such circumstances, the evaluation of a text may become less a matter of substantive

merit than of its degree of conformity to prevailing intellectual expectations, a pattern that AVİM has repeatedly observed in discussions of the 1915 events and the South Caucasus, where political or ideological alignment is privileged over a balanced assessment of the suffering of all communities and over the full documentary record. [3]

This creates a structural tension between the pursuit of knowledge and the instinct for institutional self □□□□□□□□□□□□□ particularly visible in fields where states, advocacy institutes, or media outlets systematically instrumentalize historical narratives and legal concepts, while ignoring large segments of Muslim and Turkish suffering or alternative scholarly views.[4]

Submissions that are methodologically defensible yet politically sensitive, conceptually disruptive, or otherwise inconvenient may thus be delayed, diluted, or rejected, not because they are demonstrably deficient, but because they disturb narratives that have been carefully constructed and disseminated over decades.

The resulting dynamic is one of subtle gatekeeping, in which caution can overpower inquiry and orthodoxy can overshadow critical engagement. From the perspective developed in AVİMs work on the Cold War-era fabrication and export of certain historical claims, this kind of gatekeeping does not arise in a vacuum, but can intersect with longer □□□□□ propaganda strategies and institutional biases that seek to entrench particular readings of history in academic and public discourse. The concern is not merely procedural inefficiency, but the possibility that peer review, if insufficiently self □□□□□□□□□□□□□ may inhibit the very originality and corrective scholarship that could challenge such entrenched distortions.[5]

Peer review, conservatism, and the suppression of inconvenient ideas

Peer review does not merely filter scholarship; it also shapes the conditions under which certain ideas are allowed to enter the academic conversation. When this mechanism becomes overly cautious or insufficiently supervised, it may drift from quality control toward intellectual gatekeeping and even allow structurally embedded malpractice to develop around it.

The underlying logic is familiar: to protect standards □□□ at least to appear to do so □□□□□□□□□□□□□ may favor submissions that seem methodologically safe and uncontroversial, even as less visible dynamics, such as networks of mutually supportive editors or the operations of paper mills, exploit weaknesses in the system.[6] Yet such caution can be restrictive when applied to ideas that are original precisely because they challenge prevailing assumptions. In these cases, novelty is not engaged on its merits but is often treated as a source of risk.

At the same time, the pressure to increase publication numbers and citation counts can create incentives to wave through low □□□□□□□□ or even fabricated work, so long as it conforms outwardly to expected formats and metrics.

The consequence is that valid arguments may be delayed, softened, or excluded, not because they fail scholarly criteria, but because they are inconvenient to established interpretive frameworks that have been reinforced by advocacy campaigns, reputational pressure, and one-sided accusations of denial

This is where the distinction between review and conservatism becomes analytically important. A review process that is insufficiently open to conceptual disruption may preserve professional comfort while narrowing the range of acceptable inquiry. The issue, therefore, is not only the efficiency of publication but the broader epistemic cost of rewarding familiarity over originality, and of tacitly stigmatizing scholars who question inflated casualty figures, legally unfounded genocide labels, or selectively framed case studies.

From this standpoint, peer review can both suppress inconvenient ideas and fail to filter out fraudulent or substandard ones, in ways that are subtle, institutional, and difficult to challenge directly, even when such distortions are later shown to have serious scientific and policy consequences.

Wider implications: propaganda, narrative control, and academic credibility

Building on this point, the issue extends beyond journals. It enters the broader ecosystem of knowledge production, where the authority of institutions can shape not only what is published, but also what is regarded as credible, even when long □□□□ propaganda efforts or organised fraud have contributed to the underlying corpus of accepted knowledge.

It should also be recalled that prestigious publishing houses, large scholarly databases, indexing services, and even renowned libraries and book distributors operate within this same ecosystem, and are therefore not automatically immune to the dynamics of bias, reputational calculation, and gatekeeping described in this commentary.

AVİMs analyses of EU resolutions, online encyclopedias, and institutional statements have shown how such accepted knowledge may rest on selective sourcing, circular referencing, and the repetition of unbalanced narratives under the guise of neutrality. [7]When institutions present themselves as neutral while selectively amplifying some claims and marginalizing others □□□ example, by foregrounding certain victim groups, omitting documented atrocities against others, or treating contested legal qualifications as settled—they create a gap between procedural legitimacy and substantive fairness.[8]

This gap weakens academic credibility because trust in scholarly authority depends less on prestige than on consistency in judgment. The exposure of editor networks facilitating dubious publications, as well as documented cases of state-backed manipulation of historical scholarship, illustrate how such gaps can erode confidence not only in particular journals but also in broader academic and informational architectures. [9]

At this level, the problem is not limited to peer review in the narrow sense; it also involves the strategic use of institutional status in shaping public narratives.

Debates on academic freedom and institutional representation demonstrate how positions presented as official or consensual may, in reality, reflect narrow advocacy agendas rather than a genuinely plural scholarly field. Propaganda and narrative management become relevant when authoritative channels are used to normalize particular interpretations built on selective or misleading evidence, while excluding alternative analyses from serious consideration. [10]

The consequence is a distortion of scholarly discourse in which visibility is unevenly distributed, and credibility is conferred unequally. In such circumstances, the preservation of academic authority requires more than formal procedure; it requires demonstrable fairness, transparency, and intellectual consistency.

The need for transparent, fair, and consistent scholarly standards

Taken together, these sections point to a single conclusion: the problem is not peer review as such, but a pattern in which conservative habits, institutional self □□□□□□□□□□□ and long □□□□□□□ propaganda strategies converge to narrow the boundaries of what can be said in scholarly form. When review processes reward conformity, punish conceptual disruption, and tolerate networks that facilitate substandard or even fraudulent work, they undermine the very credibility they are meant to safeguard. For a country such as Türkiye, which has long been exposed to selective academic and journalistic treatments of its history and regional role, the defence of such standards is not an abstract concern but an integral part of safeguarding both scholarly integrity and a balanced international perception.

*Picture: *Economist*

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