



**Publish or perish revisited: Persistence, academic labour, and institutional logics in scholarly publishing**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

Academic publishing is increasingly guided by performance-based evaluation systems that demand continuous output from academics at different career stages. Existing literature has examined publication pressure, productivity, and research assessment, but persistence in academic publishing continues to receive insufficient attention. It is often conflated with individual motivation, resilience, or publication volume. Consequently, there is still no clear account of how academics develop, sustain, or break down when trying to publish under evaluation-driven systems and uneven work conditions. Drawing on labour process theory and institutional logics, persistence is redefined as an ongoing form of academic labour influenced by institutional logics and evaluative governance. Building on studies of higher education, academic labour, and research evaluation, a conceptual model was developed to explain how persistence emerges through the interaction among institutional logics, labour conditions, and adaptive publishing practices. Four research questions guided the discussion. Different persistence patterns, including sustained scholarly engagement, compliance-driven publishing, and fragile or interrupted participation, were identified and discussed, with an explanation of how feedback loops connect evaluation outcomes to future opportunities and constraints. The paper explains how recurring patterns of disengagement, ethical risk, and unequal career outcomes across academic systems occur by shifting attention from individual endurance to institutional Organisation. A policy-relevant critique of evaluation systems that reward visible persistence while overlooking and under-supporting the labour that sustains scholarly publishing was offered. This paper contributes to higher education policy by clarifying how evaluation systems organise publishing labour and by identifying institutional conditions required for sustainable and ethically grounded scholarly participation.

**Keywords:** Research Evaluation; Audit Culture; Publishing Ethics; Performance-Based Assessment; Higher Education Governance.



## Introduction

Academic publishing occupies a central place in contemporary conversations in higher education. Across countries and disciplines, research output is increasingly used to evaluate academic performance, guide recruitment, make promotion decisions, allocate funding, and position institutions within global rankings (Bornmann & Mutz, 2015; Fanelli & Larivière, 2016; Moed, 2017). These circumstances have raised expectations for continuous publication and contributed to what is widely described as a publish-or-perish culture in academic work (Bello et al., 2023; Elbanna & Child, 2023; Owan et al., 2024). Consequently, publishing has shifted from a primarily scholarly activity focused on knowledge contribution to a regulated practice closely tied to accountability and performance measurement. Sustained engagement in publishing has therefore become an ongoing requirement across academic careers. Consequently, these developments are not only academic concerns but policy issues, as research evaluation systems increasingly shape funding decisions, career progression, and institutional priorities across higher education systems.

A large body of literature on academic publishing has mostly focused on variables such as research productivity, publication pressure, writing for publication, and performance metrics. Most studies, including meta-analyses by Tian et al. (2016) and Yeo et al. (2022), have focused on publication counts, citation indicators, journal status, and the effects of research assessment systems on academic behaviour. Although, these studies explain how publishing is evaluated and rewarded, they tend to focus more on measurable outputs than on the processes through which scholars continue to engage with publishing over time. As a result, persistence, understood as sustained engagement across repeated cycles of writing, submission, rejection, revision, and resubmission, has received limited attention in the literature (Owan et al., 2023).

When persistence appears in the literature, it is often implied rather than clearly defined, or it is used interchangeably with related concepts such as motivation, resilience, commitment, or productivity (Aprile et al., 2020; Heng et al., 2020; Ho, 2017). In some cases, it is inferred from how often a scholar publishes; in others, it is treated as an individual's capacity to cope with rejection and pressure (Owan et al., 2023). These approaches blur the line between output, emotional capacity, and the ongoing work required to stay engaged with scholarly publishing under institutional constraints. They also tend to place responsibility on individual researchers, while giving less attention to evaluation systems, workload arrangements, and unequal access to research support (Aboagye et al., 2021; Nicholls et al., 2022; Van Dalen, 2021).

This lack of clarity has important consequences. This conceptual ambiguity also limits policymakers' and institutions' ability to design evaluation systems that support sustainable and equitable participation in academic publishing. When persistence is reduced to personal determination or endurance, the institutional and systemic conditions under which publishing takes place receive less attention. When persistence is treated as publication output, the labour involved in navigating peer review, rejection, revision, and journal selection becomes less visible (Bu et al., 2018; Merga, 2021). These perspectives make it difficult to explain why persistence varies across settings and why some researchers turn to questionable publishing practices, including predatory or low-quality journals.

Research also suggests that evaluation systems increasingly influence publishing behaviour in ways that favour visibility, speed, and compliance rather than long-term scholarly development. Metric-based assessment encourages continuous output while giving limited



recognition to the labour required to sustain publishing over time (Moed, 2017; Owan et al., 2024; Yeo et al., 2022). Studies of early-career academics, doctoral researchers, and scholars working in resource-constrained or peripheral settings indicate that continued engagement often depends on mentorship, protected research time, collaborative networks, and institutional recognition of their published work (Aprile et al., 2020; Kwanya, 2020; Shellenbarger & Gazza, 2020). Where such support is weak or uneven, publication might become fragile.

Research in this area also indicates that research evaluation systems, metric governance, and institutional incentive structures strongly influence academic publishing. These systems link career progression and institutional value to publication counts and journal placement, thereby encouraging alignment with performance indicators and journal hierarchies (Hammarfelt & Rijcke, 2014; Jandrić & Hayes, 2019; Şener et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2021). It has also been noted that national and institutional assessment systems further influence publication strategies, language choices, research agendas, and timelines (Aboagye et al., 2021; Hammarfelt & Rijcke, 2014; Weinstein et al., 2023). Studies also suggest that pressures to evaluate research performance encourage short-term strategies, compliance, and engagement with questionable publishing routes under constrained conditions (Horta & Li, 2022; Madikizela-Madiya, 2022; Mertkan et al., 2022).

Despite these explanations of pressure and incentives, two important gaps remain in the literature. First, persistence is rarely treated as a process that unfolds over time through repeated cycles of submission, review, rejection, and revision (Aboagye et al., 2021; Weinstein et al., 2023). Second, although links between evaluation systems, working conditions, productivity, and well-being are documented, the processes by which these factors lead to different persistence patterns remain unclear. It is therefore difficult to explain within a single framework how evaluation systems and working conditions jointly sustain publishing engagement for some academics while weakening, redirecting, or interrupting it for others. This gap also hinders the development of policy frameworks that can address unequal participation, ethical risks, and long-term sustainability in academic publishing.

The present paper addresses this gap by focusing on persistence as a governed and ongoing form of academic labour, rather than treating it as a personal attribute or a simple output measure. A conceptual and theoretical account of persistence in academic publishing was developed. Persistence is examined as labour embedded in institutional logics linked to research evaluation systems, career stage, and unequal research infrastructure. In this view, persistence is treated as an ongoing academic process shaped by institutional expectations, evaluative governance, and uneven working conditions. This approach makes it clearer to separate persistence from related concepts. It also makes it easier to explain patterns of disengagement and ethical compromise in different academic settings.

By doing so, the paper provides a framework that can inform the design of evaluation systems, institutional policies, and research governance practices that better align expectations with the realities of academic labour.

### **Institutional Logics in Academic Publishing**

Academic publishing operates within institutional logics that define what counts as legitimate scholarly work and how academic value is recognised. In Nigeria, publication expectations have increasingly become tied to promotion and career advancement, often creating



pressure to publish under resource-constrained conditions and giving rise to what has been described as a "publish or perish" or even "publish and perish" culture (Owan & Asuquo, 2022). Institutional logics comprise the prevailing norms, expectations, and criteria through which activities are evaluated and rewarded within a field (Cai & Mountford, 2021). In contemporary times, these logics are increasingly organised around formal research evaluation systems that prioritise measurable outputs, visibility, and comparability across institutions and countries (Bornmann & Mutz, 2015; Moed, 2017; Thomas et al., 2020).

In the Nigerian higher education system, these bibliometric indicators, journal rankings, and citation measures serve not only as tools for assessment but also as mechanisms for organising academic work. As part of a wider audit culture, they direct scholarly effort towards activities that can be monitored, compared, and counted (Skene et al., 2020). They also set informal expectations about where to publish, how often to publish, and which forms of contribution carry value. Publishing, therefore, operates less as a one-off scholarly act and more as an ongoing requirement that is tied to performance management and accountability. Evidence from research evaluation studies indicates that these arrangements have influenced publication patterns, writing practices, and working routines in ways that align academic labour more closely with evaluation criteria (Hammarfelt & de Rijcke, 2015; Owan et al., 2024).

Within these conditions, persistence takes on a specific meaning. It is not simply a voluntary personal trait but a condition for staying viable within metric-driven systems. Research on academic labour points to increasing workload intensity, extended working hours, and closer monitoring of scholarly activity, with publishing at the centre of this pressure (Gill, 2014). Persistence in publishing, therefore, represents continued compliance with institutional expectations within systems in which academic work is closely organised and assessed using evaluation tools. Studies of publication growth indicate that the expansion of scientific output has gone hand in hand with greater reliance on quantitative indicators to manage academic systems at scale (Bornmann & Mutz, 2015).

Research in evaluative informetrics also suggests that these indicators influence institutional behaviour and guide researchers' decisions about where to publish, how often to publish, and what to study (Moed, 2017). This body of work helps explain how persistence is produced. Scholars are expected to maintain continuous engagement with publishing to align with evaluation cycles that reward accumulation and visibility over slower or occasional forms of scholarly contribution. This subsection primarily addresses Research Question 2 by examining how institutional logics and research evaluation systems organise academic publishing activities.

### **Persistence as Regulated Academic Labour**

Persistence in academic publishing can be understood as a form of regulated academic labour. Regulated academic labour refers to scholarly work that is shaped by performance expectations, evaluative standards, and accountability mechanisms that influence how academic success is judged. This labour goes beyond producing manuscripts to include relentless engagement with peer review, revision, resubmission, journal selection, and changing editorial requirements. The reason is that most of the work is unpaid, spans long periods, receives little formal recognition, and is usually combined with other activities, thereby increasing academics' workload. These features align with broader accounts of necessary yet often unseen academic

labour that supports institutional performance without commensurate reward (Gill, 2016; Reid, 2021).

Research evaluation systems intensify this labour by linking publishing activity directly to career progression and institutional standing. Under such governance, these arrangements, publication becomes embedded in systems of research governance that regulate academic activity through performance measures and assessment tools (Oancea, 2019). Although new discussions on reforms promote ideas such as “publishing and flourishing”, evaluation systems still place strong emphasis on output indicators as measures of academic worth (Yeo et al., 2022). As a result, persistence involves not only producing knowledge but also sustaining the effort required to publish. Such efforts keep changing over time, across institutions, disciplines, or research policies. Under these conditions, publishing increasingly involves strategic alignment with indicators, as scholars adjust their practices to such changing expectations (Biagioli, 2020; Wouters, 2020).

This perspective explains why persistence differs across academic settings. Where institutional support matches evaluation demands, through mentorship, protected research time, and access to infrastructure, sustained engagement is more achievable. Where such support is limited, persistence often becomes unstable or broken. In these situations, publishing labour may shift towards strategies that prioritise speed and formal conformity to expectations over long-term scholarly development. Studies have suggested that such patterns often occur alongside heavy workloads and emotional distress, especially in environments with limited recognition and rising performance pressure (Gill, 2016; Ogbonna & Harris, 2004). This subsection contributes to Research Questions 1 and 2 by clarifying the concept of persistence and explaining how publishing labour is shaped by evaluation systems.

### **Evaluation Regimes and Performativity**

Evaluation systems introduce a performative dimension to academic publishing. Evaluation regimes refer to the systems, procedures, and criteria used to assess academic performance and research productivity, while performativity describes the tendency for individuals to modify their behaviour in response to such evaluation systems. Within academic publishing, these processes create pressure not only to publish but also to make scholarly productivity visible and measurable. Moed (2017) explains how indicators convert scholarly work into measurable signals, encouraging practices that prioritise quantifiable outcomes over long-term intellectual contribution. Similar concerns have been raised in Nigerian higher education, where the use of journal impact factors in staff assessment may oversimplify research quality and distort academic evaluation practices (Owan & Owan, 2021). Such systems alter publication patterns and work routines, as scholars adjust their behaviour to meet formal criteria (Hammarfelt & de Rijcke, 2015).

This performative orientation changes the meaning of persistence. Instead of signalling sustained scholarly commitment, persistence may take the form of compliance-driven endurance, focused on meeting thresholds for promotion, contract renewal, or graduation within audit-based systems. Macfarlane (2017) links this shift to performativity in academic publishing, in which publication becomes a monitored activity, and non-compliance carries reputational or career risks. Under such conditions, continued engagement reflects adherence to evaluation demands rather than a steady pursuit of scholarly goals.



This pattern is particularly visible among early-career academics. Aprile et al. (2020) describe how early-career researchers manage tensions between institutional expectations and personal research values. Research on changing ideas of impact and excellence suggests that early-career scholars must constantly balance career survival with shifting evaluation signals, making persistence contingent on circumstances rather than stable (Wróblewska et al., 2024). Persistence, therefore, depends on the ability to manage competing demands in environments that reward visibility and alignment with policy priorities.

The same logic also helps explain disengagement. When the work required to sustain publishing exceeds available resources, such as time, funding, mentoring, or emotional support, researchers may reduce activity, withdraw from some publication, or redirect effort towards outputs that meet metric expectations. Research on metric-driven systems has identified strategic adjustment, gaming, and selective withdrawal as unintended outcomes of evaluation regimes (Biagioli, 2020). Literature on publishing pressure further suggests that less experienced researchers may adopt questionable strategies under institutional pressure, indicating that disengagement and problematic persistence are driven by structural conditions rather than personal choice (Mertkan et al., 2022). Persistence is therefore influenced not only by motivation but by the practical feasibility of maintaining compliance within performative systems. This subsection addresses Research Question 2 by examining the mechanisms through which evaluation systems influence publishing behaviour and sustained participation in academic publishing.

### **Institutional Pressure and Ethical Tension**

Empirical studies on publishing pressure suggest that institutional logics can create ethical tension in academic publishing. In cases where promotion and recognition depend heavily on publication counts, some academics turn to journals that promise rapid publication but have poor review and editorial practices (Öztürk & Taşkın, 2024; Tella, 2020). These dynamics indicate that ethical tension arises from evaluation arrangements that prioritise visible output. Related work suggests that early career researchers are particularly exposed to these pressures. For instance, Mertkan et al. (2022) describe how early-career academics, under intense pressure, strategically choose questionable outlets to meet formal requirements tied to job security and progression. These choices complicate explanations based only on inexperience or poor judgment. Studies of predatory publishing suggest that such practices are often associated with incentive structures and limited opportunities rather than individual moral failure (Mills & Inouye, 2020).

From this perspective, such behaviours represent a reworking of persistence under constraint. Researchers continue to publish, but do so in ways aligned with evaluation demands rather than scholarly standards. This distinction is important because persistence does not disappear under pressure; it changes form. The literature on misaligned incentives in scholarly publishing further explains how performance metrics can redirect effort away from knowledge contribution towards credential accumulation, with implications for research quality and academic norms (Trueblood et al., 2025).

These cases also point to the limits of explaining persistence in terms of motivation or resilience. Even committed researchers may adopt compromised strategies when expectations are rigid, support is limited, and pressure is intense. There is evidence that high publication

pressure increases the willingness to engage in questionable practices (Paruzel-Czachura et al., 2020), supporting the view that ethical risk is largely driven by structural conditions rather than individual choice. Persistence must therefore be understood within systems that can sustain, distort, or weaken scholarly engagement. This subsection contributes to Research Questions 2 and 4 by explaining how evaluation pressures influence publishing practices and generate different forms of persistence under constraint.

### **Career Stage and Differential Exposure to Institutional Logics**

Institutional logics do not affect all researchers in the same way. Career stage influences both exposure to pressure to evaluate research performance and the ability to persist. Evidence suggests that doctoral researchers and early-career academics face greater publication pressure and have less access to institutional resources than their senior colleagues (Armond & Kakuk, 2022). For those in the early stages, publishing is closely tied to entry into the profession, progression, and job security, thereby increasing the stakes of continued publishing activity. Early-career academics and doctoral researchers often work under the most demanding conditions. Research suggests that these groups are introduced to narrow, metric-focused evaluation systems within highly competitive environments, where scholarly worth is assessed using a limited set of indicators (Fochler et al., 2016). Under such conditions, persistence is often driven by short-term survival rather than long-term research development, a tension also noted in studies of early academic careers (Aprile et al., 2020).

Senior academics may have more freedom in their research choices, yet they still operate within evaluation systems that prioritise output, visibility, and performance monitoring. Studies of promotion and tenure systems indicate that academics at different stages manage institutional expectations in different ways, balancing professional, managerial, state, and market demands within performance systems (Pietilä & Pinheiro, 2021). Persistence at later stages, therefore, reflects a different form of engagement with evaluation pressure rather than its absence. Across the academic career, persistence is associated with access to institutional resources and varying levels of vulnerability to evaluation pressure.

Evidence from Nigerian universities further suggests that mentorship plays an important role in sustaining research productivity among early-career academics by facilitating skill development, research engagement, and scholarly output (Okon et al., 2022). Advantages in funding, networks, and workload allocation can strengthen persistence, whereas early disadvantages may accumulate and limit participation over time (Mudrak et al., 2026). In the Nigerian context, collaborative research has also been identified as an important mechanism for enhancing scholarly productivity and broader knowledge-related outcomes, suggesting that sustained research engagement is often supported by collective rather than purely individual effort (Odigwe & Owan, 2022).

Evidence from Nigerian universities further suggests that institutional characteristics such as leadership, ownership, and location are associated with variations in academics' research productivity and other dimensions of academic performance (Chuktu et al., 2023). This indicates that scholarly persistence is influenced not only by individual effort but also by the institutional environments within which academic work is undertaken. This observation is consistent with evidence from Nigerian universities indicating that institutional climate and culture are important correlates of academic performance, including research productivity (Aduma et al., 2026). This



supports the view that persistence is shaped by career stage and institutional positioning rather than by individual disposition alone. This perspective is reinforced by evidence highlighting the role of collaborative research relationships in supporting academic productivity and value creation within universities (Odigwe & Owan, 2022). While the present discussion adopts a general theoretical perspective, the effects of evaluation pressures are likely to be experienced differently across contexts, particularly in settings characterised by resource constraints, high teaching loads, and limited access to research infrastructure and scholarly networks. This subsection addresses Research Questions 3 and 4 by examining how career stage, resource access, and institutional positioning influence the feasibility and form of publishing persistence.

### **Reframing Persistence within Institutional Logics**

Existing work indicates that persistence in academic publishing is developed at the intersection of institutional logics, academic labour, and evaluative governance. Changes in higher education governance, especially the growth of market-oriented and managerial systems, have altered relationships between productivity, professional autonomy, and accountability, changing the conditions under which academic work takes place (Leišytė, 2019). Within these arrangements, persistence does not arise only from individual commitment but from expectations built into systems that organise and monitor academic labour.

From this perspective, publication persistence involves ongoing negotiation between scholarly goals and institutional demands. Researchers must continually balance disciplinary values and intellectual goals with external pressures from performance-based evaluation systems. Studies indicate that such systems influence everyday publishing practices, including journal choice, timing, and writing routines, as scholars adjust their behaviour to meet assessment criteria (Hammarfelt & de Rijcke, 2015). Persistence, therefore, is developed through repeated adjustments rather than through uninterrupted pursuit of scholarly ideals.

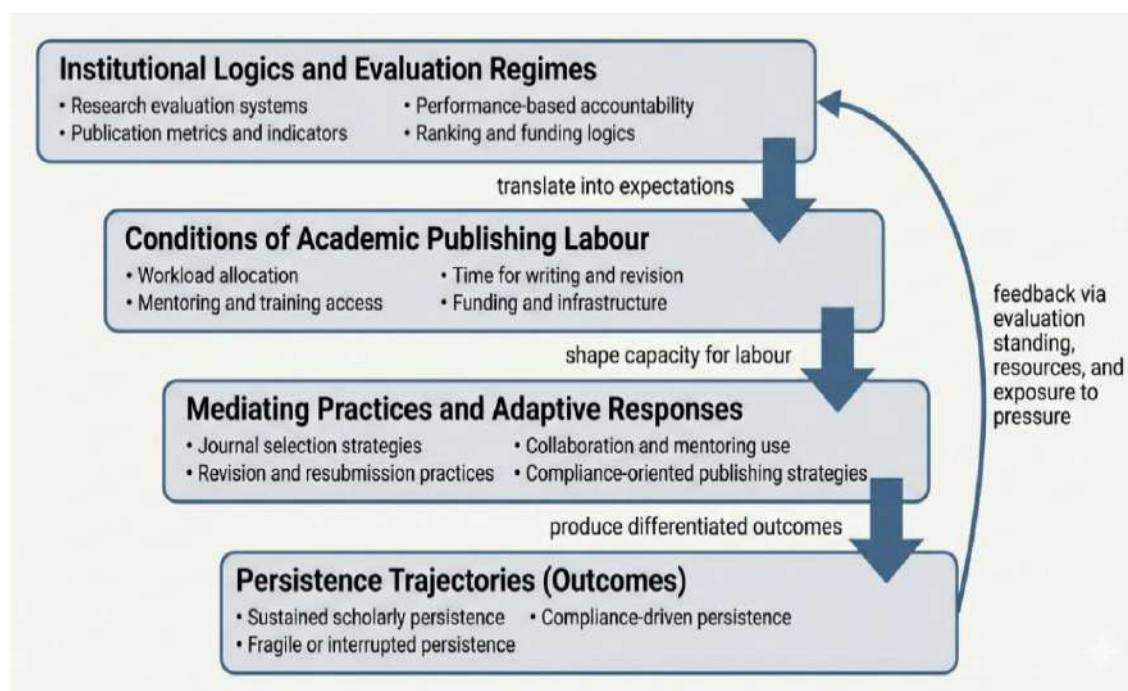
Reframing persistence in this way shifts attention away from individual traits such as motivation or resilience and towards organisational conditions that influence sustained engagement with publishing. Critiques of performance management have identified individualised productivity as a form that reveals how academic work is organised and constrained within institutional systems (Kenny, 2017). Treating persistence as governed academic labour makes visible how evaluation systems influence who can persist, how persistence occurs, and the costs associated with it.

This perspective also connects empirical findings on barriers and strategies with broader debates on research evaluation, academic labour, and institutional accountability. Institutional logics approaches in higher education relate system-level governance with everyday academic practices while keeping a clear focus on how organisational forces influence research practice (Cai & Mountford, 2021). In this way, persistence can be understood as a patterned outcome of institutional organisation rather than as an individual trait. This framing sets the foundation for the model developed in the next section, which maps the relationships between institutional logics, publishing labour, and persistence patterns in contemporary scholarly publishing. This subsection synthesises the preceding discussion and addresses all four research questions by developing a conceptual understanding of persistence as a form of institutionally organised academic labour.

## A Conceptual Model of Publication Persistence

Rationale for a Conceptual Model. The discussion so far makes it clear that persistence in academic publishing cannot be explained by individual motivation or resilience alone. It is developed through the interaction of institutional logics, evaluation systems, and the conditions under which academic labour is carried out, especially in settings influenced by audit and metric cultures that reorganise value, time, and expectations in academic work (Shore & Wright, 2015). To improve conceptual clarity, this section sets out an integrative model that explains how persistence is generated, sustained, weakened, or redirected within contemporary academic publishing systems.

This model addresses a recurring weakness in the literature: empirical studies describe barriers, pressures, and coping strategies in considerable detail but often fail to explain how these elements connect clearly. The model treats persistence as a processual outcome of institutional governance acting on academic labour, bringing research evaluation, higher education, and publishing into a single frame. In this sense, publishing is part of an academic mode of production in which scholarly work is organised, broken into parts, and increasingly aligned with external accountability demands (De Jong McKenzie, 2023). Figure 1 summarises this argument by mapping the relationships among institutional logics, labour conditions, mediating practices, and different persistence trajectories, including the feedback loops through which evaluation outcomes alter future conditions for publishing work. In addition to its analytical value, the model offers a basis for examining how policy and institutional arrangements shape the sustainability and direction of publishing practices across higher education systems.



*Figure 1. Conceptual model of publishing persistence as governed by academic labour.*

## **Core Components of the Model**

The conceptual model consists of four analytically distinct but closely connected components:

- i. Institutional logics and evaluation regimes
- ii. Conditions of academic publishing labour
- iii. Mediating practices and adaptive responses
- iv. Persistence trajectories and outcomes

Each component is discussed below.

### **Institutional Logics and Evaluation Regimes**

At the macro level, persistence is influenced by institutional logics that govern academic value, legitimacy, and reward. These logics are put into practice through research evaluation systems that prioritise publication volume, journal status, citation visibility, and metric-based accountability (Bornmann & Mutz, 2015; Moed, 2017). Within audit cultures, indicators increasingly stand in for substantive judgement, encouraging scholars and institutions to align their behaviour with metric proxies rather than with disciplinary standards of quality (Owan et al., 2024; Wouters, 2020). These regimes define what counts as successful publishing and set time-based expectations for output. Persistence is developed because academic careers are organised around continuous compliance with evaluation cycles rather than occasional scholarly contribution. Even reform-oriented discussions that promote ideas of flourishing still sit within systems that reward measurable output (Yeo et al., 2022). Within this component, persistence is not optional; it is built into the conditions for career survival, progression, and institutional recognition.

### **Conditions of Academic Publishing Labour**

Institutional logics are translated into concrete labour conditions at the meso level of universities and departments. These conditions affect researchers' ability to persist and include workload distribution, access to mentoring and research training, availability of funding and infrastructure, and protected time for writing and revision. Where these conditions do not meet the demands of evaluation, publishing labour becomes more intense, fragmented, or difficult to sustain. Research indicates that overwork and accelerated labour are associated with audit-driven governance, in which expectations for continuous productivity expand without commensurate support (Watermeyer et al., 2024). Early-career academics often face this mismatch most acutely because they deal with these high expectations alongside limited structural support (Aprile et al., 2020). In such situations, persistence depends less on effort alone and more on whether institutional arrangements enable sustained publishing labour.

### **Mediating Practices and Adaptive Responses**

Between institutional pressure and persistence, outcomes are mediated by practices through which researchers respond to publishing demands. These practices act as mechanisms that can stabilise or mar persistence. These include strategic journal selection, revision and resubmission practices, collaboration and mentoring, and compliance-oriented publishing strategies. Studies indicate that researchers under pressure actively adjust their publishing behaviour to meet institutional expectations, sometimes prioritising speed, acceptance, or countability over longer-term scholarly development (Mertkan et al., 2022). Such adaptations

are closely tied to metric-oriented practices, including salami slicing, engagement with questionable journals, and other forms of indicator alignment under performance pressure (Biagioli, 2020). These practices do not mean that persistence is absent; rather, they reveal a form of adaptive persistence produced under institutional constraints.

### **Persistence Trajectories and Outcomes**

At the outcome level, persistence appears in different trajectories rather than along a single linear route. The model identifies three analytically distinct trajectories:

- i. Sustained scholarly persistence: This involves continued engagement with peer review, revision, and reputable publishing over time, usually supported by institutional conditions that are reasonably well aligned (Owan et al., 2023).
- ii. Compliance-driven persistence: This involves continued publishing activity aimed at meeting evaluation thresholds, often through short-term strategies or minimal review standards, and is reinforced by audit-driven emphasis on indicators and rankings (Shore & Wright, 2015; Tella, 2020; Wouters, 2020).
- iii. Fragile or interrupted persistence: This occurs when publishing engagement becomes episodic or declines because of cumulative labour tension, emotional exhaustion, or a mismatch between expectations and resources, including partial withdrawal from metric-centred publishing circuits (Aprile et al., 2020).

These trajectories indicate that persistence is neither automatically positive nor uniformly sustained. Its quality and durability depend on how institutional logics influence labour conditions and on the adaptive responses available to researchers.

### **Integrative Logic and Conceptual Contribution of the Model**

The model advances a directional but non-deterministic account of how persistence in academic publishing is generated through the sequence of institutional logics → labour conditions → mediating practices → persistence trajectories. This sequence identifies the main routes through which evaluative governance organises academic work, while still allowing for contingency, variation, and strategic response. In line with dynamic, feedback-oriented institutional logics frameworks, persistence is treated as an outcome of interacting structures and practices rather than as a linear or inevitable result of personal disposition (Meyer et al., 2026).

The model also includes feedback loops. Persistence outcomes influence later evaluation standing, access to resources, and exposure to institutional pressure. These effects then alter subsequent labour conditions and expectations. Across repeated cycles, such recursive dynamics may harden into self-reinforcing patterns that support continued publishing for some researchers, or into self-undermining patterns that weaken or break engagement for others. This looped arrangement fits accounts of recursive social systems in which repeated evaluative cycles generate path-dependent trajectories rather than neutral repetition (Beer, 2022). It helps explain why persistence often intensifies over time for researchers who accumulate advantage, while weakening for those working under long-term constraint.

The model explains recurring patterns across national systems and career stages without reducing them to motivation or resilience because it treats persistence as an outcome of institutional governance rather than individual disposition. This view aligns with research that sees evaluation systems as constitutive infrastructures that organise timeframes, expectations,



and opportunities, rather than as neutral tools for measuring performance (Andersen, 2020). Persistence is therefore understood as developing through governance arrangements that organise academic careers and publishing trajectories.

The model makes three contributions. First, it clarifies persistence as processual academic labour rather than as output, attitude, individual trait or disposition. Persistence is defined as relentless effort maintained by researchers in ensuring that research work carried out under specific evaluative conditions, unevenly supported and differently rewarded, is successfully published.

Second, it brings together diverse empirical patterns into a coherent explanatory framework by linking institutional logics, labour conditions, adaptive practices, and outcomes through directional and recursive relations.

Third, it establishes a basis for policy-relevant critique of evaluation systems that demand persistence while failing to support the labour that sustains it. In line with critical analyses of performance-based research evaluation and its effects on careers and resource allocation, the model highlights how such systems encourage continuous output while underinvesting in the conditions necessary for sustainable scholarly work (Thomas et al., 2020). These contributions position persistence not as a personal virtue or psychological capacity, but as a patterned outcome of institutional organisation. This framing prepares the ground for the final section of the paper, which discusses the implications of the model for research policy, evaluation reform, and institutional accountability. These contributions also provide a structured basis for evaluating existing research assessment policies and for identifying areas where institutional reform is needed to support sustainable publishing practices.

### **Implications for Higher Education Policy, Research Evaluation, and Institutional Practice**

Reconceptualising persistence as academic labour governed by institutional logics has important implications for research policy, evaluation systems, and institutional practice. Contemporary publishing regimes often assume that persistence will arise naturally from individual motivation and competitive incentives. This assumption fits within wider audit cultures that treat quantification as a neutral route to quality and improvement (Craig et al., 2014; Tourish et al., 2017). The conceptual analysis in this paper challenges that view by arguing that persistence is not an automatic personal response to incentives. However, a condition influenced by how academic labour is organised, evaluated, and supported within institutions. For policymakers, this implies a need to reconsider the continued reliance on narrow output indicators as the primary basis for research evaluation.

### **Rethinking Research Evaluation Metrics**

One major implication concerns the continued reliance on output-based evaluation metrics. Publication counts, journal rankings, and citation indicators remain the primary tools for assessing research performance across many systems (Bornmann & Mutz, 2015; Moed, 2017). Although these measures are administratively convenient, they hide the labourous processes through which publishing takes place. The long work of drafting, revising, resubmitting, and responding to peer-review results becomes invisible within cultures that favour



what can be easily counted, while pushing aside labour that does not translate directly into measurable outputs (Craig et al., 2014; Spence, 2019).

When persistence is treated as output volume, evaluation systems fail to recognise sustained engagement with publishing processes, especially in fields with long review cycles or high rejection rates. This misrecognition creates incentives for compliance-driven persistence, in which researchers prioritise speed, acceptability, and metric alignment over scholarly development and contribution. Under such conditions, publication strategies are guided less by disciplinary judgement than by audit demands, encouraging distorted priorities and ethically fragile practices (Macfarlane, 2017; Mertkan et al., 2022; Tella, 2020). Reform efforts that keep metrics at the centre while only adjusting thresholds or labels risk reproducing these distortions, especially where national indicator templates are absorbed into institutional criteria and individual appraisal systems (Kulczycki et al., 2021; Yeo et al., 2022).

Policy frameworks, therefore, need to move beyond fixed output indicators towards evaluation approaches that recognise the processual nature of publishing labour. Such approaches would take into account time investment, revision cycles, and engagement with rigorous peer review, while restoring a central role for informed academic judgement rather than narrow metric proxies. Without this shift, evaluation systems will continue to reward visible persistence while neglecting the labour conditions needed for sustainable and meaningful scholarly engagement (Spence, 2019).

### **Aligning Institutional Expectations with Labour Conditions**

Institutions play a mediating role between macro-level evaluation regimes and individual publishing behaviour by translating sector-wide performance demands into workload arrangements, performance management systems, and career policies that directly affect academic capacity for research and publishing (Kenny & Fluck, 2022; Siekkinen & Ylijoki, 2022). When promotion criteria, contract renewal expectations, or graduation requirements are intensified without matching investment in research infrastructure, mentoring, or time allocation, publishing persistence becomes increasingly fragile. Evidence suggests that such misalignment not only limits the capacity to meet expectations but also weakens staff wellbeing and sustainable engagement with academic work (Aprile et al., 2020; Franco-Santos et al., 2017).

The conceptual model developed in this paper suggests that sustainable persistence depends on alignment between institutional expectations and labour conditions. Key enabling conditions include protected time for research and writing, access to mentoring and editorial guidance, realistic workload distribution, and clear communication of evaluation criteria. Where workload and performance policies ignore these conditions, they redefine what counts as visible and valuable academic activity while hiding the labour that sustains publishing over time (Kenny & Fluck, 2022; Siekkinen & Ylijoki, 2022).

Without such alignment, institutions effectively shift the costs of persistence onto individual researchers. This burden falls most heavily on early-career academics, those in contingent or casualised roles, and scholars working in resource-constrained environments, groups already facing heightened vulnerability, limited mentoring, and blocked progression (Menard, 2025). Under these conditions, persistence may continue, but often in forms marked by intensified workloads, divided attention, and accommodation to surveillance and precarity. Such have implications for the quality, ethical integrity, and long-term sustainability of scholarly



engagement, as academic labour becomes increasingly compressed and degraded under audit-oriented institutional reforms (Ross & Savage, 2021). This reinforces the argument that persistence cannot be sustained through expectations alone. Without institutional responsibility for aligning evaluation demands with workable labour conditions, persistence risks becoming an extractive requirement rather than a supported form of scholarly work.

### **Addressing Ethical Risk as a Structural Issue**

Ethical concerns in academic publishing are often framed as matters of individual misconduct or weak scholarly values. However, the conceptual model developed here suggests that ethically problematic publishing practices more often arise as adaptive responses to institutional pressure than as deliberate rejections of scholarly norms. Within audit-driven and performative academic environments, researchers are expected to meet rising output demands under conditions that increasingly limit the time, resources, and support available for rigorous publishing work (Pereira, 2016; Mills & Inouye, 2020).

When evaluative timelines are rigid and institutional support is weak, persistence may take forms that satisfy formal requirements while bypassing demanding review processes. Empirical evidence indicates that heightened publication pressure is associated with greater willingness to engage in questionable practices, including submission to journals with weak standards and other marginal strategies that prioritise acceptance over scholarly development (Mertkan et al., 2022; Paruzel-Czachura et al., 2020; Tella, 2020). Such practices should not be read simply as ethical lapses, but as responses influenced by incentive structures that reward speed, visibility, and metric accumulation.

Approaches that focus mainly on sanctions, awareness campaigns, or individual integrity training do not address these structural drivers. Research linking publication pressure to ethical compromise suggests that individualised ethics interventions leave untouched the conditions that generate risk in the first place (Paruzel-Czachura et al., 2020). From this perspective, ethical risk functions less as a marker of individual failure than as a sign of misalignment between evaluative expectations and the labour conditions under which publishing takes place.

Treating ethical risk as a systemic issue shifts responsibility towards institutions and policy frameworks. Studies that reinterpret engagement with so-called predatory or questionable outlets as rational responses to institutional and geopolitical pressures point to the need for governance-level reform rather than moral blame directed at individual scholars (Mills & Inouye, 2020). Strengthening mentoring systems, giving clear guidance on journal selection, and reducing reliance on short-term performance targets and narrow journal metrics are therefore more likely to support ethical persistence than punitive regulation alone, especially for early-career and precariously positioned researchers working under intense evaluative scrutiny.

### **Implications for Career-Stage Equity**

The labour conditions that sustain persistence vary sharply by career stage. Early-career researchers are often subject to the greatest evaluative pressure while having the least control over workload, funding security, contract stability, and access to mentoring (Alderson et al., 2022; Aprile et al., 2020). This combination of high expectation and constrained capacity increases vulnerability at the point of entry into academic careers and narrows the range of workable publishing strategies. Therefore, treating persistence as a universal expectation without



accounting for these differences reinforces inequities within academic systems, as apparently uniform evaluative standards translate into unequal outcomes over time (Huang et al., 2019).

Evaluation policies that assume linear, uninterrupted publishing trajectories exacerbate these inequities. Such assumptions push aside scholars whose publishing engagement is interrupted by structural conditions such as fixed-term contracts, funding gaps, caring responsibilities, or periods of enforced inactivity, rather than by lack of scholarly commitment (Alderson et al., 2022). When persistence is assessed against idealised trajectories, interruptions are interpreted as personal deficiency rather than as predictable effects of institutional and funding arrangements. More differentiated expectations that take account of career stage, disciplinary norms, and institutional circumstances are therefore essential for sustaining scholarly participation across the academic life course.

Reframing persistence as academic labour also shifts responsibility from individuals to institutions. If persistence is required for institutional prestige, rankings, and access to resources, institutions bear responsibility for creating conditions under which such persistence is feasible and ethically sustainable. This responsibility extends beyond rule enforcement to the active organisation of everyday work environments, expectations, and support systems that enable sustained engagement (Briskin & Gunsalus, 2025).

Institutional accountability for persistence, therefore, includes investment in research development, mentoring capacity, workload governance, and transparency in evaluation criteria. These are not peripheral supports but central means through which institutions define, distribute, and regulate performance expectations (Kenny & Fluck, 2022). Shifting the analytical question from why individual researchers fail to persist to whether institutional arrangements make persistence possible, without high personal cost, clarifies how equity in academic careers is produced or undermined through organisational design rather than individual disposition.

### **Closing Integration**

The implications outlined here extend the conceptual model beyond analytical clarification to institutional critique, situating persistence within institutionalised evaluation regimes that produce systemic, rather than incidental, effects on academic work. Persistence in academic publishing is not simply a matter of personal endurance or motivation. It is a form of labour organised through evaluation systems, organisational design, and policy choices that determine which forms of scholarly activity are recognised, rewarded, or made invisible. Viewing persistence in this way has clear consequences for how research performance is assessed, how ethical risk is interpreted, and how academic careers are organised. Assessment systems do not merely record publishing activity; they actively redirect behaviour, priorities, and research agendas by defining what counts as legitimate output and an acceptable pace of production (Hammarfelt & de Rijcke, 2015). Under journal-metrics-based regimes, these definitions can steer publishing towards outlets and practices associated with heightened ethical risk, particularly when compliance with indicators takes precedence over scholarly judgement (Ivanović et al., 2023).

This institutional critique also clarifies why reform efforts that focus on technical adjustments to indicators or calls for individual resilience often fail. Evaluation systems that retain their underlying logic while modifying only surface-level instruments risk reproducing what has been described as a “fatally efficient” machinery, one that rewards visible persistence



while narrowing intellectual horizons and weakening the conditions needed for sustained scholarly labour (Spanò et al., 2024). In such cases, persistence is recognised symbolically but supported unevenly, with cumulative consequences for research quality, integrity, and career sustainability. Reconceptualising persistence as academic labour governed by institutional logics, therefore, shifts attention from how much researchers endure to how institutions decide which forms of persistence are enabled, valued, and ethically possible. This reframing positions persistence not as a personal virtue to be measured, but as an institutional outcome to be examined, opening space for critique of evaluation systems that reward endurance while underinvesting in the labour conditions that make meaningful scholarly engagement possible. This calls for policy approaches that move beyond performance measurement towards the active organisation of conditions that make sustained and meaningful scholarly engagement possible.

## **Conclusion**

A key gap in research on academic publishing, where persistence is often treated as a personal trait or inferred from publication counts, was addressed in this paper. This paper offered a clearer explanation of why sustained engagement with publishing differs across careers, institutions, and national settings. Persistence was redefined as ongoing academic labour governed by institutional logics and evaluation systems.

The conceptual model developed in this paper indicates that persistence is neither always positive nor always sustainable. Instead, it is developed through the interaction of evaluation systems, labour conditions, and adaptive practices, leading to different patterns such as sustained scholarly engagement, compliance-driven publishing, and fragile or interrupted participation. These patterns are not simply personal outcomes but responses to institutional arrangements that define academic value, recognition, and risk. This reframing has important implications for research policy and institutional practice. It shifts attention away from individual resilience towards institutional responsibility for organising evaluation, support, and accountability in ways that make sustained scholarly work possible. It also helps explain why reforms that focus narrowly on metrics, thresholds, or individual behaviour often fail to address disengagement, inequality, and ethical vulnerability in academic publishing.

Viewing persistence as governed academic labour encourages a change in how academic systems are assessed. Instead of asking why individual researchers fail to endure, attention should be turned to how institutions organise conditions that either support or limit meaningful persistence, and for whom. Addressing these issues is essential if academic publishing is to remain ethical, sustainable, and intellectually productive rather than becoming an extractive condition of academic employment. In higher education policy, this means that reform efforts should focus not only on what is measured but also on how evaluation systems structure academic work, distribute opportunities, and shape the conditions under which persistence becomes possible.

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