

RESEARCH EVALUATION AS ACADEMIC FINANCIALIZATION: HOW BANKING LOGICS RESHAPE THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

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Introduction and problem statement

Research evaluation has become one of the most powerful governance mechanisms shaping contemporary academia. Decisions about hiring, promotion, funding, and institutional prestige are increasingly determined through quantitative indicators such as publication counts, citation metrics, and journal-based rankings. These instruments are often presented as neutral tools for assessing quality, yet their widespread use has profoundly altered academic behaviour and knowledge production.

This paper addresses research evaluation as a political-economic regime rather than a technical assessment practice. It argues that current evaluation systems operate according to a logic that closely resembles financialization in capitalist economies. The analysis is grounded in David Harvey's discussion of financialization in *The Limits to Capital* (Harvey, 2006), where value increasingly detaches from material production and is generated through circulation, credit relations, and self-expanding abstractions. Drawing on this framework, the paper conceptualizes contemporary academic publishing and evaluation as a form of academic financialization.

The argument is developed within the context of an ongoing national research project funded by TÜBİTAK under the 1001 program (Project No. 223K471). The project investigates how metric-based evaluation systems, publishing infrastructures, and policy reforms interact to produce questionable publishing practices and structural inequalities in research systems in Türkiye.

Conceptual framework: Financialization and academic publishing

In Harvey's account, financialization describes a systemic transformation in which money becomes capable of generating more money through mechanisms that operate independently of productive activity. Credit, debt, and speculative instruments acquire a central role, producing recurring crises that are not anomalies but structural outcomes of the system itself.

This paper argues that a similar dynamic characterizes contemporary academic publishing and evaluation. Scientific publications increasingly function as units of

circulation rather than as indicators of epistemic contribution. Citations operate under specific conditions as signals that sustain metric accumulation, while evaluation scores reproduce themselves by shaping future opportunities for funding, collaboration, and visibility. Metrics thus become self-referential instruments whose primary function is to generate further metrics.

Within this regime, academic publishing is reorganized around circulation value. Commercial infrastructures mediate the relationship between universities and academic labour, translating scholarly output into standardized and comparable indicators. Evaluation shifts away from expert judgment grounded in disciplinary norms toward a system governed by abstract signals that prioritize volume, speed, and visibility.

Empirical grounding and project contribution

The TUBITAK-funded project provides the empirical foundation for this conceptualization. It combines large-scale quantitative analyses of publication data with qualitative investigations of academic motivations and policy documents. The project has produced a comprehensive dataset mapping more than two thousand journals categorized as questionable, alongside a nationally representative sample of academic profiles in Türkiye. These data reveal that questionable publishing practices are not marginal deviations but structurally linked to evaluation systems that reward output quantity and index-based visibility.

Findings from the project demonstrate that publication behaviour is closely aligned with evaluation thresholds in promotion, incentive, and funding policies. Peaks in output frequently coincide with career-critical moments, such as applications for associate professorship or performance-based incentives. These patterns support the claim that evaluation metrics function as a form of credit system, generating pressure to accumulate measurable outputs regardless of their substantive contribution.

From this perspective, phenomena such as paper mills, low-transparency journals, and rapid-publication outlets should be understood as forms of fictitious academic production. They mirror fictitious capital in financial systems by creating measurable outputs that circulate within evaluation regimes without corresponding epistemic value.

Implications for the social sciences and humanities

The consequences of academic financialization are particularly pronounced in the social sciences and humanities. These fields often produce knowledge whose societal relevance emerges over long periods and through indirect forms of engagement. Metric-driven evaluation regimes, however, privilege short-term circulation and standardized outputs, systematically disadvantaging context-sensitive, theoretical, and critical research.

Within global centre-periphery dynamics, this system reinforces existing inequalities. Researchers working outside dominant academic centres face evaluation standards defined elsewhere, while lacking the institutional power to influence them. This produces a structural form of indebtedness, where scholars must continuously convert their work into recognized metric currencies to remain employable and visible.

Conclusion and significance

This paper contributes to current debates on research assessment by proposing academic financialization as a coherent conceptual framework for understanding the persistence and effects of metric-based evaluation systems. Rather than attributing

questionable publishing practices to individual misconduct, it situates them within the structural logic of contemporary research governance.

By linking political economy theory with empirical evidence from a nationally funded research project, the paper advances a context-sensitive critique of research evaluation that is directly relevant to ongoing reform initiatives. In line with the aims of RESSH 2026, it emphasizes the need to rethink evaluation systems in ways that protect scientific autonomy, epistemic diversity, and the social value of knowledge.

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References

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