Mapping the Current Research Agenda on Scholarly Publishing: Scopus-Indexed Reviews

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Nearly ten years ago, scholarly publishing came to the fore in research on scientific communication spurred by the evolving Open Science system, the reinvention of peer reviews, and new attitudes to scholarly publications in the ranking-based academic environment. Here, the JLE editors revisit the field of scholarly publishing and identify the most popular areas where potential JLE authors might have difficulty. In this editorial, Scopus-indexed reviews are analysed to map the prevailing trends. The editorial review shows that the trends include open access, peer review transparency, the changing role of libraries in scholarly publishing, CrossRef's initiatives, outsourcing and skills lacking in publishing, open-access monographs, and the role of commercial publishers.

Keywords: scholarly publishing, scholarly writing, open science, open access, DOAJ, language choice, peer review, academic journals

Introduction

Scholarly publishing has been researched more intensely over the last ten years as a separate field of study. The reality of "publish or perish" has motivated researchers to seek more publications in high-ranking journals as these activities determine a researcher's status in the quantitative systems of university rankings. Research on scholarly publishing is highly influenced by the emerging field of Open Science and other trends igniting heated debate. In fact, some scholars feel that 'evidence-based rational debate' is often suppressed by misinformed rhetoric (Tennant et al., 2019).

Some of the topics are highly contested. Others are universal and have been in existence for years. The striking feature of the major research themes is brand-new aspects of the old phenomena.

The Open Science movement has been changing the landscape of science at large in both academic and scholarly publishing. Open Science as a new philosophy gravely transforms attitudes and processes, and attaches new understanding to old phenomena. Some heated topics have emerged, with misinformed rhetoric preventing scholarly publishing from fast-track transformations. Whereas open access is the most visible part of Open Science, "efforts have extended to the availability of open data and software" (Wolfram, Wang, Hembree, & Park, 2020, p.1034).

Open-access publishing has become one of the centrepieces in research on scholarly publishing. Open access (OA) dates back the beginning of the 21st century. It came into being as a set of practices and principles of research output distribution in electronic journals that was widely spawned in the early 2000s. With all the colour-naming OA systems in the world, the gist of it is linked to readers' and society's access to science and new knowledge dissemination.

Editorial

Being part and parcel of scholarly publishing, peer review remains one of the delicate and vital spheres of scholarly publishing. Although it has been a professional and social filter and barrier to low-quality research for 300-plus years, peer review occasionally involves human failings and does not always prove the relevance and accuracy of the publication (Tennant et al., 2019). The research community put forward a lot of criticism and drawbacks of the peer review process, including bias, peer review fraud, and unfairness (Wolfram, Wang, Hembree, & Park, 2020); unnecessary delays (Benos et al., 2007); as well as a preponderance of incompetent reviewers, a lack of constructive criticism, and editorial passivity (Sciullo & Duncan, 2019).

Peer review is under scrutiny from all of the parties concerned. New progressive forms are being tested. There are many recommendations on how to improve the process and make peer review more effective and bias-free. It is suggested that reviewers and editors should be properly trained and open review forms be introduced (Sciullo & Duncan, 2019). Payment and praise for reviewers are being discussed by the wider academic community.

Peer review aims to improve research and its reporting quality, reducing "the risk of publishing research that is sloppy, erroneous or, at worst, fabricated" (Wolfram, Wang, Hembree, & Park, 2020, p.1034).

Open Science has led to changes in peer review, offering open peer review where the previously hidden process has become public. Peer reviewers are being held more responsible for their assessment and recommendations, as with this form of peer review their names are known to the public. The traditional blind peer review effect of the "black box", thus, has worn off.

In this short editorial review, we map the most essential trends in research on scholarly communication by answering the following research question: What are the recent trendsetting themes for research on scholarly publishing?

Methodology

Scholarly publishing research is represented in journals ranging by their scope from communication and linguistics to education and medicine. Although there are a few basic problems at their core, various aspects of scholarly publishing occasionally come out linked to a specific field or subject area. As major peer-reviewed journals on scholarly publishing and aligned topics are indexed with Scopus, we decided to rely on the database, studying the research agenda. To be more exact, we would like to illustrate our mapping of the mainstream directions of study by reviews published in Scopus-indexed journals.
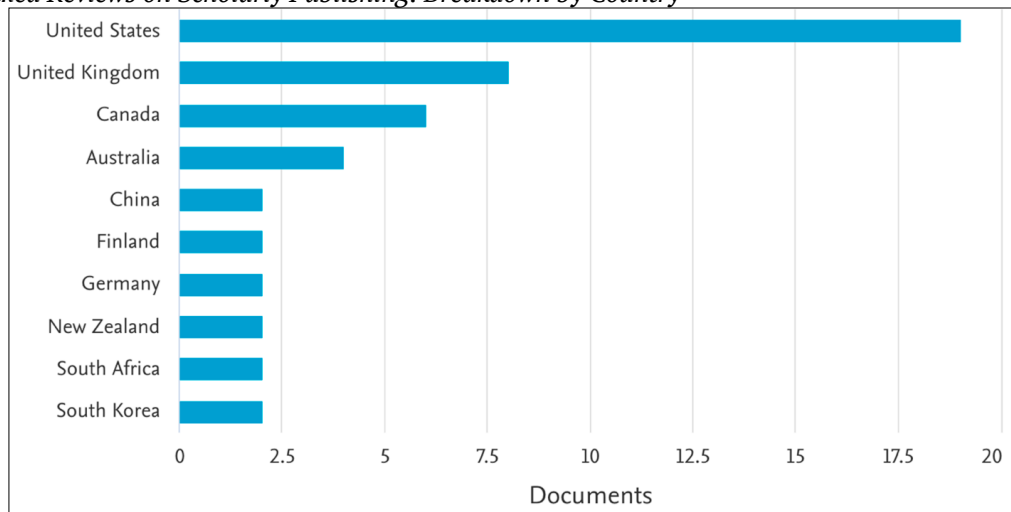
As the recent noticeable upturn in the number of studies related to scholarly publishing started in 2012, we limited ourselves to the period between 2012 and 2020 (although number of papers for 2020 is not complete yet, it covers most of the publications). We started our search for documents (article title, abstracts, and keywords), with "scholarly publishing" as a key term. It brought 1,363 documents spreading between 1934 and 2020. Starting from 2012, more than 50 new publications on scholarly publishing were indexed in Scopus yearly, with a total of 826 documents (2012-2020).

As reviews tend to give a deep analysis of the field, we studied the reviews published in the *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* (Q2, n=21), *Science Editing* (Q2, n=5), *Insights: the UKSG Journal* (Q2, n=4), *Information Services and Use* (Q2, n=3), *Learned Publishing* (Q1, n=2), *Libri* (Q2, n=2), and another 14 journals (n=1).

The affiliations of the reviews are rather numerous, with three of them belonging to Princeton University and the University of Sydney each. Fordham University and University of Technology Sydney had two affiliations each. The other universities (n=80) affiliate one review each.

The reviews were unevenly spread geographically, with 19 reviews coming from the USA, eight from the UK, eight from Canada, and four from Australia. Thus, 37 (72.5 %) out of 47 reviews were Anglophone (See *Figure* 1).
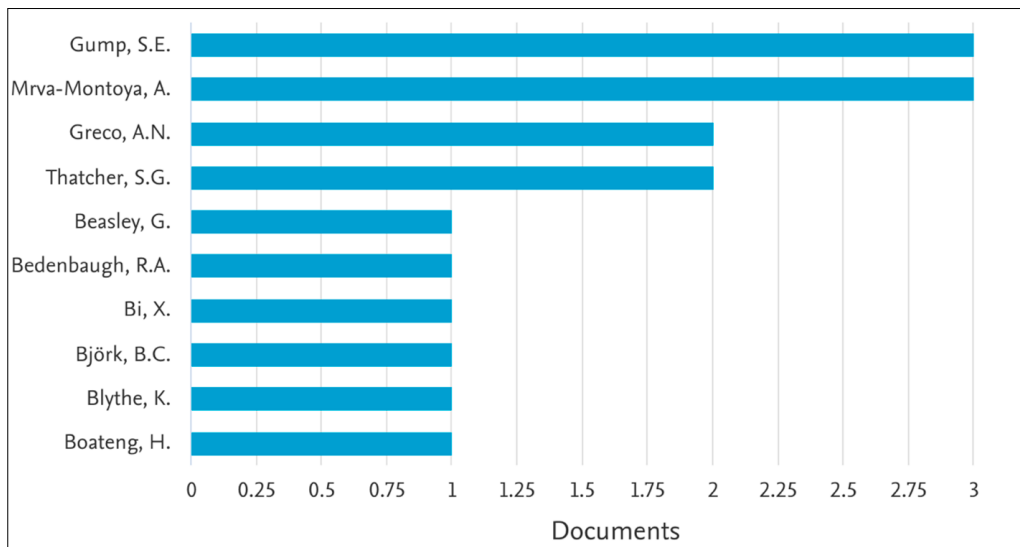
Figure 1
Scopus-Indexed Reviews on Scholarly Publishing: Breakdown by Country

Note. Adapted from Scopus Database, 2020. Copyright 2020 by Scopus.

S.E. Gump and A. Mrva-Montoya authored three of the 51 reviews each, and A.N. Greco and S.G. Thatcher had two publications each (See *Figure 2*). None of the other authors had more than one review each.

Figure 2
Scopus-Indexed Reviews on Scholarly Publishing: Documents Per Author

Note. Adapted from Scopus Database, 2020. Copyright 2020 by Scopus.

While filtering the selected reviews, we found that some of them were rather irrelevant to the field of scholarly publishing. Thus, four publications were omitted from our analysis.

Some publications aim to give an overview of the trends in scholarly publishing or research carried out in one subject area. Tennant et al. (2019) put forward ten hot topics around scholarly publishing in an attempt to sum up the most sensitive issues. Another review focused on updating journal editors on publishing trends and providing readers with the latest research (Smart, 2014).

Results

Open Science and Open Access in Scholarly Publishing

Fifteen of the 47 reviews directly or partially focused on open access publishing and Open Science challenges for scholarly publishing. The OA reviews ranged from political frameworks for open access publishing in Canada (Papillon et al., 2019; Price & Puddephatt, 2017) to open access and publishing research funding in Germany (Mayer, 2013), OA monograph publishing (Thatcher, 2015), mega-journals and the open-access business model (Spezi et al., 2017), OA-related hot topics and key trends in scholarly publishing (Smart, 2014; Tennant et al., 2019), subscription-based journals in the OA environment (Laakso, Solomon, & Björk, 2016), predatory publishing and open-access journals (Smith, 2017), the economic perspectives of open access (Frankland & Ray, 2017), OA hybrid model (Mrva-Montoya, 2017), criteria for joining the Directory of Open-Access Journals (Bi, 2017), a national OA journal system in South Korea (Park & Seo, 2016), challenges for the labour in OA publishing (Eve, 2017), article processing charges (Beasley, 2016), etc.

Mega-journals as a new phenomenon in the open-access business model landscape were reviewed using four factors: their scale, disciplinary scope, peer review policy, and economic model (Spezi et al., 2017).

A comprehensive review dealing with hot topics arising from Open Science helps us identify the most heated topics addressed at four levels: policy, science, education, and academic communication. It covers such top priority issues as preprints, copyright transfers, new approaches to peer review, predatory publishing, and the global databases legitimacy (Tennant et al., 2019).

Some of the publications we selected are limited to local or national experiences or environments. They are rather valuable as we learned a lot about evidence in various states and on diverse aspects. A review limited to Spain aimed to consider effective ways for national scholarly sources towards open access, open-peer review, and altmetrics (Segado-Boj, Martin-Quevedo, & Prieto-Gutierrez, 2018). South Korea has a national OA publication platform for distributing research outcomes in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). The system encompassing a model and a platform that increases the open-access awareness of researchers as they witness improved knowledge dissemination (Park & Seo, 2016).

Although open-access scholarly publishing in Canada is a growing trend in scientific communication, subscription-based journals prevail and remain trendsetters in social sciences and humanities. Price and Puddephatt (2017)analysed the competing resistance on the part of OA journals in the new challenge-based setting.

The cost of scholarly content for the underfinanced science and research in Sub-Saharan Africa remains a great obstacle to African scholars' bigger contribution to world science (Malapela, 2017).

Seeking sometimes opposite aims (contributions to science versus profit), open-access journals follow various business models and fall into diverse groups (top-ranking journals, predatory journals, new-born journals, established journals, etc.). As predatory publishing, an enormous scholarly publishing obstacle, is widely associated with open-access journals, a new challenge has emerged; journals seek to be whitelisted be researchers. As Open Science aims to deliver scholarly contributions to the wider global readership, most open-access journals think of high-quality publishing as their top priority. All practices are scrutinized through (non)-predatory criteria. The next review calls our attention to comparing OA business models given their potential for abuse and predatory publishing (Smith, 2017).

The Directory of Open Access Journals serves to support the best practices in open-access publishing, improving its quality via ever-rising criteria (Bi, 2017).

One of the reviews dwells upon the economics of e-journals versus traditional (print) sources, outlining that OA publishing in e-journals brings about added costs and increases the potential of misinformation (Frankland & Ray, 2017).

Mrva-Montoya's (2017) review considers an OA hybrid model for a new university press. It combines diversified funding and sustainability with rigorous peer review, and high-standard editing and publishing.

Libraries: A New Strategy for Survival

A few reviews (n=4) considered cloud computing in academic library practices (Mavodza, 2013), library coalitions (Lippincott, 2016), the impact of the serials crisis on library budget shortfalls (Greco, 2015), and the role of librarians in scholarly publishing reforms (Bedenbaugh, 2014). The review by S.K. Lippincott presented the Library Publishing Coalition (LPC), a professional association. With the purpose of knowledge dissemination, it supports library publishers who strive to fill in the gaps in the scholarly publishing system.

Peer Review: Promoting Transparency and Fairness

With all the criticism about peer review, it is still considered valuable if it is well managed. New forms of peer review are emerging. Open peer review, with the identities of the parties being made public, raises the effectiveness of the reviewing process. It improves the quality of submissions.

Among the selected publications, there were six relating to peer review as an important process within the scholarly publishing domain. One of the reviews (Sciullo & Duncan, 2019) raised ethical issues within the context of professionalizing peer review. Another review offered a model based on a review board for scientific publishing to balance the interests of the stakeholders (Hagen, 2018).

Monographs: New Practices

We came across several reviews summarizing new approaches to publishing and distributing monographs. Academic books are mainly brought out by university presses or by commercial publishers. The reviews analyse monographic purchasing trends in academic libraries (Jones & Courant, 2014), the economic aspect of monographic price setting (Greco & Spendley, 2016), the introduction of online content platforms along with traditional print books that essentially enhances research dissemination and raises feasibility of producing books (Mrva-Montoya, 2015), and moves towards more inclusive practices in the university press community (Coggins, Fosado, Henry, & Manaktala, 2020).

As university presses are going through tough times due to decreasing demand for their print books, they tend to turn to open-access or hybrid strategies, ensuring rigorous peer review, high-quality editing and production, and effective marketing (Mrva-Montoya, 2017). More arguments on the background of the crisis of scholarly monograph publishing explain the failures of some moves and projects before the OA business model was introduced (Thatcher, 2015).

A Mixed Bag of Studies

The area of research on scholarly publishing encompasses other issues.

CrossRef was established in 2000 to provide reference linking services. At present, it actively works out and introduces additional services in scholarly publishing, including Cited-By linking, CrossCheck plagiarism screening, and CrossMark update identification (Lammey, 2014).

Some researchers focused on the linguistic aspects of scholarly publishing. In China, researchers' language choices in humanities and social sciences are shifting to the English language in international journals, although it was shown that researchers still have very limited foreign language aptitude (Zheng, & Gao, 2016). Another review (Uysal, 2014) scrutinized the macro-level state policy in Turkey towards scholarly publishing. It revealed that there is a growing dominance of English in academic and scholarly publishing, with some measures to support the national language in science.

One of the gaps in scholarly publishing is found with regard to skilled professionals. Open access and the growing market for publications demand skilled labour. But the human resources needed to meet the high professional standards are insufficient (Eve, 2017). Outsourcing partly provides for some skills in scholarly

publishing and communication (Matthews, 2017). The editing aspect of scholarly publishing is rarely discussed, but it plays a very special and vital role in producing high-profile journals (Fretz, 2017).

Conclusion

In their analysis, the JLE editors discovered that the most discussed issues in the research domain of scholarly publishing covered open access initiatives and consequences for academic journals, university presses, commercial publishers, and all other stockholders; their attitudes to open access; a new form of improved peer review corresponding to the needs of the scholarly publishing community and Open Science; new practices and services applied by libraries to remain a part of scholarly publishing; predatory publishing in the context of predatory open access; moves by DOAJ and CrossRef to enhance open access; national/local practices in scholarly publishing. JLE expects that some of our potential writers would like to pinpoint their interests and conduct research on some of the hot topics enumerated above.

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