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Open Access: The Whipping Boy for Problems in Scholarly Communication – A Response to the Rebuttals

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Abstract:

In this paper, we respond to five rebuttals to Kingsley and Kennan (2015). Four researchers in the information systems field and a university library director of research infrastructure provided these rebuttals. Almost without exception, the rebuttals from the information systems researchers take an analytical approach to the question of scholarly communication in their field. However, in undertaking their individual analyses of scholarly publishing or communication, they do not directly address the issues raised in our original debate piece. The rebuttal from the university library administrator (Groenewegen, 2015) alone directly addresses the discussion points raised in the original debate. As researchers in the field of scholarly communications, while this was not how we originally envisioned the debate, the rebuttals as a body of work have opened up some interesting themes, which we explore in addition to responding to the individual rebuttals.

Keywords: Scholarly Publishing, Open Access, Predatory Publishing, Institutional Repositories, Article Processing Charges, Subscriptions, Hybrid Publishing, Mega Journals.

Editor's Note: The paper was handled by the Department Editor for Debates.

1 Introduction

We thank the editors of the *Communications of the AIS* for allowing us to be involved in this discussion about open access (OA) and scholarly publishing. It is a topic relevant to all scholarly disciplines, yet much of the discussion on OA has occurred in sociology of science, communications, and the information and library sciences fields, so it is satisfying to see a formal discussion here in information systems (IS). In addition to researchers across all fields, the scholarly publishing and OA debate affects, and is relevant to, librarians, institutional administrators, publishers, and funding bodies who are all engaged in the practice of scholarly publishing and OA in different ways. The rebuttals to this debate piece do not form a representative sample of these latter interest groups—though not for lack of trying (see the special issue's editorial: Kautz, 2015). Several reasons may explain this poor engagement from administrators of the scholarly communication system, not least the challenge of time. It is also possible that the area of scholarly communication is contentious and that many people working in the area are not willing to engage in public debate. Another potential reason could be that publishers and administrative individuals do not typically deeply analyze things. This is not surprising given that often the primary focus may be processes and outcomes rather than critical analysis and understanding, which is more likely to occur in the academic sphere.

Four researchers in the IS field and one university librarian administrator provided rebuttals. Almost without exception, the rebuttals from the IS researchers take an analytical approach to the question of scholarly communication in their field. Many considered what IS can contribute to this discussion, which is appropriate because IS encourage and enable OA in scholarly publishing via technologies such as the Internet, the World Wide Web, their standards and protocols, and search engines (Kennan, 2008). However, in undertaking their individual analyses of scholarly publishing or communication, they do not directly address the issues raised in our original debate piece. The rebuttal from the university library administrator (Groenewegen, 2015) alone directly addresses the discussion points raised in the original debate. While this was not how we originally envisioned the debate, the rebuttals as a body of work have opened up some interesting themes. In this rejoinder, we explore some of these themes.

2 Nomenclature

The study of scholarly communication is itself an academic field of study. Traditionally, discussing and studying scholarly communications and publishing and OA have occurred in parallel in the sociology of science, communication, and librarianship and information sciences disciplines (Crane, 1972; Garvey & Griffith, 1972; Merton, 1973; Garvey, 1979; Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Latour, 1987; Odlyzko, 1996; Odlyzko, 2002; Björk, 2004; Björk & Hedlund, 2004; Björk, 2005; Borgman, 2007; Laakso & Björk, 2012; Suber, 2012). The specific area of OA began with Stevan Harnad's subversive proposal originally circulated in 1991 (Okerson & O'Donnell, 1995) when the Internet's potential became clear. The World Wide Web (WWW) started in 1994, so it is only 20 years old. The OA movement has already marked its first decade since the first formal (Budapest) OA declaration (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002). Scholarly communications and OA have been studied in the disciplinary framework of individual fields. Indeed, as authors, we can note that we have pioneered Australian empirical research in this field—Kingsley from communications and Kennan from information sciences. Researchers in IS have featured in the literature over this period (Kling & Callahan, 2003; Kling, McKim, & Kin, 2003; Kennan & Kautz, 2007; Kennan & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2007; Clarke & Kingsley, 2008; Mann, von Walter, Hess, & Wigand, 2009).

This multidisciplinary research is now crystalizing into a singular field of study where scholars such as Charles Bailey (2010) have brought together the literature on OA from multiple fields. As with any research area, one should clarify the specific meaning of particular words, which is particularly important in field such as OA where interest, research, and writing comes increasingly from multiple fields, each with their own approaches and languages. In addition, investigating is an activity in which researchers and administrators practice, so many terms are used colloquially and often loosely, which is no longer appropriate if discussion is to develop and mature in these groups. In this section, we define some terms in this area.

2.1 Publishing

The dictionary definition of the word “publish” simply means to make work publicly available. In this context, uploading something onto the Web would be considered publishing. From a publisher's

perspective, publishing refers to the “action or business of preparing and issuing books, newspapers, etc., for public sale or distribution” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2014). However, in the fields that research scholarly publishing, publishing refers to a much broader process or system that involves, at minimum, scholarship and writing, certification (most commonly via peer review), registration (commonly formal publishing in a journal or some other version of record), dissemination (awareness, making accessible, distribution), and archiving (Kling et al., 2003; Kennan & Kautz, 2007; Kennan & Cole, 2008; Kingsley, 2008). That is, in the literature, the term publishing refers to the whole process that Crowston (2015) discusses in his rejoinder. The act of making something publicly available is referred to as dissemination.

Using the scholarly definition of publishing, Hess and Hoerndlein (2015) make an apparently minor but serious mistake in asserting that “OA has just created another avenue for publishing one’s research”. While it is true that OA journals are a new publishing option, making a version of published work available in a repository is not a new avenue for publication but a new avenue for dissemination.

At the risk of sounding pedantic, another of Hess’s and Hoerndlein’s (2015) statements: “the rising number of OA journals puts even more pressure on the peer review system” implies that more research is being conducted and published because now there is a new form of publication outlet. No evidence exists that this is the case. More research is being published every year, more a result of the academic requirement to “publish or perish”, a phrase growing in use from 1942 (well before the advent of OA), and from a growing academic population (Wilson, 1942; Molinaro, McLuhan, & Toye, 1987; Steele, Butler, & Kingsley, 2006)

2.2 Green Open Access

As we discuss in our debate paper, self-depositing a version of one’s paper is the “green” road to OA, which is opposed to the “gold” road, which focuses on converting whole journals to OA. The green road operates in the existing journal system. The papers are still reviewed and processed and published in traditional journals, but an author’s version of their paper is also disseminated outside of journals for those without access to personal or institutional subscriptions. In his conclusion, Lindman (2015) suggests authors should “publish their own research in institutional repositories or webpages”, which is not technically green OA unless the work has also been through the scholarly publishing cycle (which includes certification and registration as discussed above).

2.3 Gold Open Access

The term gold OA refers to work that is made OA at the time of publication. The business model behind gold OA journals varies and many OA journals do not charge a paper-processing charge (APC) (Solomon & Björk, 2012). Hess and Hoerndlein (2015) state that “the financing system, the authors themselves, respectively their institutions or funding bodies, now pay to make gold OA research available”, which is a very common misunderstanding (Kingsley, 2013). Many OA IS journals listed in the Index of Information Systems Journals (Lamp, 2004) do not charge a fee, such as the Australasian Journal of Information Systems.

However, hybrid OA always includes a fee, where the author pays to make a specific work available in an otherwise subscription journal. Note that, in scholarly communication discussions, this type of OA has raised serious questions about publishers “double dipping” by charging both subscription fees and article processing charges (APC) (Pinfield, 2013a; Brook, 2014).

2.4 Open Access Movement

Hess and Hoerndlein (2015) state that OA has “failed to effect more fundamental changes to the system of scholarly communication” because it is simply another distribution channel for scientific work, which is true. OA is specifically about creating another freely available distribution channel. Similarly, Groenewegen (2015) attributes goals to the OA movement that do not necessarily exist by stating that “Open access as it currently exists is designed to overcome the power of the brands that journals represent in academia”. OA is not “designed” to do anything other than an attempt to make research freely and publicly available.

The OA movement is multifaceted, evidenced not least by the large number of slightly different definitions of the term (Suber, 2012). While some discussions do branch into the broader disruption of scholarly

publishing generally, OA advocates generally do not claim to be trying to fundamentally change scholarly communication.

2.5 Employers or academic Reward System more Broadly?

Crowston (2015) uses the term “employer” to refer to those who have control over researchers and how they publish their research outputs. We prefer to use a different term because the term employer means specifically the person paying the salary, but academics are also beholden to the policies of funding bodies and other quality assessment processes beyond those of their employer. We prefer the term “academic reward system”, which includes promotion, prestige, research funding, and obviously payment for employment.

2.6 Scientific Writer

As an aside, as someone who worked as a science communicator for a decade before returning to academia and completing a PhD in science communication, I (first author) found amusement in Lamp’s suggestion that the “new” occupation of “science writer” might emerge.

3 Analysis of Rebuttals

3.1 Juho Lindman (2015)

In his rebuttal, Juho Lindman (2015) asks whether IS researchers are using OA publishing options. Lindman argues that scholars in IS consider themselves “open to new technologies” and then poses the question whether this is in fact born by the uptake of OA in IS scholars. He then goes on to define different terminology used to describe different types of OA before describing the terms used for stages of a paper throughout the publication process. Lindman then presents the findings of a small empirical study to examine the uptake of open access among the top eight IS journals.

Lindman (2015) concludes the IS journals “are actually quite up to date on golden OA publishing” because many of the journals offer a hybrid OA option. In our opinion, this simply means that publishers have discovered a new source of revenue: it does not illustrate a deep understanding of issues relating to OA. Not one of the journals analyzed was a fully OA journal. Lindman also concludes that the large number of people who have not chosen to pay for OA through a paper processing charge to make their work open in an otherwise subscription journal indicates a need for providing more funds for institutions and authors. We disagree. The low number Lindman found reflects the generally low uptake of hybrid options in journals, with approximately 1 percent of published papers indexed by Scopus (Björk & Solomon, 2014). Note that this information is difficult to establish because publishers do not always identify their hybrid papers as OA (Carpenter, 2012; Gerritsma, 2014). Lindman is correct in that providing funds will increase the uptake of this type of OA, which the funding to support the RCUK policy in the UK evidences (Brook, 2014), but this in itself is subject to considerable debate because some have argued that this policy is simply transferring the revenue source from one “bucket” to another without addressing the fundamental issues underlying the financial structure of the scholarly publishing system as it stands (Pinfield, 2013).

It is encouraging to see someone take an interest in analyzing a specific field by a researcher in the field; indeed, this is necessary to gain a true insight into one’s own (and one’s own field’s) behaviors. Many scholars have analyzed various fields’ OA uptake (Hajjem, Harnard, & Gingras, 2005; McMaster & Wastell, 2005; Björk et al., 2010; Darley, Reynolds, & Wickham, 2014), but, as valuable as these are, those who belong to a field will have a better understanding of that field’s relevant journals and communication norms and are able to analyze with these nuances in mind (Becher, 1994).

3.2 John Lamp (2015)

In the introduction to his rebuttal, John Lamp (2015) succinctly and accurately summarizes the various factors affecting the changes in scholarly communication, which includes some of the reasons for scholars’ low engagement with OA. He then explores motivations for scholarly publication and quotes Mann, Weinkauff, Tsang, and Sin (2004), who themselves quote research dating back to 1997 and 1998. However, this work draws on the influential 1979 work “Laboratory life” by Latour & Woolgar, now in its 10th edition (Latour & Woolgar, 2013) and is also influenced by the 1943 work “The normative structure of science” by Robert Merton (1973), who is credited with creating the sociology of science field.

Lamp then summarizes the key functions of scholarly publications and quotes Cullen and Chawner's (2011). He notes that the concept of key functions of scholarly publications were articulated earlier in 2003, which predates Web 2.0 technology's adoption. Crowston also defines the functions of scholarly journals according to Rowland's (2002) work. However, this taxonomy of scholarly publications' function has been the subject of considerable analysis including the work by Van de Sompel, Payette, Erikson, Lagoze, Warner (2004), and Ware (2006). Indeed, in some cases, this work dates back even further and predates the Internet (Garvey & Griffith, 1972; Garvey, 1979; Roosendaal & Geurts, 1997). The function of the scholarly publication was part of influential work done in the sociology of science in the 1970s by Derek De Solla Price (1970) and Diana Crane (1972).

Lamp then investigates how these functions may be altered or addressed in the context of electronic publishing and includes some of the debate that has arisen around new models of peer review, which he does partly to discuss some of the advances and added benefits that electronic publishing has compared to the limitations of paper publication. He describes the innovations implemented by the Journal of Humanitarian Engineering before introducing the issue of impact beyond impact factors—an aspect of publishing that is increasingly required in funding policies, partially due to issues with the journal impact factor (Clarke & Kingsley, 2008; PLoS Medicine Editors, 2006; Vanclay, 2012). Australia is not alone in that funders have what Lamp describes as a “prescriptive attitude” to the treatment of scholarly outputs; indeed, increasingly around the world funders are requiring OA as a provision of their funding (Australian Open Access Support Group, 2013).

3.3 Kevin Crowston (2015)

Kevin Crowston (2015) begins by saying he generally agrees with the arguments in our original paper but adds that he thinks (p. 358) the analysis of the current system of scholarly publishing “would benefit from being done more systematically”.

Crowston then draws on Kling et al.'s (2003) framing of the scholarly communication system. Note that Kling et al.'s (2015) framework is one of many frameworks of the scholarly communication system originating from different fields (see the section above on Lamp's rejoinder for references to some of the influential work in this field). While these analyses of the scholarly communication system have many aspects in common, they differ on disciplinary lines, which is in itself a good example of the issue of competing disciplinary perspectives, a constant challenge for those working across disciplinary lines as people working in the field of scholarly communication are required to do. The study of disciplinary differences primarily originates from Becher and Trowler's (2001) classic book “Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual Enquiry and the Culture of Disciplines”. While Becher has lamented how poorly scholars recognize these differences (Becher, 1994), disciplinary differences increasingly are being identified as an important issue in scholarly communication research (Fry, 2006; Kingsley, 2008).

Becher and Trowler (2001) note that “The tribes of academe one might argue, define their own identities and defend their own patches of intellectual ground by employing a variety of devices geared to the exclusion of illegal immigrants” (p. 47), and, generally, scholars have little understanding of fields other than their own. Crowston gives a clear example of this issue later in his paper when he states “many employers give more weight to in evaluations to journal publications and little or none to conference papers”. This may be the case in information systems, but is certainly not in the areas of computer science, engineering, and other related fields where conference papers are the primary and most prestigious publication outlet. By noting this, we are not in any way criticizing Crowston: we simply demonstrate that even experienced and thoughtful researchers in one field are not abreast of the variations across the disciplinary spectrum.

That aside, Kling et al.'s (2003) framework is a good structure for the type of analysis that Crowston (2015) has achieved in his response. To analyze the scholarly communication system, he identifies six sets of actors involved in scholarly communication around information systems. He then maps the flows of interaction between these actors into a network of scholarly communications and addresses the functions of scholarly communications. Crowston uses Hackman's (1987) model. As we mention above, this model has origins in several fields over many decades. Similar to Lamp, Crowston then analyzes how the Internet supports or disrupts the functions of scholarly journals. The paper concludes by discussing how authors, readers, and employers might resist OA.

We find it interesting that Crowston (2015), while identifying publishers as one of the six sets of actors involved in scholarly communications, does not address the hardly inconsiderable perspective of the

publisher when discussing resistance to OA. There is clearly a profit imperative on behalf of traditional commercial publishers that is driving resistance to change—at least until revenue streams can be redirected. The interplay between this powerful group and the reward system, supported by funding bodies, governments, and employing institutions (briefly referred to in Crowston's analysis as "employers"), is crucial to OA's acceptance in scholarly communication.

That said, Crowston (2015) makes some recommendations such as encouraging researchers to consider OA journals and providing a list of reputable OA journals to guide authors plus encouraging publishers to convert their journals to OA. Crowston also notes that research evaluators need to consider research more broadly. We accept these recommendations as sound and note they are generally being addressed by researchers and practitioners in the field of scholarly communications.

3.4 Thomas Hess and Christian Hoerndlein (2015)

Hess and Hoerndlein (2015) suggest a point that is missing in the general discussion about OA and attempt to move the discussion forward by suggesting four points that "every innovation in the system of scholarly communication needs to take into consideration". They then address the issue in the framework of three interoperating subsystems: the production system, the distribution system, and the financing system.

We agree wholeheartedly with Hess and Hoerndlein's (2015) suggestion that there is the potential for automated improvements to the peer review system, and this would appear to be an excellent potential contribution to OA from our information systems colleagues. They also suggest that paper-level metrics could be used to help with the recognized problem of sifting through this increased information deluge to find relevant and quality work. This is indeed the argument of the altmetrics manifesto (Priem, Taraborelli, Groth, & Neylon, 2010) developed by a group of researchers in the fields of science and technology, social computing, computer and information science, and biophysics. IS researchers' contribution to promoting and further developing such systems again would be welcomed.

Hess and Hoerndlein (2015) stand alone among the rebuttals in noting the very serious impediment the current reward system is to any large-scale change. They make several sensible suggestions about making "openness" itself a criteria for reward, which aligns with a suggestion the Australian Open Access Support Group made in response to the July 2013 Australian Government Discussion paper "assessing the wider benefits arising from university-based research" (Australian Open Access Support Group, 2013).

Hess and Hoerndlein (2015) also suggest that "libraries should make data on their expenses for scholarly journals available to their institutions' scientists", which is an excellent suggestion and, indeed, some good examples exist (Pinfield, 2013). In Australia, overall subscription figures are released annually by the Council for Australian University Libraries (CAUL)—albeit in a user-unfriendly format (Council of Australian University Librarians, 2013). However, publishers, particularly Elsevier, insist on confidentiality clauses in their contracts, which makes the publisher-level detail difficult to extract. Hess and Hoerndlein channel the zeitgeist with their suggestion because, currently, a series of freedom of information claims by a U.K. mathematician are underway to try and make these sometimes staggering figures more publicly available (Gowers, 2014). In the US, a group of economists who study the prices of academic journals have developed a webpage that lists the subscriptions for journals, and they have been subjected to court cases in an attempt to keep the Elsevier subscription information redacted (Bergstrom, Courant, & McAfee, 2014).

3.5 David Groenewegen (2015)

David Groenewegen (2015) stands alone from the other papers' authors in that he is outside the IS field as a senior administrator and director of research infrastructure in a library. His contribution is valuable because any changes in scholarly communication are underpinned by administrative systems built and managed by institutional administrators. In his rebuttal, Groenewegen addresses some of the weaknesses (as he sees them) in our argument and then discusses the weaknesses he sees with OA.

Groenewegen (2015) notes that the "Bohannon sting" demonstrates that some journals are predatory. We do not deny the existence of predatory journals. The point we were making was that does not mean that all OA journals are predatory nor that all subscription journals are above scrutiny. Indeed, there have been recent revelations of subscription-based and peer-reviewed journals accepting gibberish works (Van Noorden, 2014). A blog started in 2010 regularly publishes information about papers that have been retracted due to poor or non-existent peer review (Oransky & Marcus, 2010). Note the very journal in

which the “Bohannon sting” was published, Science, has itself published incorrect work due to poor peer review (Sanders, 2012).

Groenewegen (2015) concludes from the “Bohannon sting” that, in his experience, researchers have expressed an unwillingness to pay for publication because it is vanity publishing. Indeed, many researchers hold this perception, and there is no doubt the “Bohannon sting” was damaging to the OA movement simply because there is so little understanding of scholarly publishing generally in the academic community as Lamp (2015), when quoting Reinsfelder’s (2012) work, has noted. There is often even less understanding of OA options among the academic community, which we discuss in more detail below.

We contend that Groenewegen’s (2015) argument—that it is difficult to cancel specific journals because of the “big deal” packages that libraries are forced to sign—are not an argument against change but indeed an argument for change. His comment that the reason that the physics, mathematics, computer science, quantitative biology, quantitative finance, and statistics journals in Elsevier’s ScienceDirect “Freedom Package” have not been individually cancelled due to the cost appears to indicate an unawareness of the SCOAP3 project where key journals (<http://scoap3.org/scoap3journals>) in the field of high-energy physics have been converted to OA at no cost for authors through a membership consortium at CERN that pays the paper publishing charges on behalf of authors. Note that Australia has not signed up to contribute to this project to date (SCOAP3, 2014).

Again, like Hess and Hoerndlein (2015), Groenewegen (2015) notes the importance of addressing the reward system. He is entirely correct that, until this is addressed, “open access can only ever be in the thrall of the publisher’s whims”. Groenewegen notes that “Arguing around the edges of this is not helping. Research needs something better”. We agree (Kennan, 2008; Kingsley, 2008), and we welcome any constructive contribution to a solution for a better scholarly publishing system for the future.

4 Emerging Themes

The Study of Scholarly Communication is a Field of Research in its Own Right

All our original arguments and those the rejoinders make respond to perceptions about OA and its impacts on the current scholarly publishing model. Researchers and OA activists alike are dragging the yoke of the old ways instead of looking at a whole-scale change to the scholarly publishing system. As a participant in Kennan’s (2008, p. 193) dissertation research said:

So we now have technological opportunities. If we invented academic publishing today it would look completely different from this vast numbers of specialized journals ...

Evidently, many of the respondents to this debate piece were unaware that research on scholarly communication exists as a field of research in its own right. For example, Crowston (2015) bases his entire rebuttal on the assumption that little work has been done in the area of scholarly publishing and OA. There are no arguments from us that a “systematic” analysis of the current system of scholarly publishing strongly contributes to this debate. However, it is hardly an area that has been bereft of any work (which we discuss throughout this paper). Moreover, despite the inherent jibe contained in Crowston’s (2015) statement, our original paper did not set out to be a literature review of the scholarly communication discipline. Instead, it was to discuss how OA had become a whipping boy for problems experienced more widely in scholarly publishing.

Similarly, Lindman (2015, p. 356) maintains there is a “clear call for more research on the good and bad sides of OA” that demonstrates a lack of awareness of approaching three decades of substantial literature and research. This supports our contention that many academics not immersed in OA research lack a deep understanding in this area. We agree wholeheartedly with Lamp’s assertion that researchers generally have low awareness of publishing and OA opportunities (Reinsfelder, 2012).

Lindman (2015) indicates that IS researchers can bring valuable insights to discussions about OA in relation to advances in other sciences. This would be valuable and would continue on the long tradition in the scholarly communications area of being informed by perspectives from multiple fields to come to well-rounded and rigorous conclusions.

Lamp (2015) also notes that IS researchers have a role to play in the future of scholarly publishing by stating: “the transformation of scholarly publishing is being enabled by the new possibilities that are being delivered out of the information systems innovations that many of us have had a direct role in researching

and developing”. Indeed, the one of the earliest declarations on OA specifically references how technology has enabled OA (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002), and we believe that better scholarly information systems could improve OA and scholarly publishing more broadly.

4.1 Scholarly Communication Knowledge is a Professional Development Issue

The *practice* of scholarly communication (as distinct from the *study* of it) is shared among all academic fields, librarians, publishers, and administrators. Each of these bring their own levels of understanding, perspectives, and involvement in the scholarly communication system. Regardless of where individuals sit, however, in all instances. There needs to be a base level of competence. The methods by which different fields and administrative areas reach this competence varies.

Our solution for widespread change in the scholarly communication field has always been that the academic community themselves need to take the lead, which is challenging because researchers primarily research—they are not interested in the publication process. So it is heartening that these responses indicate a willingness to engage seriously with these issues. However, the responses to this debate indicate that the task ahead to engage researchers will be really challenging. If change will only occur once academics have a deep personal understanding of the field, then the process will take a long time indeed.

It is quite possible that people think they are highly competent in this area when they are in fact not. As Lamp (2015) notes, researchers have demonstrated this problem, but is also evident in both the library and administrative communities. Traditionally, academia has held the concept of the master/apprentice with the supervisor’s role being to instruct the student in these broader issues of the scholarly system in addition to those of the scientific field. Such instruction is not always achieved, not least because it is challenging enough to stay on top of issues in this area when it is one’s primary focus of research let alone as a conjunction to a quite different primary research area. In research administration, professional development tends to be through training and attending industry conferences.

Professionals dedicated to this field need to work on professional development. Libraries have traditionally tried to address this issue, but, increasingly, a new skill set is required (Kingsley, 2014). There is an emerging trend of libraries or institutions establishing offices of scholarly communications, which is occurring primarily in U.S. libraries, although Cambridge University has recently introduced this position to assist the development of the practice of scholarly communication.

5 Conclusions

Our original paper opening this debate arose from a query from some information systems researchers to one of the authors about an online discussion among scholarly communications researchers discussing the methods and findings of the Bohannon (2013) “sting” paper, which had the unfortunate result of reinforcing the, in our opinions unfair, labelling of OA journals as “predatory”. As we argue in our original paper, some journals are predatory and some of these predatory journals are OA (but not all). Furthermore, OA is not all about gold OA journals—there are other paths to OA such as green, and there are other problems in scholarly communication which cannot be laid at the feet of OA or OA advocates. In our original paper, we then discuss some issues we felt more important to discuss in scholarly communications. Four of the rebuttals, rather than addressing the main issue we raised (i.e., that open access is the whipping boy for more systemic problems in scholarly communication), instead took an analytical approach to the question of scholarly communication in IS and considered what IS researchers can contribute to this discussion. This discussion is interesting and we hope will continue in the field. The other rebuttal (Groenewegen, 2015) more directly critiques our argument. Groenewegen’s perspective is informative but, as we argue above, is not one we agree with, though we do have concerns in common, such as the need to research and address issues in scholarly communication more systematically and the need to develop more common understandings of the issues across the different scholarly professions and fields. The debate process has been serendipitous in revealing things that were not the original intention of the debate but have been useful and informative in furthering the discussion on the future of OA and scholarly communication.

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