

iConference 2018

Workshop Proposal

Title:

Open-access mega-journals and the future of scholarly communication: Business models, peer review, and disciplinary communities

Organizers:

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Abstract:

Open-access mega-journals (OAMJs) represent an increasingly important part of the scholarly communication landscape. OAMJs, such as *PLOS ONE* and Nature's *Scientific Reports*, are large scale, broad-scope journals that operate an open-access business model, and which employ a novel form of peer review, focusing on scientific 'soundness' only and not judgments of novelty or importance. This workshop will facilitate discussion of the future of scholarly communication using OAMJs as a starting point, examining key issues including business models, peer review, and disciplinary community (and other stakeholder) responses to key developments in the field. The workshop will bring to bear the findings of a major two-year mixed-methods research project on mega-journals carried out by the organizers. It will use some of the empirical evidence, theoretical models and practitioner responses generated by the project as the basis for discussion. The contribution of OAMJs to the wider Open Science agenda will also be considered.

Description:

Purpose and Intended Audience:

This workshop is aimed at researchers interested in scholarly communication, Open Science, and bibliometrics. In addition, practitioners attending the conference (including librarians, publishers, research managers) will be particularly interested in this topic. Finally, those who are journal editors, editorial board members, or who just have an interest in journal publishing and open access (OA)/Open Science will be interested in this workshop. All of these groups will be able to make a contribution to the session and it is hoped to attract a variety of them to attend in order to reflect a range of perspectives in the discussion. The workshop will combine the findings of a recent large-scale research project on open-access mega-journals (OAMJs) with the contributions of participants to identify key trends which may inform future research agendas and practice-based activity.

The empirical and theoretical work on which the workshop will draw arises from a two-year mixed-methods research project (<http://oamj.org/>) carried out by the organizers from the universities of Sheffield and Loughborough in the UK. This work has helped to define four main characteristics of OAMJs: (1) large scale, (2) wide disciplinary scope, (3) a peer review policy focusing on 'technical soundness' only (and therefore not taking into account judgements of the novelty, significance or interest of a paper), and (4) an OA business model. Journals of this sort have been controversial, but a

number, such as *PLOS ONE*, *Scientific Reports* and *BMJ Open*, have been very successful and now publish large numbers of articles per year. This workshop will present work carried to explain the OAMJ phenomenon in the wider context of scholarly communication. It will examine the position of different actors in relation to OAMJs, especially publishers and researchers from different disciplinary communities. It will also discuss the extent to which OAMJs in themselves represent potentially disruptive innovation or the extent to which they may give rise to further innovation.

Some of the findings from the project have already published in a number of major information science and other journals (see below), but the organizers will also share so far unpublished results as part of the workshop. Grounding the workshop in empirical results will ensure that the discussion of these often controversial issues takes as its starting point a strong evidence base.

Key publications:

Spezi, V., et al. (2017). Open-access mega-journals: The future of scholarly communication or academic dumping ground? A review. *Journal of Documentation*, 73(2), 263–283. <http://doi.org/10.1108/JD-06-2016-0082>

Spezi, V., et al. (2018). “Let the community decide”?: The vision and reality of soundness-only peer review in open-access mega-journals. *Journal of Documentation* (In press).

Wakeling, S., et al. (2016). Open-access mega-journals: A bibliometric profile. *PLOS ONE*, 11(11), e0165359. <http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0165359>

Proposed Format:

The workshop will take the form of a set of facilitated discussions on major themes each introduced by a short presentation by the workshop organizers. For each of the major themes, the initial presentation will be followed by a very short response from a discussant identified in advance, and not from the session organizing team, who will set discussion going. Discussion will be guided with the help of a briefing document distributed to participants in advance (which include references to key works on the topic including those produced by the organizers) allowing those involved to prepare. Discussion is expected to be a combination of small group and whole group interaction, but this will, of course, depend on numbers of attendees.

Outline structure:

	Theme	Leader	Timing	Indicative times
1.	Situating mega-journals: Context and characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the OAMJ project • Defining the OAMJ concept • The development of OAMJ publishing within the market • Bibliometric analysis 	SP & SW	20 min intro + 20 min discussion	1.30m-2.10pm

2.	Publisher strategies: Vision and implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivations for setting up OAMJs – findings of interviews of senior publishers and academic editors • Implementing OAMJ models – publisher comments on the challenges and compromising of realising the vision 	SW & JF	20 min intro + 15 min discussion	2.10pm-2.45pm
3.	Peer Review: Rhetoric and reality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soundness-only peer review – modelling the peer review process and how OAMJs operate within it • Peer review futures – future possibilities for peer review and quality assurance in scholarly communication 	SP & VS	20 min intro + 25 min discussion	2.45pm-3.30pm
	Coffee break			3.30pm-4.00pm
4.	Researcher responses: Individuals and communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author behaviours – results of the international survey • Disciplinary communities and publishing – findings of focus groups 	JF & SW	25 min intro + 25 min discussion	4.00pm-4.50pm
5.	The future: Continuity and disruption <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OAMJs and open access and open science • OAMJs as a ‘stepping stone’ 	SP	5 min intro + 20 min discussion	4.50pm-5.15pm

Goals or Outcomes:

It is envisaged the workshop will identify and clarify key current issues in this area of scholarly communication and as such highlight areas for future research. We hope that it will attract people who might take part in future research collaborations, which may or may not involve the session organizers. The session will also help to inform any practitioners who attend of relevant actions in the area of policy, product and service development. The outcomes of the workshop will be disseminated on the oamj.org website. In addition, this session will help shape the approach taken to structuring a special issue of an information science journal which the organizers have been asked to edit, in indicating where interest in the various topics covered particularly lies.

Relevance to the iConference:

The workshop, focusing as it does on innovation and transformation in the scholarly communication domain, fits well with the 2018 iConference theme of “Transforming Digital Worlds”. One of the major questions underpinning discussion will be the extent to which mega-journals represent continuity or disruption within academic publishing and the ways in they may be a stepping stone for further change. OAMJs will be considered in the wider context of innovation in scholarly communication, giving rise as they do to a whole range of questions around openness, publication business models, quality control, and disciplinary and professional cultures.

Duration:

The workshop is intended to be a half-day event.

Attendance:

The workshop is expected to be attended by 30-40 participants, although larger numbers can be accommodated.

Special Requirements:

There are no special requirements.