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# Debate Section Editorial

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# Debate Section Editorial

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**Abstract:**

This is the debate section of CAIS; the section editor takes the initiative to bring about debates, but we are dependent upon suggestions and material provided by the community. We are also open to receive material in various formats, so please take contact and send your proposals and manuscripts through either the CAIS editorial team or directly to the section editor.

# 1 Introduction

The inaugural debate section of CAIS discussed the value of IS research, among others, the value of our documented and published research. Publishing research in general and IS research in particular is currently the topic of a wider debate. On AISWorld in April 2015, a debate was revived about IS journal review cycle times and the review processes including suggestions to improve both cycle times and the processes. This might be a topic for a future debate section in CAIS.

This second debate section fosters another discussion about the place of open access in academic publishing. Academic publishing provides evidence about the outcomes of our research and, as such, is a natural and necessary part of scholarly work. However, academic publishing has also commercial aspects because most well established journals are produced and disseminated by profit-making publishing companies based on an excellent business model: universities pay their academic employees with public or private money to teach , research, and perform governance and service tasks with their organizations and their scientific communities and publishers recruit these academics to run journals, to submit scholarly work, to review peer academics' work, all without paying them for that work. Moreover, some journals charge individuals for submitting or making available their work and/or charging those to read their papers.

This economically very successful business model for publishers has been challenged during the last two decades by the open access movement (among others). Open access itself, however, has also been challenged recently. Open access itself however has also been challenge recently. To kick off the debate included here Danny A. Kingsley, a Visiting Fellow of the Australian National Centre for the Public Awareness of Science at the Australian National University,  and Mary Anne Kennan, a Senior Lecturer at the School of Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, Australia and a Visiting Fellow, at the School of Information Systems, Technology and Management, Australian School of Business, University of New South Wales, Australia  provide some background to the development  and current state of open access and examine some of the accusations make a gainst open access: that open access publishers are predatory, that open access is too expensive, and that open access papers deposited in repositories will bring about the end of scholarly publishing. By analyzing these charges, they argue that these problems are not problems only about access, open or otherwise, but problems associated with the scholarly publishing system more broadly. As such, they argue that scholarly publishing should take advantage of social and technological innovations.

As the debate section editor, I tried to find a varied set of debaters: publishers, librarians, research administrators, editors, researchers. Not surprisingly, this was a hard task. All the publishers I approached through my network declined—most did not even reply to my request. I wondered if I had stirred the hornet's nest. Many librarians were interested but did not want to make a public statement as professionals or employees of a university library. The same was the case for most research administrators independently of whether they represented universities, research institutions or government agencies with the exception of one administrator and librarian at a university library responsible for research infrastructure. Most editors also politely turned down my request: three, however, were interested in sharing their thoughts. Thus, we now have representatives from a journal run out of Central Europe, one with an Anglo-American background, and one from Australia. Finally, a researcher and open data scholar took up the challenge, and we now have five rebuttals of the original position.

Juho Lindman, an IS open data scholar, tackles the problem by briefly investigating IS researchers' and IS journals' uptake of open access. He ends on a positive note that the IS community has already taken up open access to some extent. John Lamp, the Editor-in-Chief of the *Australasian Journal of Information Systems*, discusses the functions of academic publishing and changes in scholarly communication and provides some reasons for scholars' limited engagement with open access. Kevin Crowston, the Co-Editor of Information Technology & People, bases his analysis of IT and Internet support for scholarly publishing on a definition of the functions of scholarly journals and communication, identifies some reasons for why scholars have resisted open access, and provides some recommendations to improve how scholars engage with open access. Thomas Hess, a Co-editor of the Germany-based *Business & Information Systems Engineering*, and his collaborator Christian Hörndlein, agree that open access cannot be blamed for any of the problems of the existing academic publishing system. Instead, they argue that it cannot affect any substantial changes either. Their suggestions for change beyond automated improvements to the peer review system include alternative metrics to identify quality work, changing academic reward systems, and transparency concerning library expenses. Finally, David Groenewegen, the director of

research infrastructure in the Monash University library in Melbourne, Australia, is doing exactly this and provides some numbers concerning libraries' expenses for journals. Beyond addressing the issue of current university reward systems, he also points to some other institutional circumstances that might prevent researchers and libraries from supporting open access in its present state. In a final rejoinder, Kingsley and Kennan  lament that most of the previous debaters in their individual analyses of scholarly publishing do not directly address the issues raised in their original debate piece but welcome the rebuttals for opening up some interesting themes. As a reaction on the rebuttals, they provide their position on the nomenclature used in the area of open access, argue against the rebuttals, and identify several emerging themes in the context of scholarly communication.

This debate is long from finished and I encourage *CAIS*'s readership to engage with the topic and share their thoughts in form of further position papers or in other venues such as AISWorld.