

Mitigating the Tragedy of the Commons in Scientific Publishing

Creating a Market for Information Systems Articles

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Mitigating the Tragedy of the Commons in Scientific Publishing: Creating a Market for Information Systems Articles

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MITIGATING THE TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS IN SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHING: CREATING A MARKET FOR INFORMATION SYSTEMS ARTICLES

Panel

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Abstract

Academic discourse relies on journal articles as the main vehicle of knowledge exchange and dissemination. Quality control of the articles is managed via a peer review process that is considered essential for the development of a cumulative body of knowledge that is valid and consistent. In recent years, it seems that the review capacity in the IS field has decreased and it gets harder to retain a sufficient number of qualified reviewers who can handle the ever-growing flow of submissions. As stewards of digital technology in business and sociality, we should consider its untapped potential contribution to our publishing practices. In this panel, we will explore and debate the potential institutional, organizational, and technological approaches to mitigating the review process bottleneck and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of publishing in the IS field. In particular, we will revisit a ten years old proposal to adopt a market mechanism as a way to facilitate journal articles selection and appropriation.

Keywords: IS publications, articles market, reviewers market, journal management.

"What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

"No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man." (Heraclitus)

1 Panel Theme and Goals

The academic discourse relies on journal articles as the main vehicle of knowledge exchange and dissemination. Quality control of the articles is managed via a peer review process that is part and parcel of the scientific enterprise. In general, a typical published paper passes at least two rounds of formal review by a team of reviewers and editors. The review process is considered essential for the development of a cumulative body of knowledge that is valid and consistent, although it is demanding and time-consuming. Reviews are conducted voluntarily as a service to the discipline by willing and, hopefully, able members of the discipline's community of scholars. Naturally, the availability of reviewers is limited and should be treated as a scarce resource. Moreover, the review process is sustainable only if the pool of available reviewers can handle the flow of submissions in a timely manner. In recent years, perhaps due to the increased institutional pressures to publish and the increased rejection rates in most IS journals, it seems that the review capacity in the IS field has decreased. Journal editors find that it gets harder to retain a sufficient number of qualified reviewers who can handle the ever-growing flow of submissions. Apparently, as a community, we demonstrate the tragedy of the commons syndrome by displaying a hunger to get published with a modest appetite for providing the necessary support to sustain it.

In this panel, we will explore and debate the potential institutional, organizational, and technological approaches to mitigating the review process bottleneck and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of publishing in the IS field. In particular, we will revisit a ten years old proposal to adopt a market mechanism as a way to facilitate journal articles' selection and appropriation. The proposal to adopt a market mechanism in the IS field was originally suggested at ICIS 2004 by Rick Watson who served at the time as the President of the Association for Information Systems (AIS). The idea was received with mixed feelings and evoked a heated debate that was portrayed subsequently by a panel of editors in chief at ICIS 2005. The underlying proposal at the time called for (1) developing electronic journals, (2) developing a reviewers' certification system, and (3) developing a market in which journal editors would bid for journal articles that have been reviewed and passed muster (Gray et al. 2006).

Subsequently, in the last decade, electronic publishing has become prevalent in the IS field and the entire publishing industry. However, so far, not much has been done to address the chronic inefficient utilization of the scarce reviewing resources and the poor allocation of articles to journals as evident from high article rejection rate and the tedious review process. The common single digit acceptance rates and typical review cycles that are measured in years suggest that something is rotten in the state of Denmark and that we ought to take action. Nowadays, with a backdrop of open innovation, crowdsourcing, multi-sided platforms and the collaborative economy, the ten years old idea to adopt a market mechanism as a way to facilitate journal article selection and appropriation appears as a more viable option. While a full-fledged market of authors and journals selling and buying reviewed articles might not be feasible, surely partial solutions are viable and should be examined¹. As stewards of digital technology in business and sociality, we should walk the talk and consider its untapped potential contribution to our publishing practices.

¹ We note the recent controversy that has surrounded a pilot project at *Nature* to introduce a two-tiered system where authors pay for expedited reviews. URL: <http://www.nature.com/news/concern-raised-over-payment-for-fast-track-peer-review-1.17204> (Accessed 24 April 2015)

2 Panel Format

The panel is intended to generate varied responses to several specific questions. Panelists will be asked to draw on their rich experience in the field and their intimate knowledge of publishing to answer the following initial questions:

- Would you support the idea of article marketplace, as an author and as an editor?
- How can the idea of article marketplace be implemented? What would be the expected benefits? Potential risks?
- What are potential alternative courses of action that are likely to make the publication process more efficient?

After the discussion induced by these framing questions and following the current debate in the discourse about the future of our discipline (e.g., Avital 2014), we take a forward-looking turn and focus on the implications of the publishing process to IS research and to the prospects of our community at large. Questions for this portion of the panel discussion are as follows:

- What should we do next?
- What are particular features of the publishing process that can be incrementally improved to build on the current capabilities of the IS community and the available infrastructure?
- What are particular features of the publishing process that can be radically improved to build on the current capabilities of the IS community and the available infrastructure?

The panel is designed to stimulate an engaging discussion that not only appeals to a broad audience but also provides practical insights and lively debate. The panel comprises a team of six panelists who have significant experience in various aspects of publishing as authors, reviewers, review board members, editors in chief, and the current VP publications of AIS. All panelists will provide illustrations of their respective positions on publishing and draw insights from their own firsthand experience.

The panel will follow a roundtable discussion format. Following an introduction by Michel Avital, the moderator, the panelists will be given about 4 minutes each to address the initial set of questions, for a total of 20 minutes. At this point, the audience will be invited to voice their opinions in response to the panelists' remarks, or question them about the topic. The topic is relevant for everyone regardless of research orientation or seniority and we expect that many in the crowd will have something to contribute to the discussion. About 15 minutes will be allotted for the discussion.

Then, we will move to the forward-looking phase of the discussion. Panelists will be asked to predict the effects of digital technology on publishing in the IS field and scholarship at large. Panelists will be given about 5 minutes each, for a total of 25 minutes. Questions from the audience will again be solicited in the final 15-20 minutes. The moderator will summarize the main points and facilitate audience participation.

In summary, we seek to evoke provocative ideas and generative thinking with regard to the future of publishing in the IS discipline and perhaps also contribute to the general discourse thereof. At minimum, we hope that the panel will stimulate new insights about the modus operandi of publishing and the potential role of information technology in its development.

3 Panelists

Michel Avital is Microsoft Chair and Professor of IT Management in Copenhagen Business School. Digital innovation is the leitmotif of Michel's work that focuses on examining the crossroads of information, technology, and people. Building on positive modalities of inquiry, his research focuses on information and organization with an emphasis on the social aspects of information technologies. He has published over 100 articles on topics such as big data, open data, the sharing economy, open design, generative systems design, creativity, innovation, green IT and sustainable value. He is an

editorial board member of nine leading IS journals. Michel is an advocate of open access and an avid proponent of cross-boundaries exchange and collaboration.

Jan Damsgaard is head of department of IT Management and Professor at Copenhagen Business School. He holds a Ph.D. in Information Systems and a Master's degree in Computer Science and Psychology from Aalborg University, Denmark. His research focuses on the digital transformation of businesses for example by the mobile phone or the Internet. Jan is a senior editor of Information & Organization. He has worked and done research at several institutions in the USA, China, Finland and Australia.

Shirley Gregor is Professor of Information Systems at the Australian National University, Canberra, where she is Director of the National Centre for Information Systems Research and Associate Dean Research in the College of Business and Economics. Her research interests include the innovative use of information technology, knowledge systems and the philosophy of technology. She was Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of the Association for Information Systems 2010-2013. She has an abiding interest in epistemological issues, particularly the development of sound bodies of knowledge and theory in a practical discipline such as information systems.

Dov Te'eni holds the Mexico Chair for Information Systems and directs the Orange Institute for Internet Research at Tel Aviv University. He studies how computers support people deciding, communicating, sharing knowledge and interacting. Amongst others, Dov has co-authored Human-computer interaction for developing effective organizational systems (Wiley), co-edited the Encyclopedia of Knowledge Management and published in several management and HCI journals. He is a Past President of AIS and current Editor of EJIS. He has served as Senior Editor for MIS Quarterly, AIS Transactions of HCI and sat on the boards of JAIS, Information and Organizations, and Internet Research. He co-chaired ICIS2008-Paris and ECIS2014-Tel Aviv, and was awarded AIS Fellowship in 2008.

Virpi Kristiina Tuunainen is professor of IS at the Department of Information and Service Economy of Aalto University School of Business, and director of Aalto University Service Factory. She's the VP of Publications of the AIS and she serves on the editorial board of four IS journals. Her research focuses on ICT enabled or enhanced services, customer and community digital innovation, and creative use of ICT, and her work has been published in leading IS journals and conferences.

Leslie P. Willcocks is Professor in Technology Work and Globalization and Director of the Outsourcing Unit at The London School of Economics and Political Science. He is Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Information Technology. Leslie has a global reputation for his work in outsourcing, global strategy, organizational change and managing digital business. He has researched, educated and advised major corporations and governments globally on these issues for 25 years, and is co-author of 40 books and over 230 refereed journal papers on these subjects.

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