Article sharing on scholarly collaboration networks
BY FRED DYLLA | MARCH 24, 2016

The global community of librarians, researchers, publishers and scholarly collaboration networks (SCNs) needs to work in tandem to improve the article sharing experience. To this end, a working group of the International Association of STM Publishers (stm-assoc.org) has published — with community input — voluntary principles for article sharing on SCNs. As community ownership, endorsement and adoption is key to their success, we are asking for your participation.

The evolution of scholarly sharing
A scholar investing the time and effort to write an article for a scholarly journal has very clear goals in mind. First, the author wants this article to meet the publishing community standards established by the journal’s peer review and editorial guidelines. Once published, the author wants to inform research colleagues of the article’s publication — and have it read widely by providing access or sharing a copy.

The sharing of journal articles is a practice that dates back to when the scholarly journal was first invented 350 years ago, only the ease and methods of sharing have changed. In the print days, authors were often given, or could purchase, extra copies (reprints) of their articles for distribution. Authors could replicate their reprints and mail them; readers could also make personal copies from the journals held by their institutional library. The advent of electronic files, email and the Internet facilitated sharing at new levels, and we are just beginning to realize how growing, global interconnectivity will impact this time-honored practice.

The rise of SCNs
Social media added ease and convenience of sharing information among a group of “friends.” SCNs went a step further offering both convenience and more structured options to share with colleagues and potential new collaborators interested in the article’s subject matter.

SCNs first appeared early in the web era, and their popularity has grown enormously in the last few years. The best known networks are very successful start-ups in terms of the number of users: ResearchGate (6 million members) and Academia.edu (30 million monthly visitors), and Mendeley (5 million members), now owned by Elsevier. These networks solicit researchers to establish collaboration networks and give users capabilities to upload versions of their articles to be shared with user-defined collaboration groups and, in some cases, members of the public.

Given the growing popularity and utility of SCNs, the scholarly publication community needs to support this new venture — but in a way that allows the practice to evolve as a useful tool without undue harm to the enterprise that published the article. Given that the business of scholarly publishing is still dominated by the

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subscription model, if all publications are made instantly available to anyone on the day of publication, subscription income and the means of sustaining the value of the scholarly publishing enterprise would be at risk. When a majority of the publishing business moves to an author-paid, open access model, this becomes less of a concern. But in my view, this transition will continue incrementally as it has done for the last 10 years, and for certain fields (the humanities, for example) it may never be a viable model.

**Principles for article sharing on SCNs**

For the last year and a half, I have had the honor of chairing a working group assembled by the International Association of STM Publishers to help establish some general guidelines for the use of such networks by all parties.

In February 2015, the working group posted a draft of voluntary principles for article sharing on SCNs and related FAQs concerning the use of these networks. We asked the wider research community to consider the draft principles available on the STM website and actively sought commentary over a two-month consultation period that concluded in April 2015.

This round of consultation resulted in a healthy debate across the stakeholders, including substantial library community comments. A revised set of voluntary principles was posted on the STM consultation web page in August 2015 (attachment included at the end of article). The principles basically provide user guidelines for sharing articles among research collaborators and the FAQs address additional cases. (More information and background about the process can also be found on this website.)

**Adopting and endorsing the principles**

The STM working group is now soliciting buy-in from stakeholders across the scholarly publishing community; it is only through wide-based support that we can affect collaborative practices for mutual benefit. The current list of endorsing organizations can be found at [stm-assoc.org/stm-consultations/scn-consultation-2015/endorsements](http://stm-assoc.org/stm-consultations/scn-consultation-2015/endorsements). We ask libraries and library associations to consider the principles, let us know what you think, and show your support by endorsing the principles.

Why might librarians want to endorse a set of principles developed through a publishing standards association? The issues addressed by the principles also greatly impact librarians. Your users may seek advice and guidance about where and how to share articles, and you will be well positioned to respond with this guidance. By engaging with STM in this effort and working with us to identify and endorse good practices, you will enable sharing networks, publishers and librarians to work together to make the process hassle-free for you and your users. These platforms need to evolve in a way that complements library services as well as publisher services, so you will have a voice and influence on the evolution of these new sharing tools.

Your organization can formally endorse the voluntary principles by emailing Matt McKay (mckay@stm-assoc.org). Matt also is the point of contact to receive any additional feedback (comments, thoughts, ideas) that you have to offer. Finally, he can keep you informed of developments pertaining to this initiative by adding you to our distribution list for updates.

As a direct result of this working group’s efforts, publishers are issuing policies that address posting via SCNs. In addition, a new working group has been formed to develop technical solutions that will help implement the principles, such as improved article version metadata and extended usage measurements. The library and publishing communities will benefit from improvements in both article version metadata and the extension of usage data to these new platforms. We are committed to working towards solutions to improve the article sharing experience for all. Please join us.

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Voluntary principles for article sharing on scholarly collaboration networks
(Revised 8 June 2015)

Scholarly research is by its nature collaborative. Teams of researchers and scientists in the academic and not-for-profit sectors share experience, expertise, and facilities in order to advance human knowledge and understanding. Nowhere is this more evident than in the sharing of scholarly articles – the majority of which include multiple authors, often from different institutions and countries. Sharing of articles and supplementary material is thus an important factor in advancing research.

As research groups have become more interdisciplinary and international, such sharing has increased, enabled by the rise of internet tools and technologies. Scholarly collaboration networks offer researchers the opportunity to discover and share articles and data, but the sharing experience can be inefficient, inconsistent, hindered by legal uncertainty and frustrating for academic researchers, institutions, collaboration networks and publishers.

We would like to make sharing of subscription and licensed content simple and seamless for academic researchers so that it is consistent with access and usage rights associated with articles while enhancing collaboration. We believe publishers and scholarly collaboration networks can work together to facilitate sharing, which benefits researchers, institutions, and society as a whole, with a core set of principles that maximize this experience for all.

Open Access publication provides one route to enable sharing but does not address sharing of subscription and licensed content. These voluntary principles are intended to address that gap, and be complementary to, not as a substitute for, Open Access publication or self-archiving. They are also not meant to address sharing by and between commercial organizations.

The signatories to these principles believe:

- Publishers have a core commitment to facilitate the dissemination and discovery of their authors’ scholarly articles.
• Sharing should be allowed within research collaboration groups, namely groups of scholars or researchers invited to participate in specific research collaborations. Such groups would:
  • be of the size that is typical for research groups of that discipline
  • only share articles within and for the purposes of the group
  • allow article sharing between subscribers and non-subscribers within the group
  • include commercial researchers, subject to publisher policy or appropriate licensing
  • include members of the wider public participating for the purposes of the group

• Publishers and libraries should be able to measure the amount and type of sharing, using standards such as COUNTER, to better understand the habits of their readers and quantify the value of the services they provide.

• Initiatives to facilitate sharing should:
  • be based on standards to support the tools and platforms required by researchers
  • be open to all participants supporting these principles
  • integrate access and usage rights and data reporting into research workflows
  • ensure that usage and activity data is managed in a manner consistent with personal privacy and security laws and requirements

• Public posting of article metadata and open access articles in scholarly collaboration networks should be encouraged.

• Publisher policies on research collaboration group sharing and public posting of articles should be clear and easily discoverable, and we call on publishers to work toward this goal.