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Researchers' Sharing Behaviours:

piloting a new "shareable PDF"

to leverage authors' use of scholarly collaboration networks and recapture "lost" usage

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Introduction

Researchers have for many years had access to new platforms and channels for networking and sharing resources, but the pace of growth in their usage of these networks has substantially increased recently. This has led to full-text sharing on a scale that concerns publishers and libraries, because of the proportion of such sharing that infringes copyright.

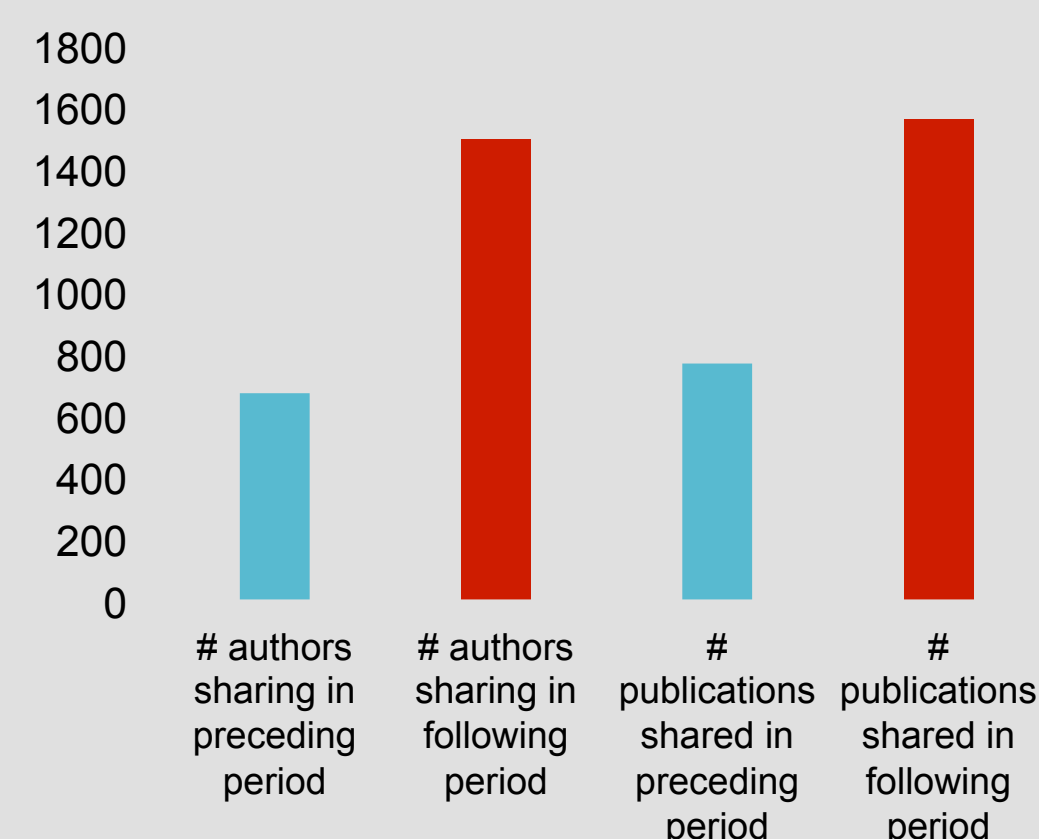
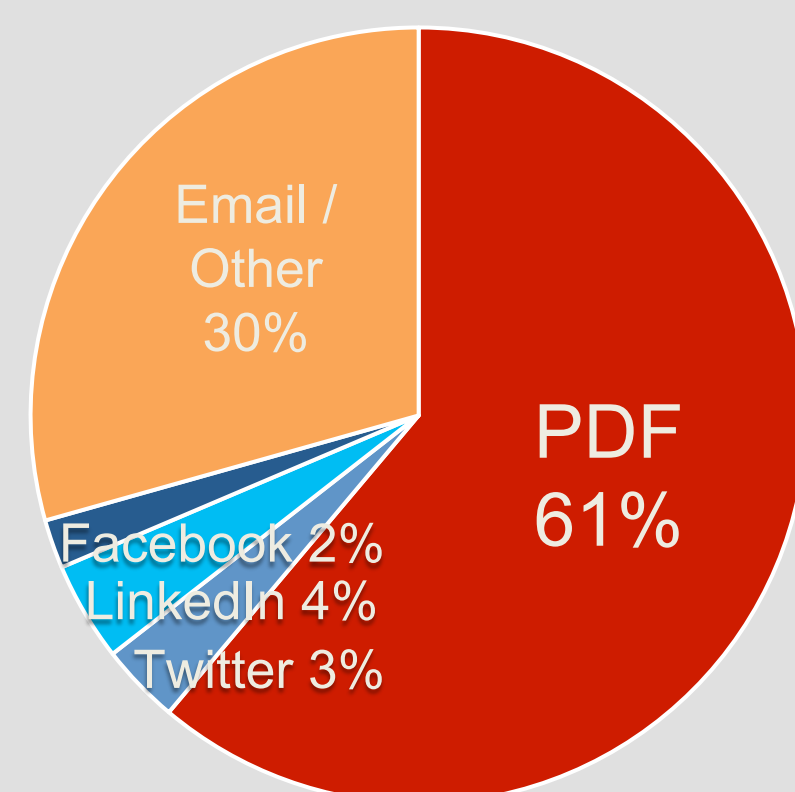
In 2017, we undertook a survey of 7,500 researchers to understand their preferences and behaviours around copyright, scholarly collaboration networks (SCNs), and sharing / accessing of full text articles via platforms other than the journal website. The survey showed substantial growth in the trend for sharing / accessing content "off grid" (i.e. in websites where usage is not reported to publishers, libraries, funders etc) with 57% of respondents indicating they upload PDFs of their articles to SCNs, and 66% indicating they use SCNs to access content. However, 83% agreed or strongly agreed that copyright should be respected. Based on this data, we then piloted a new approach to online sharing that encouraged authors to share a summary PDF, with links through to the full text on the journal website, rather than sharing the full text itself.

Methods

The summary, or "Shareable", PDF was created on behalf of 5 participating publishers (initial pilot), growing to 12 participating publishers by April 2018. The Shareable PDF option for sharing was presented to all authors using the Kudos platform to manage their research dissemination for these publishers. Uptake of this option was measured (the number of authors choosing to generate a Shareable PDF, and the number of PDFs generated) – these numbers were put in the context of how many of the participating publishers' authors completed some kind of sharing via Kudos during the period of analysis, and how many articles were shared. We also measured the results in terms of click throughs from the SCN platforms where Shareable PDFs were posted (e.g. ResearchGate, Academia.edu) to the full text. Where possible this was compared to the views of the Shareable PDF / publication pages in SCNs, in order to calculate a click through rate.

Results

Where the Shareable PDF (S-PDF) option has been made available, it has immediately become the most popular mechanism for sharing (Kudos also enables authors to track sharing via social media, and to generate links for sharing via email, web, or offline in posters, handouts, presentations etc). 61% of authors have chosen to use this option when it has been available for sharing their work. The number of authors sharing (via any channel) more than doubled (increase of 123% for participating publishers). The number of publications being shared (via any channel) more than doubled (increase of 103% for participating publishers).



Publisher	Date S-PDF feature switched on	Number of S-PDF shares since that date	Number of other shares since that date	Proportion of shares that are S-PDF
1	8 Feb 18	1	1	50%
2	1 Nov 17	51	24	68%
3	1 Nov 17	638	721	47%
4	1 Nov 17	43	24	64%
5	1 Dec 17	14	5	74%
6	1 Nov 17	930	377	71%
7	12 Jan 18	199	45	82%
8	12 Jan 18	7	10	41%
9	12 Jan 18	51	35	59%
10	6 Dec 17	14	7	67%
11	16 Mar 18	34	11	76%
12	1 May 18	Data not yet available		
TOTAL		1,982	1,260	61%

Publisher	Date S-PDF feature switched on	Time live (period)	# authors sharing in preceding period	# authors sharing in following period	% increase	# publications shared in preceding period	# publications shared in following period	% increase
1	08-Feb-18	2 months	0	2		0	2	
2	01-Nov-17	5 months	7	18	157%	7	20	186%
3	01-Nov-17	5 months	407	559	37%	505	643	27%
4	01-Nov-17	5 months	13	28	115%	13	27	108%
5	01-Dec-17	4 months	3	11	267%	3	11	267%
6	01-Nov-17	5 months	141	672	377%	141	644	357%
7	12-Jan-18	3 months	27	132	389%	27	134	396%
8	12-Jan-18	3 months	3	5	67%	3	5	67%
9	12-Jan-18	3 months	24	44	83%	23	47	104%
10	06-Dec-17	4 months	10	16	60%	10	16	60%
11	16-Mar-18	1 month	38	11	-71%	37	11	-70%
12	1 May 18	Data not yet available						
TOTALS			673	1498	123%	769	1560	103%

(a) Plain language summary – what is this publication about and why is it important? These help a wider audience to find and understand the work, by using non-specialist language (more common in search queries). They also make it easier for those within the field to quickly understand the relevance of an article. An independent study of Kudos' services for explaining and sharing publications showed **23% higher growth in downloads** of full text on the publisher site for publications where Kudos had been used¹.

(b) Author perspective – the story behind the research – bringing the work to life

(c) Cover artwork and logo – so that wherever the PDF ends up, the publisher / journal branding remains visible

(d) Link to the full text on the publisher website so that whichever platforms / channels are used to increase visibility of the publication, the resulting readership of the full text is consolidated in one place – easier for the author, institution and funder to count, and ensuring that publisher usage / subscriptions are not undermined.

(e) Where it was possible to calculate a click-through rate (i.e. where the site in which the shareable PDF had been shared, and its "view" count, could be accessed) this was 27%.

Shareable PDFs comprise:

- Plain language summary** – what is this publication about and why is it important? These help a wider audience to find and understand the work, by using non-specialist language (more common in search queries). They also make it easier for those within the field to quickly understand the relevance of an article. An independent study of Kudos' services for explaining and sharing publications showed **23% higher growth in downloads** of full text on the publisher site for publications where Kudos had been used¹.
- Author perspective** – the story behind the research – bringing the work to life
- Cover artwork and logo – so that wherever the PDF ends up, the **publisher / journal branding** remains visible
- Link to the full text** on the publisher website so that whichever platforms / channels are used to increase visibility of the publication, the resulting readership of the full text is consolidated in one place – easier for the author, institution and funder to count, and ensuring that publisher usage / subscriptions are not undermined.
- Where it was possible to calculate a click-through rate (i.e. where the site in which the shareable PDF had been shared, and its "view" count, could be accessed) this was 27%.

Conclusions

Our data provides an encouraging indication that authors are willing to adopt new approaches to sharing, and the project has been a successful way to:

- leverage authors' desire to share
- leverage PDF-based sites as discovery channels
- enable editors / journals to track, report on and benefit directly from content usage in networks and channels outside the traditional information ecosystem
- bring otherwise "lost" usage back to the journal
- assist in the protection of subscriptions.

We speculate that this could enable editors to:

- build a business case for adopting a new approach to sharing that will benefit the journal
- engage with and educate authors about different approaches to sharing
- encourage use of PDF-sharing channels as a discovery channel
- better evaluate the different approaches that authors take to sharing, to develop a journal-specific evidence base to shape future author guidance.

References

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