

Author Attitudes Towards Open Access Publishing

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TBI Communications on behalf of InTech Open Access Publisher

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1.0 Introduction

A continuing debate

Open Access (OA) continues to be a controversial business model for publishing scholarly information, with both ardent advocates and critics. OA places the burden of payment for the publishing and distribution process on authors rather than readers; the purported benefit being that the resulting information can then be made freely available online at no cost to the reader, potentially increasing readership well beyond traditional boundaries of access.

The concept of Open Access has been around for several decades but it has only really gained traction in the past decade, particularly as it has begun to gain the support of government, institutions and research funders. OA covers three key areas relating to: 1) making access to scholarly content freely available online; 2) making access to the data within scholarly content accessible and re-usable; and 3) allowing institutions to deposit copies of their authors' articles in an institutional or subject-based repository.

1.1 Open access and peer review

Peer review is often (mistakenly) mixed up with OA, with some commentators assuming that OA means limited peer review. In reality, this is a totally separate issue. Many new systems of peer review are being developed, and this too is proving highly controversial. Often these new systems of peer review are combined with OA – perhaps because it is the organizations that are innovating with access business models that are more likely to innovate with peer review business models. For example, PLoS One¹ – which combines OA with a 'light' peer review system that primarily checks an article for technical accuracy rather than making more subjective judgements about quality and potential impact.

Concerns from the traditional publishing community concerning OA generally centre on issues of quality (ensuring a rigorous peer review process remains in place, whatever the access model) and long-term stability. The existing access models based on print publications and subscription access have proved their longevity and the full implications of whole scale and rapid change to OA remain uncertain, so traditional publishers call for caution and experimentation to ensure the overall system remains stable. Charging authors for publication also increases the incentive to publish many articles rather than few, which Elsevier argued in its report to the UK Science and Technology Select Committee in 2004, would force OA publishers to “continually be under pressure to increase output, potentially at the expense

of quality." Of course, the established publishing community also has vested interests in the existing models that many will regard need protecting. Although publishers have worked to adapt to OA opportunities and demands (e.g. through offering optional OA within subscription products), most of the significant innovation to date has come from relatively new organisations such as Biomed Central and the Public Library of Science (PLOS), who have less invested in the status quo.

1.2 Commercialisation of open access

Another interesting dynamic of OA is that the arguments for it have often been highly emotive with a strong focus on ethics, promoting the value of freely accessible information. Organisations and individuals supporting and offering OA are often drawn from the not-for-profit community. However, increasingly commercial organisations – both new and established publishers – are embracing and offering this business model. This is causing some tension in the market with some OA advocates seeing commercial objectives as being to some extent in conflict with the principles of OA. Certainly the model has some particular traits that could attract less scrupulous practices, because the cost of entry into the market is so much lower than traditional publishing. In an OA model few costs are incurred ahead of accruing income so it is relatively easy for anyone to set up a company offering OA publishing. The model also offers the opportunity for potentially high profits if the cost base can be kept low. These factors taken together put the model at risk of being exploited by a minority. In a recent article² by Richard Poynder, he highlighted comments from US librarian Jeffrey Beall who argued in a 2010 review that "predatory publishers" risked promoting vanity publishing and he called them predatory because their focus would be "not to promote, preserve and make available scholarship", but to "exploit the author-pays, Open Access model for their own profit."

However, OA clearly does not need to be the preserve of not-for-profit publishers. As in any open market, all organisations – whatever their profit status – should be free to compete for authors and in doing so, the overall quality of services offered will be driven up and costs minimised. Established bodies like the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) and Open Access Publishing in Europe Networks (OAPEN) will be important for vetting and verifying organisations offering OA services, but it will be critical for them to remain open to innovation from OA publishers, seeking input directly from the research community as to what constitutes quality and service and managing the potential scare-mongering of established organisations in the face of new and growing competition.

1.3 Serving authors

The future is likely to see a much wider range of organisations offering author-side fees publishing services. Much of the current debate continues to focus on what publishers think of OA, but relatively little research has been undertaken to understand the attitudes of researchers. It was with this in mind that InTech, a commercial Open Access publisher with a focus on book publishing, commissioned TBI to survey its author-base to help better understand researcher awareness of and attitudes towards this evolving model. By sharing the results of this survey, InTech hopes to dispel some of the myths about what researchers truly value relating to OA and peer review, so that the scholarly communications community can continue to innovate and evolve its business models to suit the needs of the authors that they serve.

References

1. PLoS ONE Peer Review: <http://www.plosone.org/static/review.action>
2. PLoS One, Open Access, and the Future of Scholarly Publishing. Richard Poynder.

About InTech

InTech is a multidisciplinary Open Access publisher of books and journals covering the fields of Science, Technology and Medicine. Since 2004, InTech has published more than 400 books and have provided publishing services to over 25,000 authors, providing free online access to high-quality research, and helping leading academics make their work visible and accessible to diverse new audiences around the world.

About TBI Communications

TBI Communications is a leading independent consultancy working with academic and professional publishers around the world to help them understand their markets and audiences better and adapt their business models and sales and marketing processes to increase their success in meeting both commercial and non-commercial goals.

2.0 Research Overview

A market research programme was developed by TBI on behalf of InTech that would provide a better understanding of the needs of researchers and the evolving context within which they carry out research, publish and exchange information. Views on Open Access and on InTech as a service provider were also sought.

The research programme comprised:

- a. Telephone interviews with high profile Open Access advocates
- b. Telephone interviews with InTech contacts including staff, authors and editors
- c. Online survey sent to InTech database of authors, which received over 8,000 responses

3.0 Survey Findings

The online author survey was conducted in early March 2011 and sent out in an email by InTech to their database of approximately 25,000 authors worldwide. After just a few days there had been a response of 8,000. This in itself is an interesting indicator of interest – how many organisations receive a 32% response rate when they survey their customer base? Clearly the issues surrounding OA resonate with the research community.

In summary, 8,015 participants took part in the online author survey, of which 4,692 (58.5%) participants completed the entire survey. The survey responses are summarised in the points that follow.

3.1 Profile of Respondents

Primary job roles (Total= 7,990 responses):

- 78.1% (5,919) were researchers
- 21.4% (1,708) were lecturers
- 3.2% (252) were graduate researchers
- 1.3% (101) were students
- 0.1% (10) were librarians
- Other secondary roles named include professor, surgeon, physician, medical doctor, university role or teaching role.

Primary workplace:

- 78.6% (6,282) work in universities
- 16.2% (1,295) work in not-for-profit research institutions
- 5.2% (413) work in a commercial research organisation
- Other workplaces include hospitals.

Geographic location:

Geographically the responses were very diverse. While the 10 most common countries of origin were:

- China (8.3%)
- USA (7.8%)
- Japan (7.1%)

- Italy (5.3%)
- Brazil (4.8%)
- Spain (4.6%)
- Turkey (4.3%)
- India (4.0%)
- Iran (3.8%)
- Poland (3%)

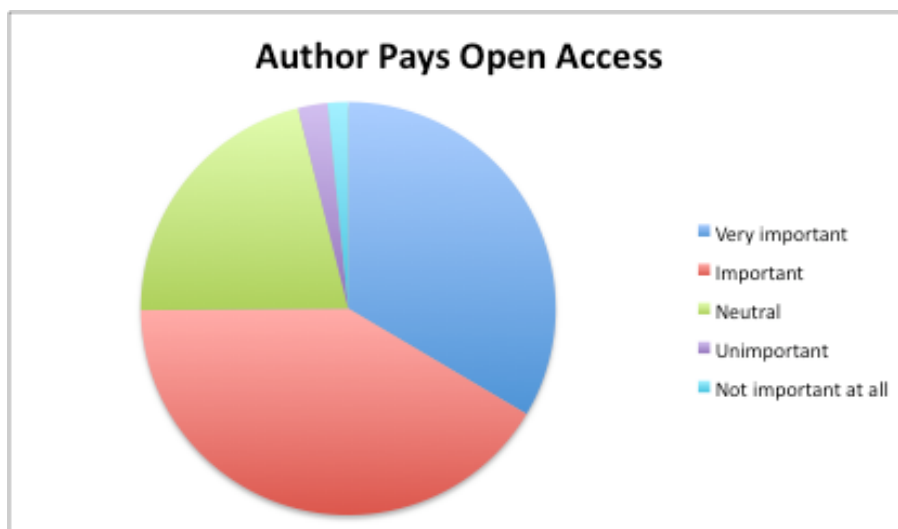
Responses also included 7 participants from Azerbaijan, 8 from Ethiopia, 4 from Iceland, 29 from Morocco, 5 from Puerto Rico.

Specialty:

- 28.6% (2,286) have a specialty in medicine
- 22.4% (2,328) have an engineering background, including electrical/ electronic engineering
- 22% (1,755) have a biological sciences specialty
- 9.6% (770) have a background in materials science
- 8.0% have a background in computers and information science
- Technology (3.9%) and Earth Sciences (5.6%) are the lowest

3.2 Author attitudes towards open access

We asked authors for their general views on how important Open Access was to them. **75% of participants said they think it is 'very important' or 'important' to be able to offer their work free online** to a global audience even if that means the author pays.



Further analysis of participants' views on Open Access country by country shows that authors' responses are uniformly high, which you would expect from those who have published with an Open Access publisher such as InTech. The following table shows the top ten responding countries. There is little variation in the enthusiasm for Open Access.

Table A: Author attitudes towards Open Access

Country of origin	Total responses to question	% of positive responses ('very important' or 'important')	% of negative responses
China	443	72.2%	2.8%
Japan	333	69%	3.3%
United States	339	70.8%	5.9%
Brazil	242	83%	3.3%
India	205	68.7%	9.8%
Turkey	212	77.8%	2.8%
Iran	192	81.3%	5.2%
Italy	236	79.7%	3%
Spain	219	81.8%	3.6%
Mexico	147	87.1%	3.4%

Overall, **only 2.4% participants thought the Open Access model was unimportant or not important at all**. 9.8% of responses from Indian participants were negative, which is comparatively high. India also has the lowest percentage of positive responses out of these 10 countries.

The participants' comments on Open Access publishing fall into four main categories and representative quotes for each are included below.

a) Improving access to knowledge

There is, not unsurprisingly, widespread agreement amongst authors that Open Access is key to reaching the widest possible audience, which is an ambition for many authors:

"I appreciate on-line free access as it makes data available to anyone."

"What I need is dissemination of my ideas in my subject, whatever the cost."

"I don't want price to be a barrier to someone obtaining access to my work."

"I want people to get the information as soon and freely as possible."

"Fundamentally for me the purpose of publication is to share one's reflection with others for their benefit as well as for the progress or better understanding of the issue being discussed. It is also to stimulate others for further investigation on the subject matter."

b) Author payments

Author payments remain controversial. Many researchers accept the need to cover publication costs and for organisations to make a profit from this, but publishers should take note that the payment must be seen to be set at a fair level and authors should receive a high quality service in return:

"If a publisher does not offer my work online free of charge to a global audience, I won't even consider it. However, if the publisher wants to charge me an arm or a leg as publication charge, I definitely won't consider it. In other words, a good piece of work will find a global audience, sooner or later. The cream will rise to the top."

Many authors spoke of their lack of familiarity with the Open Access model, which may explain why some see this kind of publishing as purely 'vanity publishing' or even a scam of some kind. However, some authors commented that once they understood the model, they revised their opinions:

"It is quite unusual for the author to pay a publication charge and it first worried me, but due to the fact that many readers can find out about your work, I think it is a good thing after all."

Others remain firmly fixed against the principle of paying for publication:

"As an author, I would not like to pay to publish my work. The credibility of the author is questioned when someone can pay and get something published."

"When the audiences are able to view it free of charge, the authors should not also be charged. Open-access publications have merely become a money-making business."

c) Quality

Quality remains a critical issue for authors. A vast pool of unmoderated information is not what researchers want. There was also a sense that work worthy of being read should still be able to be published via conventional means:

"The challenge for OA is to convince readers of the quality of publication to my opinion."

"If my work is of good quality other authors will reach it anyway."

"Journal reputation is the most important item."

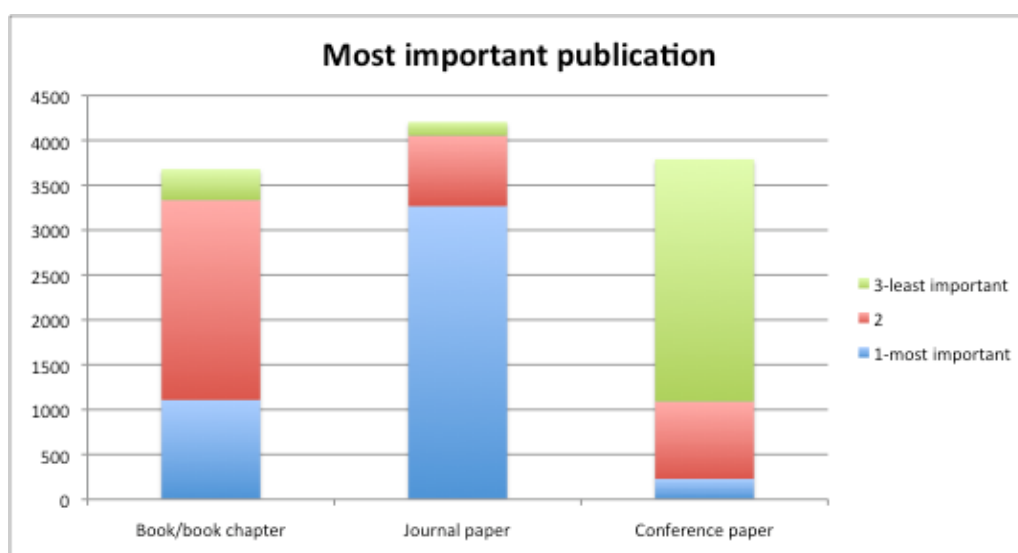
Although Open Access to content was seen as strongly desirable as a general principle by the authors surveyed, clearly asking for a payment makes them consider more carefully the direct value of publishing under this model. OA publishers will need to provide evidence of impact increasingly to justify the publication charges and persuade a greater volume of researchers that Open Access is the way forward (if indeed it is). More studies are required to prove the benefits:

"The cost of publication will need to justify future citations - availability to a global audience does not ensure citations in reputable journals."

3.3 Relative importance of publication types

We asked researchers to rate how important different publication formats were to them. 78% of 4,754 respondents said journal papers were the most important. 71% of 3,197 respondents said conference

papers were least important. 61% of 3,876 respondents rated books of medium importance. However, a good proportion (30%) rated book publishing as most important. Journals have traditionally dominated many subject areas in terms of career importance to an individual author. Perhaps this may change as Open Access models for book publishing become more common with accompanying rapid publication times.



3.4 Perceptions of Open Access publishers

Firstly, we wished to establish how InTech as a commercial provider of OA services, was perceived by its customers. There was an overwhelming vote of confidence in the organisation, with **81% of responding authors rating their publishing experience with InTech as either 'excellent' or 'good'**. Only 4.5% rated their experience as poor or extremely poor. Clearly, although InTech is a commercial organisation, this did not impact on author's overall satisfaction with the services provided.

2,042 (39.5%) included an explanation of their answer, which highlighted some issues of importance to authors relating to Open Access and peer review:

"The publishing process is very well organized and I had no difficulty in using the interface. The publishing manager always answered promptly and was very helpful."

"One of the most valuable features of your organization is your punctuality. In addition, your efforts in trust building between your organization and your authors."

Amongst many respondents there was a clear appreciation of the OA business model:

"As a current graduate student, I strongly support the concept of open access textbooks."

"It represents an excellent opportunity to spread scientific research and application results."

But there are also pockets of suspicion of and lack of understanding about Open Access:

"I was invited to write a chapter for InTech on Nanotechnology recently. I initially accepted the offer but then found out that you expect each author to pay ... to do this. I think this approach is fraudulent so I reversed my decision and decided not to publish with InTech for this reason."

Peer review proved to be a controversial subject, and InTech itself has experimented with several different approaches to get the balance right between providing the level of input that authors clearly still want while minimising the costs, optimising publishing speed and elements of subjectivity that can be associated with traditional peer review. There was clear feedback from the survey that a light peer review model was not felt to be sufficient:

"Overall experience is good, however, as the chapter author I did not obtain any feedback on my submission from the reviewers."

"If there would be a review process, the writing process would be more natural and the chapter could be improved."

Based on this feedback InTech completely revised its approach to peer review to give more in-depth feedback to authors, who clearly place a high value on publishers providing peer review as part of the core service, whatever the access business model.

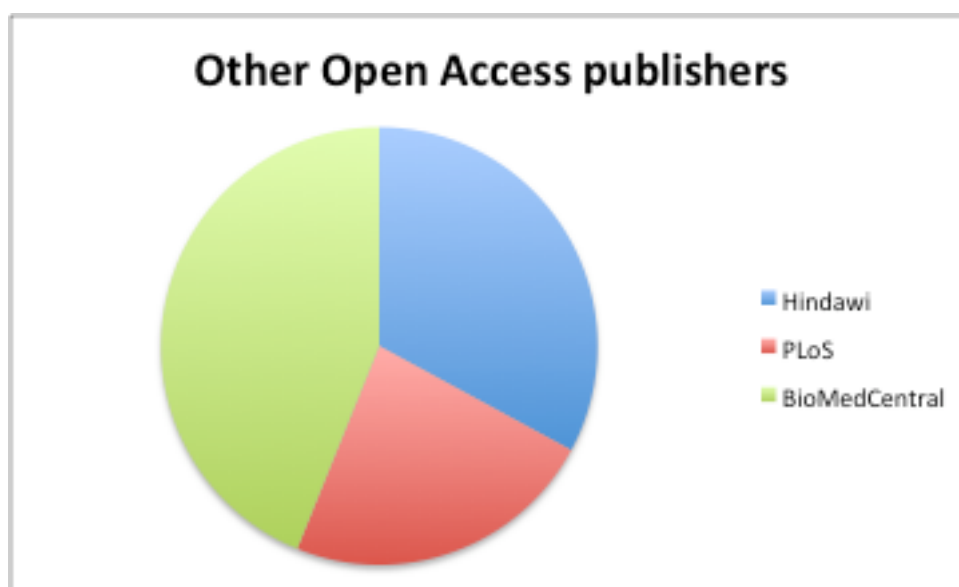
Another area for improvement identified through this survey is information on the impact of an author's piece of work – how widely read and cited it is and by whom. While some authors are impressed by the high number of downloads many of InTech's OA books have achieved:

"I looked on your site and I saw very high performance publishing articles and I am honoured to collaborate with you. Our University has partners which publish on your site and they are very satisfied, so I have a very good image of your site."

Others clearly want more support from publishers in understanding how OA helps them reach a wider audience and the evidence that supports that post-publication:

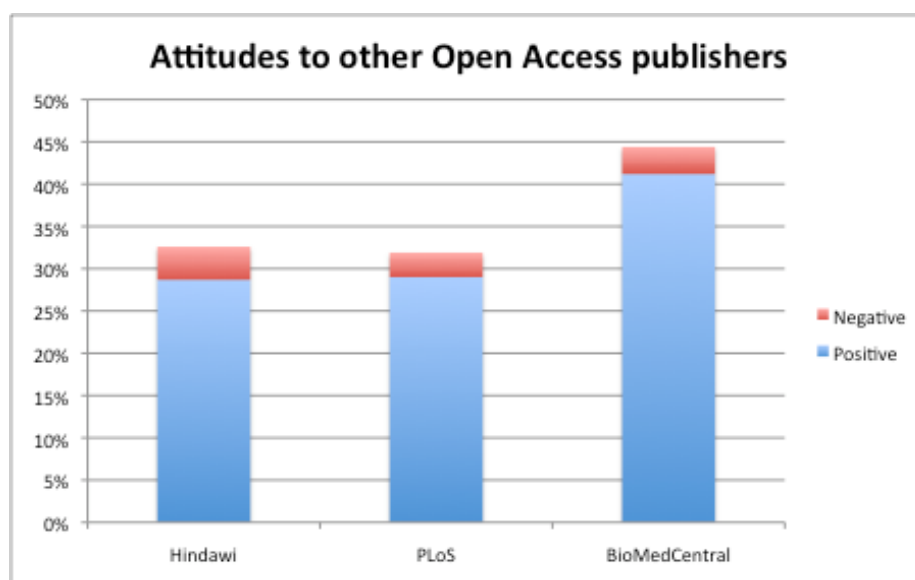
"I do not know how people find the work and read it."

InTech authors were asked which of the following other three Open Access publishers they were most familiar with: Hindawi, PLoS and BioMed Central. BioMed Central is the one that most authors are familiar with:



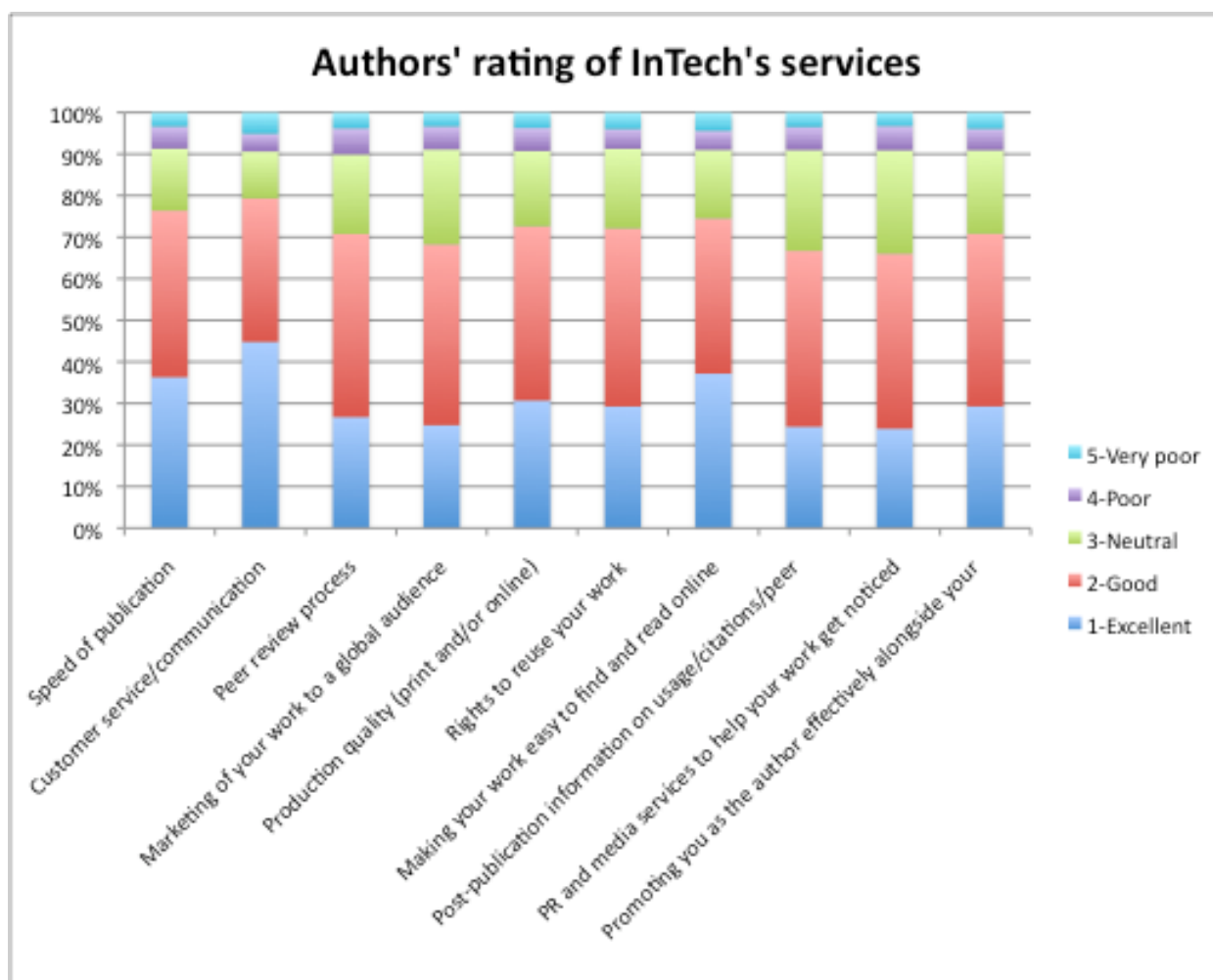
Attitudes to publishing with these Open Access competitors were more positive than negative. The majority have a neutral attitude perhaps indicating a lack of familiarity with these publishers. BioMed Central

received the most positive comments (41.2%). Geographic analysis of this question showed that Hindawi had more awareness in Japan and China.



3.5. Author Services

In order to better understand how well authors' needs were being met we asked how satisfied they were with the range of services provided by InTech as a representative Open Access publisher. **Over 60% participants gave InTech either a good or excellent rating for every service provided.**



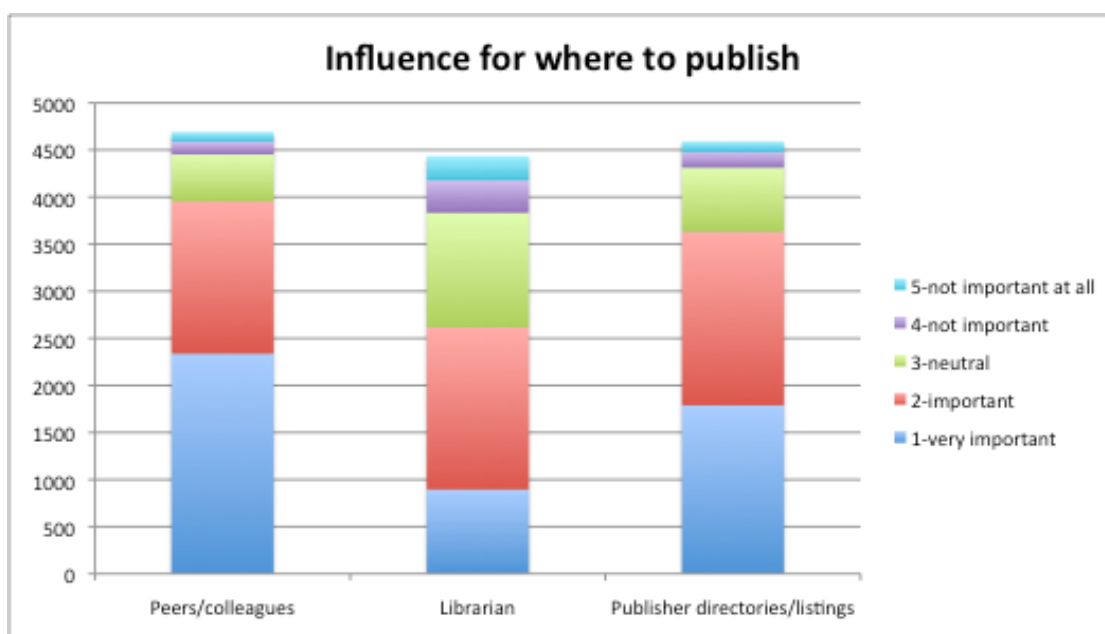
Although these results relate to just one Open Access publisher, they represent the range of services typically provided.

3.6 How authors choose an OA publisher

General feedback from the survey and interviews indicated that there is still a lack of knowledge amongst the research community (particularly in some subject areas) about the OA business model. We asked where authors got information from to help them decide where to publish. Peers and colleagues emerged as the most important influencers for authors when deciding where to publish. However, librarians were also highly influential, particularly in certain geographic locations. Geographical analysis reveals that countries, where librarians are considered important, include Brazil (73.5%*), China

(67.1%*), India (68.5%*), Turkey (66%*), Mexico (74.1%*) and Iran (73.6%*).

*Rated as very important or important source of information.



In telephone discussions too, several Open Access advocates discussed the challenges for OA publishers in the face of continued lack of understanding of the model amongst authors:

"I've seen blogs where some OA publishers have been accused of being in it for the money and that is certainly true for some publishers, but some of the suspicions are unfair. There is a lack of understanding of OA."

4.0 Summary and conclusions

The survey was conducted amongst a group of authors who are already favourably inclined towards Open Access, through their experience as customers of InTech – an Open Access Publisher.

However, it is rarely the case that InTech's authors have sought out Open Access as their main publishing requirement. In fact, most of InTech's authors (79%) had never heard of the publisher until approached directly. Once they learn about the model they are generally highly favourable. This indicates that there is still work to be done to explain the model and its benefits to the research community. However, OA publishers are going to increasingly need to provide comprehensive evidence of the direct benefits of this model to an individual author, and also increasingly the benefits of their particular approach as competition increases and new publishers are launched offering OA services; OA on its own will not be a big enough differentiator.

As might be expected, authors have concerns over cost and quality control, but as long as the cost can be kept reasonable and a good system of peer review remains in place, they are generally accepting of the value of free access to their work after publication.

Peer review remains an extremely emotive topic in the world of scholarly communications. For many, peer review has for many years been seen as the bedrock of the system and where the traditional publishing process really adds value, filtering out poor quality information so that only the very best and most reliable work is published. For others, peer review is a biased and expensive system that adds little value, and is increasingly irrelevant in a world where the cost barriers of publishing content have reduced from high (print-based) to low (online-based).

Open Access is sometimes caught up in this argument and therefore OA publishers need to have a clear policy on their particular stance on peer review and ensure transparency. It is legitimate to operate under a light peer review system (much like PLoS ONE); it is also legitimate to operate under a peer review system that is more traditional and in-

depth in nature. The point is that OA publishers need to be clear on their particular approach and communicate that effectively.

These research results show there is a clear demand from authors to retain a reasonably in-depth pre-publication peer review system so that they feel their work has been evaluated by someone reputable and the subsequent production quality is then high. They may feel this more strongly when they pay themselves for publication and they also may feel this more strongly for books rather than journals, where quality may be given more prestige (with a journal article if the quality suffers but the citations are high, authors will still be happy, perhaps less so with a book).