Disappointing: Elsevier Buys Open Access Academic Pre-Publisher SSRN

from the this-is-bad-news dept

The vast, vast majority of time when we point to new academic research, we end up linking to the research hosted on SSRN, which stands for the Social Science Research Network. SSRN has been around for a long, long time, and it's basically the go-to place to post research in the legal and economics worlds -- the two research areas we most frequently write about. At this moment, I have about 10 SSRN tabs open on interesting papers that I hope to write about at some point.

Technically SSRN is what's known as a "preprint server," where academics can share papers before peer review is completed and the final papers end up in a locked up, paywalled journal. The kind of paywall run by a giant company like Elsevier.

So it's been quite distressing to many this morning to find out that Elsevier has now purchased SSRN. Everyone involved, of course, insists that "nothing will change" and that Elsevier will leave SSRN working as before, but perhaps with some more resources behind it (and, sure, SSRN could use some updates and upgrades). But Elsevier has such a long history of incredibly bad behavior

It’s the Data, Stupid: What Elsevier’s purchase of SSRN also means

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On Tuesday May 17, 2016, SSRN announced that it was being acquired by Elsevier. SSRN, the Social Sciences Research Network, is a widely used repository of scholarly articles that can be uploaded and downloaded by anyone. It is “open access” (that's in quotes because SSRN's approach to OA has always been partial and peculiar, and Monday's news confirms

SSRN—the leading social science and humanities repository and online community—joins Elsevier

Elsevier’s acquisition of the Social Science Research Network, with plans to strengthen it alongside Mendeley’s technology platform, marks a significant advancement for each community of users

By Gregg Gordon  Posted on 17 May 2016

FRIDAY, JULY 15, 2016

SSRN postings and copyright

The following was sent by Stephen Henderson (Oklahoma) to the Law Prof Listserv; it is reposted here with his permission. It is one experience and could be unique, but it presents something to watch for.

It appears that the corporate takeover of SSRN is already having a real impact.

When I posted a final PDF of an article for which not only do my co-author and I retain the copyright, but for which the contract also includes _explicit_ permission to post on SSRN, I received the typical happy “SSRN Revision Email” saying all was well. Only when I went to take a look, I found there was no longer any PDF to download at all—merely the abstract. So, download counts are gone, and no article. Not the former working version nor the final version. And then in the revision comments, I found this:

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IS IT TIME FOR AUTHORS TO LEAVE SSRN?
Posted July 17, 2016

Since we first heard of mega-publisher Elsevier’s acquisition of SSRN, the popular social sciences pre-print and working paper repository, we have expressed concern. Elsevier is not known to be an avid supporter of the open access publishing practices favored by many of our members, and has historically taken a restrictive stance toward author control and ownership of scholarship.

In response, we reached out to Elsevier and to SSRN with a set of principles the service could adopt that would reassure authors that SSRN could continue to be a go-to resource for those looking to refine and share their work. We have since heard back from SSRN: they would not commit to adopting even one of our principles. They offered more general reassurances that their policies would continue as before. We were not satisfied, but we decided to wait and see whether our fears would be borne out.

As feared, it now appears that SSRN is taking up restrictive and hostile positions against authors’ ability to decide when and how to share their work. Reports are surfacing that, without notice, SSRN is removing author-posted documents following SSRN’s own,

Moving from SSRN to SocArXiv

In May, Elsevier acquired SSRN, an open access repository heavily used in fields of law, economics and other social sciences. A number of great articles raising serious concerns about this acquisition were written following Elsevier and SSRN's announcement, including posts by Brandon Butler and Ellen Ramsey, Kevin Smith, Paul Gowder, the Authors Alliance, and TechDirt, among others.

More recently, reports surfaced that SSRN started removing articles from its database even when the author to the posted article retained copyright and had explicit permission to post to

#DeleteAcademiaEdu
Scholars Criticize Academia.edu Proposal to Charge Authors for Recommendations

By Corinne Ruff | January 29, 2016

When Scott F. Johnson got an email on Wednesday from Academia.edu asking if he was interested in paying "a small fee" to get his future papers considered for recommendation by the website's editors, he thought it was a scam.
Should you #DeleteAcademiaEdu?

[Note: Many readers of this blog have probably heard by now that Kevin Smith, who has been the primary author here, will soon be leaving Duke to be the Dean of Libraries at the University of Kansas. We do intend to keep the blog going, and to continue to address the same issues you've come to expect from the site, though with a greater variety of authors. So do stay tuned. This post is by Paolo Mangiafico.]

Yesterday afternoon a kerfuffle arose on Twitter about Academia.edu, a social networking site for academics, where many academic authors have profiles, share their publications, and connect with other scholars. You can read about the beginning of the controversy in this article the Chronicle of Higher Education posted this morning.
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What's happening, Kathleen?
Kathleen Fitzpatrick
Associate Executive Director and Director of Scholarly Communication

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Academic Interests

20th-century American literature
Digital humanities
Media studies
Reading
Scholarly communication
Technology

About
Kathleen Fitzpatrick is Associate Executive Director and Director of Scholarly Communication of the Modern Language Association, where she serves as Managing Editor of PMLA and other MLA publications. She also holds an appointment as Visiting Research Professor of English at NYU. She is author of *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy* (NYU Press, 2011) and of *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2006). She is co-founder of the digital scholarly network MediaCommons, where she led a number of experiments in open peer review and other innovations in scholarly publishing.

Education
PhD, English, New York University, 1998.
MFA, English, Louisiana State University, 1991.
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