

Why engage with transformative agreements in scholarly publishing? Analysis of customer and publisher press release statements

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Abstract

Purpose – How open access (OA) should be supported has been a frequent point of debate during the last 3 decades as different pathways have been created and evolved. One particular point of contention has been the use of institutional contracts between customer institutions and academic journal publishers, so-called transformative agreements (TAs), where subscription-based reading access is bundled with OA publishing rights. This study explores the motivational reasonings given by customers and publishers engaging with TAs.

Design/methodology/approach – This study provides a thematic content analysis of customer and publisher statements from 95 press releases announcing new TAs involving five large scholarly journal publishers. Existing literature on motivational reasoning for open science, OA, and TAs was reviewed to create an initial set of codes to be used, which was complemented with an inductive process producing additional codes based on categorization of reasonings that did not fit within the initial codes.

Findings – The study found that TAs were supported for a variety of reasons, where both customers and publishers stressed better research dissemination, facilitating a transition towards OA publishing, and improved workflow management for publishing and invoicing. Customers emphasized economic and equality aspects while publishers did so to a notably lesser degree.

Originality/value – This study complements the active area of bibliometric studies on TAs with a rich qualitative study based on a set of press releases that have not been used for this type of research, establishing a solid foundation for future studies to build upon.

Keywords Open access, Economics, Scholarly publishing, Equality, Journal publishers, Press releases

Paper type Research article

Introduction

The large-scale digitization of scholarly publishing that started in the 1990s also changed the relationship and nature of transactions between academic libraries and scholarly publishers, going from purchasing select print materials owned in perpetuity to subscription-based reading access to large digital databases of published content (Okerson, 1996; Frazier, 2005). The possibilities and pressure for making published content open access (OA) grew in tandem with this change to digital, where paywalls for reading content were seen as an obstacle that should be overcome if scholarly communication is to function as efficiently and equitably as

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Conflict of interest statement: The first author has been an adviser and steering group member for the publisher negotiations of one national consortium that has one press release included in this dataset. However, he has not been involved in any direct negotiations or taken part in preparing the press release statement.



possible on a global scale (BOAI 2003; UNESCO, 2021). Accelerants for the transition toward making journal articles OA, particularly so for many countries within Europe, have been national policies where timeframes for OA growth have been committed to (e.g. Wideberg and Smith, 2017; Open Science and Research Coordination, 2019). Research funders around the world, but particularly in Europe, have also been pushing for their outputs to be made available OA under strict conditions (e.g. cOAlition S). As a response to this increasing pressure for OA, scholarly journal publishers have introduced various new initiatives to create business out of the situation, where there are now billions of USD spent on OA publishing across a handful of large commercial publishers (Butler *et al.*, 2023).

Hybrid OA, where individual articles in subscription journals are published OA through the payment of an optional fee, is one of these OA-enabled business models; however, as its core principle was outlined in a paper over 20 years ago (Prosser, 2003) and Springer launching it commercially the following year it can not really be referred to as “new” anymore. What is more recent and still evolving is how hybrid OA publishing has become integrated into the pricing and conditions of the large agreements signed between customer institutions and publishers. For understanding some of the main drives behind libraries pushing for development of such models by publishers, Gillies (2014:242) described the situation as “... linking the costs of commercial hybrid APCs [article processing charges] to the renegotiation of larger consortium licenses would create a structure within which a library consortium could effectively negotiate and exercise increased control over this market.” As also described by Gillies (2014), this kind of push to change publisher offerings and processes requires leverage on the customer side, and that is also why national coordination (e.g. library consortia) has been instrumental in driving for change, as well as international coordination through different kinds of collaborative information sharing networks (e.g. OA2020.org). Over the last decade, publishers have started signing contracts with institutions enabling both reading as well as hybrid OA publication of individual articles from authors affiliated with the institutions with whom the contract is made. The terminology and exact specifics of such agreements have evolved over time with them now generally being referred to as transformative agreements (TAs) (Borrego *et al.*, 2020; Farley *et al.*, 2021), with the key defining feature being that such agreements, in addition to reading access, enable OA publishing in otherwise subscription-based journals for a pre-defined group of authors.

Since the large publishers operate many of the key journals within the research disciplines, this has in turn put pressure on national library consortia that are often in charge of negotiating the agreements between member institutions and publishers to not just focus on achieving a reasonable price for reading access but also incorporate comprehensive OA publishing volumes within the agreements. This introduces a wealth of new analytical and management tasks for libraries, e.g. establishing prices at which to start negotiations, estimations for their own expected volume for publishing output, as well as pressuring publishers to implement accessible workflows for authors so that they make use of the pre-paid OA publishing options they have available (see e.g. Pinhasi *et al.*, 2018). The increased demand for information and analytics among customer institutions for efficiently planning and negotiating TAs with publishers has led to the creation of information-sharing networks for supporting this task. There is an international web service created for the registration and open sharing of details for TA contracts, the Efficiency and Standards for Article Charges (ESAC) Transformative Agreement Registry, which, as of the 30th of May 2025, contains details of 1,325 individual TAs spanning 2014 to 2025 (ESAC, n.d.). There have been a number of research articles analyzing published contract details to learn more about the phenomenon of TAs (e.g. Moskovkin *et al.*, 2022; Jahn, 2025; Rothfritz *et al.*, 2024).

The last 2 decades have demonstrated that how money is channeled and spent in the scholarly communication context is contributing to implementing science policy to a high degree. While the share of OA articles on the web has steadily grown over time (Piwowar *et al.*, 2018), public discussion and concern about the long-term implications of the models through which this growth is achieved has been going on actively (Farley *et al.*, 2021; Marcaccio and

Centivany, 2022; Ross-Hellauer *et al.*, 2022). Even though TAs can objectively be argued to increase the share of articles available OA at time of publication in the short term and be perceived as a “win” for the negotiating stakeholder should an agreement be achieved on scope and price, the system-wide effects of such agreements becoming more prevalent might have detrimental qualities. Local decisions to make such agreements have global implications (Hunter, 2018). This includes further cementing the market power of the large commercial publishers (Fraser *et al.*, 2023; Schmal, 2024). As TAs are mostly concerned with publishing hybrid OA (Rothfritz *et al.*, 2024) and reinforcing that particular model, there is less money to go around supporting other OA models.

Outside of anecdotal observations from ongoing discussions in various forums, there is currently a lack of research on what the motivations and main drivers are for large publishers and customers for signing TAs. One of the ways in which publishers and customers have informed the public about their newly signed TAs is through press releases. Press releases are used to communicate news about an organization to a wide audience in relation to a specific event or development. It can also be used to serve the public relations needs of the company (McLaren and Gurău, 2005). As argued by McLaren and Gurău (2005:12), the purpose of press releases is “to publish news about the company, to bring information about the new developments into the public domain, as well as to present the company in as favourable a light as possible.” As such, we propose to study the public statements made by publishers and customers within the press releases announcing TAs.

Research questions

- (1) What reasonings are present in the public statements made by customer organizations and publishers when announcing new TAs? With what frequency do the reasonings appear across all the statements?
- (2) Do the reasoning in the publisher statements differ from those given by the customer organizations? If so, what are the key differences?
- (3) What can these reasonings tell us about the intentions and motivations of customer organizations and publishers TAs?

Press releases are a unique category of public materials that can have many different motivations for being issued in the first place and have also been used as data for a lot of different types of research. Catenaccio (2008) asserts that press releases serve both promotional and informational purposes, commonly containing direct quotes attributed to one of the organization’s own representatives (Sleurs *et al.*, 2003). Hence, it is not out of place that the TA press releases contain quotes from publishers’ and/or customers’ representatives. For publishers, the press releases issued in context with signing a new TA can be seen to fulfill a marketing function, signaling to the rest of the world that they are successfully meeting the demands of customer institutions interested in OA and these new types of agreements. Customers might want to signal that they are engaging in these types of agreements, communicating to their own communities and other publishers that might still be reluctant to accommodate such models (the actual analysis in this study sheds more light on this aspect). While public statements cannot tap into underlying agendas for either party, they offer an opportunity to analyze the information that has, over the last decade been deliberately made public for many different agreements in a fairly standardized format.

Previous research

This review of previous research provides two functions 1) providing research anchoring and context for where this contribution fits in within existing streams of research and 2) identifying existing reasonings and themes from open science and TA research that can be used for the

purpose of interpreting narratives around TA agreements in this study. The first part, the narrative literature review, is presented as running text, and the key identified values and themes extracted from the literature are provided in a summarizing table at the end of the section, which also later serves as the codebook for analyzing the press release statements for their inclusion. Focus has been placed on identifying and extracting the core themes and values for supporting open science, OA or TA's specifically when mentioned in each text when such are given, and aggregating these carefully into common categories for the sake of creating a unified codebook. All reviewed literature did not contain content immediately relevant to the codebook but has been included in the narrative literature review to give a more comprehensive context to the study and its central concepts.

Motivations for advancing open science

At the core of this study is the acceptance of the notion that open science is complex, and different actors emphasize different values and motivations for engaging with it. As [Fecher and Friesike \(2014\)](#) present in their book chapter "Open Science: One Term, Five Schools of Thought," some are driven by facilitating the collaborative and participatory aspects of open science while others emphasize that democratic and equal access to knowledge should be the leading force for shaping open science initiatives. In an article tracing the genealogy of OA, [Moore \(2017\)](#) states that "open access (OA) is a contested term with a complicated history and a variety of understandings. This rich history is routinely ignored by institutional, funder and governmental policies that instead enclose the concept and promote narrow approaches to OA ([Moore, 2017](#): 1)." Due to the complicated nature of how the term has become used, [Moore \(2017\)](#) suggests that OA as a concept is best interpreted as a boundary object, where different communities have different but not completely incompatible perceptions of a common concept, which allows them to build working relationships around the concept where there is common ground to be found.

[Albornoz et al. \(2018\)](#) identified key narratives about open science by studying 49 public policy documents from around the world, shedding light on the differences and commonalities in the way open science is framed, motivated and its goals presented. The authors raise concern that many policies promote the development and adoption of infrastructures, protocols and tools motivated by "... global governance dictums and economic competition agendas, rather than by the demands and unique characteristics of the wide diversity of scientific knowledge producers and users that will eventually rely on them" ([Albornoz et al., 2018](#):11). By doing this, the authors caution against replicating and further disadvantaging researchers who have been historically marginalized.

[Albornoz and Chan \(2018\)](#) extended upon this notion and explored the assumptions embedded in the narratives about open science, in this case focusing on the difference between those identified within policies from the global north collected as part of [Albornoz et al. \(2018\)](#) and how they differ to those found in the policies, definitions and practices of countries belonging to the global south. They found a stark difference in how open science was perceived within the global south, being much more collaboration-oriented, inclusive and socially anchored than what the main observations were from the global north.

[UNESCO \(2021\)](#) emphasizes that open science should help ensure equity, fairness, diversity and inclusiveness among researchers from developed and developing countries alike. [Chtena et al. \(2023\)](#) report that although most open science policies in Europe and the Americas mention the need for equity and public participation in science, concrete guidance on how they can be achieved in practice is lacking. [Arthur et al. \(2023\)](#) also argue that achieving equity will require dialogue with multiple stakeholders and increased focus on the principles of openness and justice.

Recently, there have been several debates and discussions among researchers to make open science more equitable ([Arthur et al., 2023](#); [Klebel and Ross-Hellaeur, 2023](#)). To achieve equitable OA publishing, researchers would not be limited by cost, language barriers, gender

disparities, and other factors associated with inequity. Klebel and Ross-Hellauer (2023) found that researchers from institutions with more resources are likely to publish in journals with higher APCs. Similarly, Ross-Hellauer *et al.* (2022) found that APC-based OA publishing entrenches stratifications, as well-resourced researchers can cover the highest APCs, while the less-resourced cannot. This makes the APC-based model of OA publishing practically impossible and problematic for authors in developing countries (Adegbilero-Iwari, 2024). If the journals part of TAs eventually flip to becoming full OA journals, this paywall for authorship would become even more widespread. This suggests that researchers from institutions with limited resources, particularly those from the global south, are systematically excluded from participating in open science as a result of higher APCs.

Transformative agreement contract analysis

Borrego *et al.* (2020) studied 36 agreements that were active and publicly available at the time of data collection in April 2020. The study found that the contract terms differed a lot between agreements, highlighting that TAs span a wide umbrella rather than being something with a strict type of implementation. Similar findings were also reported by Marcaccio and Centivany (2022), who studied a sample of 14 contracts available in the ESAC registry, finding a high degree of heterogeneity in how they approached OA, and that only two of the contracts made any explicit mention of a transition toward OA.

Moskovkin *et al.* (2022) studied the connection between countries signing TAs and their other advancements in the domain of OA (e.g. number of OA journals, repositories and OA policies present in the country) through a regression analysis. They found that activity related to the signing of TAs is positively related to activities in these other dimensions of supporting OA publishing.

The most comprehensive study of the public details available about TAs is provided in a preprint by Rothfritz *et al.* (2024), where ESAC data covering 1,075 TAs spanning the years 2014–2024 from 65 different publishers was analysed. The study established that TAs have been a very Eurocentric phenomenon that, so far, has had its most active year in terms of contracts signed in 2023. The authors found that larger agreements in terms of article volume were usually also longer, and more likely to be renewed within the dataset, suggesting a tendency favoring larger publishing houses. The authors made use of the additional free text information filled into a standardized form by the submitters of TA contract info (often a library or the national consortia). Using both deductive sentiment coding and inductive thematic coding, the study captured the reasoning given within the text answers. The main themes among negative comments were: contract terms, OA exploitation, financial issues, publishing services and author engagement. For positive themes among positive comments: transition and transformation, sustainable regarding costs, no cap, good workflows and transparency.

Insights into transformative agreement negotiations

In the literature, there are a number of first-hand perspectives on publisher negotiations and the organizational or national goals set for OA, which provide insight into the reasoning and long- and short-term goals for engaging with TAs.

The German DEAL project was one of the early national coordination efforts set up in 2014, which set the criterion of only accepting contracts with publishers that can structure their agreements so that no separate reading fee is separated or paid, only a fixed amount paid per article published OA by researchers affiliated with institutions belonging to the consortium that then also includes reading-rights. Hunter (2018:1) provides a description of the early years of the DEAL project, where an “... impatience over the slow progress ... towards open access” is highlighted to be a main driver for putting together the consortium the Alliance of Science Organizations and which was led by Germany’s Rectors’ Conference.

Wideberg and Smith (2017) and Lundén *et al.* (2018) provide background and motivations for Sweden's intense engagement with TAs, having its roots in a government directive set in 2017 for all Swedish publicly funded research to be available OA by 2026. This led to the national library consortium setting strict criteria for any new agreements signed with publishers, where one was OA publishing. At that point challenges with the model were already acknowledged and they were seen as a temporary solution *in lieu* of other alternatives "... are only to be regarded as pilots or transitional models since there is a risk of such agreements becoming permanent, which in turn would threaten to replicate the current lock-in with bundled journal collections tying up a substantial part of library budgets" (Lundén *et al.*, 2018:4).

Hosoi (2021) shares how Pennsylvania Libraries in the USA have developed a process workflow for negotiating OA publishing elements into agreements, and what their list of agreement criteria is that they strive for in such negotiations. Similar to Hosoi (2021), Baldwin and Cavanagh (2024) share how the University of Nottingham Libraries has created new ways of working and systemic tools developed to support specifically the negotiation of TAs by gathering information to support decision-making. Some tension between short and long-term impacts that libraries can find themselves in can be interpreted by the authors concluding that the new processes helps the libraries go into negotiations with confidence and "... fulfilling our stated aims of maximizing publishing opportunities, increasing access to content and mitigating costs" (Baldwin and Cavanagh, 2024:6) while in the next sentence calling for a sector-wide assessment of where TAs are taking scholarly publishing.

One of the rare sources of this kind that is not from Europe or the USA is Muñoz-Vélez *et al.* (2024), which reports on the approach that The Colombia Consortium has taken into managing the negotiations of TAs covering 63 institutions. A summarizing statement on why the consortium decided to engage with TAs can be found in the following "[...], the agreements not only generate greater visibility and scientific impact of the academic production of the Consortium institutions in the global academic community, but also open the door to discussions, including at the Latin American level, on Open Science and access to knowledge by society, beyond universities and research centers." (Muñoz-Vélez *et al.*, 2024:94).

ESAC has published guidelines for TAs that stem from their community, that contain five central points: TAs are temporary and transitional, authors retain copyright, agreements must be transparent, TAs aim to constrain costs of scholarly communication and foster equity in scholarly publishing and TAs should govern service and workflow requirements for publishers to ensure that the needs of authors and administrators are addressed (ESAC, 2025).

In her doctoral dissertation, Šimuković (2023) presents an extensive analysis of the negotiations concerning OA publishing between Elsevier and the Association of Cooperating Universities in the Netherlands. Through science policy analysis and conducted interviews, she captures the extensive set of events that unfolded, highlighting the actors and their motivations through different stages of the process. Key themes driving the innovative TA that was negotiated with Elsevier were, in particular, striving for alignment with science policy, cost efficiency, sustainability and enabling wider societal access to publicly funded research publications.

From the sources reviewed in this entire previous research section, we were able to identify a number of motivational reasonings for why open science, OA, and TAs are being supported by different actors. These reasonings are aggregated and presented in Table 1, grouped into seven thematic categories: Equality, economics, management-workflows, licensing, dissemination, systemic transformation and other benefits. In the methodology section, we will further describe how the additional inductive codes were derived from the data, and how this list of motivational reasoning was implemented to code press releases concerning TAs.

Table 1. Reasonings for signing transformational agreements identified from the literature and inductive analysis of collected press releases

Motivational reasoning	Source(s)
Equality	
Access to knowledge is more equally distributed	Moore (2017), Fecher and Friesike (2014), Alborno <i>et al.</i> (2018), Alborno and Chan (2018) Moore (2017)
Enabling fairer access to paid OA options for authors across the research disciplines (within the agreement)	Alborno and Chan (2018)
Integrating diverse scientific traditions and ways of knowing into scientific production	Alborno and Chan (2018), UNESCO (2021)
Addressing the role of power and inequality in knowledge production and sharing	UNESCO (2021)
Equitable in general	
<i>Economics</i>	
Transparent prices	Rothfritz <i>et al.</i> (2024), ESAC (2025)
Cost effective	Moore (2017), Baldwin and Cavanagh (2024), Šimukovič (2023)
Sustainable regarding costs	Rothfritz <i>et al.</i> (2024), Šimukovič (2023)
Control and redirection of funding streams, gain control of total cost of publication	Wideberg and Smith (2017), Lundén <i>et al.</i> (2018), Baldwin and Cavanagh (2024), ESAC (2025)
Publicly funded research is made immediately available for everyone	Wideberg and Smith (2017), Alborno <i>et al.</i> (2018), Šimukovič (2023)
<i>Management-workflows</i>	
Good workflows enabled by the publisher, simplified terms and management	Rothfritz <i>et al.</i> (2024), Pinhasi <i>et al.</i> (2018), ESAC (2025)
OA accessibility and author engagement	Rothfritz <i>et al.</i> (2024), Šimukovič (2023)
Customized solution provided	Inductive
Building relationship ties between publishers and institutions	Inductive
<i>Licensing</i>	
Liberal licensed/enabling reuse	Moore (2017)
Copyright retention	ESAC (2025)
<i>Dissemination</i>	
Researcher's "responsibility" to disseminate their research	Willinsky (2006) as mentioned in Moore (2017)
Maximizing publishing opportunities	Baldwin and Cavanagh (2024)
Greater visibility, public access, or scientific impact	Fecher and Friesike (2014), Muñoz-Vélez <i>et al.</i> (2024)
Increasing access to content through OA	Baldwin and Cavanagh (2024), Šimukovič (2023)
<i>Systemic transformation</i>	
Transition and transformation towards OA	Hunter (2018), Rothfritz <i>et al.</i> (2024), ESAC (2025), Šimukovič (2023)
Sustainable model	Šimukovič (2023)
<i>Other benefits</i>	
Benefits to society	Alborno and Chan (2018), Alborno <i>et al.</i> (2018), Šimukovič (2023), Muñoz-Vélez <i>et al.</i> (2024) t
Benefits to the researchers of the own institution	Inductive
Benefits to the research system	Inductive
Benefits in aligning with science policy	Šimukovič (2023), Wideberg and Smith (2017), Lundén <i>et al.</i> (2018)

Use of press releases to study power dynamics between actors

To tap into a better understanding of the power dynamics involved in TA negotiations and how these can be observable through press releases, it is necessary to establish the general positions and power that the negotiating parties have at stake. The power dynamics involved in TA agreements are complex, as they bundle both reading access and the right for affiliated authors

to publish their works OA with the publisher into one single agreement, where these two elements are related yet carry different functions and dependencies for each party. We will apply the theoretical lens of supply chains, markets, and power by [Cox et al. \(2001\)](#) since it is capable of incorporating many of the dimensions that are relevant to the environment of scholarly journals, like the concept of the “Janus-faced corporation” (p. 15) where consideration for how to create lock-in and customer dependency starts already at the supply-side to then be fully realized on the market side in terms of financial revenue and future market power. TA customer institutions are not just end-consumers paying invoices, but also critical content-creation supply chain resources for publishers in terms of striving to incentivize authors to increasingly offer their best research for publication consideration, which further makes the journals that the publisher holds more irreplaceable to the wider scholarly communities.

Publishers are in a strong negotiating position as they hold and have control of critical resources in the eyes of the customers, which carry a high degree of utility and scarcity, which are the distinctions of supply chain power according to [Cox et al. \(2001\)](#). This takes shape in two major ways. First, the content that is published behind paywalls cannot be comprehensively accessed in any other way or be substituted by accessing research published in other journals. Second, since large publishers own portfolios of thousands of journals, many of which are key outlets within their disciplines where authors compete to get published, with no direct substitutes for those particular mechanisms for OA publishing, dissemination, community-interaction and merit-accumulation that a TA with a specific publisher can enable. With OA policies at national and institutional levels in many cases demanding OA publishing also play into this dynamic, by creating circumstances for negotiation where OA publishing needs to be bundled as part of the agreement, making it a TA deal or no deal at all.

Moving over to consider how this power dynamic might be expressed within the statements found within the press releases, there is not much existing research to lean on to. [Sleurs et al. \(2003\)](#) provide one of the rare focused studies on formulation and function quotations in press releases, suggesting that they are 1) often pseudo-quotes, in the sense that they are not exact words that have been uttered by anyone but can be content that is prepared together with PR representatives of the organizations that is taking care of the rest of the press release, 2) serve a pre-formulative function to facilitate dissemination of the press release content in other mediums and 3) placed in to make the press releases sound a bit more lively compared to having just promotional text. As such, they need to be interpreted through this particular lens, rather than as, e.g. transcripts from a more spontaneous interview with the individual giving a statement.

Research on press release content has mainly been within discourse analysis. [Jacobs \(1999\)](#) and [Lassen \(2006\)](#) have conducted corpus-based discourse studies on press releases in studies exploring the distinct features of texts of this kind. Both studies found that there is a broad spectrum of different approaches, with [Jacobs \(1999\)](#) concluding that the linguistic genre of press releases is very broad and loose in its distinctive features, and [Lassen \(2006\)](#) that press releases are often formulated with easy re-distribution in mind so that journalists can with minimal effort copy or lightly modify the text for inclusion in news reporting and similar mediums. [Liu and Zhang \(2021\)](#) studied how corporate press releases made persuasive attempts by appealing to pathos, ethos and logos, finding that all of them appear to various degrees. For the study presented in the present study, discourse analysis at this level is outside of scope as the focus is on identifying themes of reasonings, but that does not exclude the possibility that future studies could go one step deeper in looking at purely the discursive elements of the press releases. Something that is also left unresolved by the present study is establishing how representative press releases are to convey intentions and motivations for making agreements. Particularly as they often come in the form of joint press releases, where opposing negotiating parties have signed a common agreement, but often utilizing the publishers channels to distribute the joint release. This would be something that future qualitative research should explore since here we are limited to the static textual artefacts.

To bring some insight into these broad themes with the dataset at hand, we are interested in looking at how the themes in the press release statements relate to each of the two sides of the market that publishers engage with, selling read access to paywalled content, and selling access for affiliated authors to publish OA. And since the research on press releases is generally ambiguous on who the target audience for corporate press releases is, we will, through our thematic analysis, shed some light on where this specific category seems targeted at.

Methodology

For this study, we were interested in studying the public communications related to the five largest publishers that have engaged with TAs, Elsevier, Springer Nature, Taylor & Francis, Sage, and Wiley.

Between March 13th and June 12th 2024, we consulted various sources to aggregate a comprehensive dataset of press releases relating to TAs signed with the five publishers mentioned earlier in this section. These included:

- (1) The STM Publishing Press Release Archive, specifically press releases tagged with the “open access” tag <https://www.stm-publishing.com/category/openaccess/>
- (2) Open Access Tracking Project, specifically items tagged with the “OA negotiations” tag <http://tagteam.harvard.edu/hubs/oatp/tag/oa.negotiations>
- (3) Publisher-maintained press release archives where relevant items could be identified, i.e. <https://www.elsevier.com/about/press-releases/collection/all>
- (4) Using Google with the search phrase “publisher negotiation open access < publisher name> +press release”, as well as “publisher agreement open access < publisher name> + press release” for each publisher name

For this study, we were only interested in announcements of signed new TAs or intents to imminently sign an agreement. The final dataset consisted of 95 press releases, which can be accessed through an open dataset ([Laakso and Ayeni, 2025](#)).

Press release coding process

Nvivo 14 and Nvivo 15 were used for coding, with features that are present across both versions. Contents of all press releases were coded by both authors independently, with the codes identified from the existing literature that were presented earlier in [Table 1](#). This deductive starting point was implemented to build upon and connect directly to existing research where possible. Furthermore, the coders were to be observant and code reasonings within the press release statements that did not fit into any of the existing codes, thus also introducing an opportunity for inductive findings rather than staying within the confines of the predefined codes. After both coders had completed coding all press releases, discussions were held about how to organize and name the new reasonings and codes that were not present from the start, and reach a common agreement on these.

Dataset characteristics

Distribution of the 95 press releases per continent per publisher is presented in [Figure 1](#). The press releases were published between 2015 and 2024.

[Table 2](#) presents the breakdown of statements provided within the 95 collected press releases. The majority of press releases contained one statement per party (publisher + customer), but other variations were also found, where e.g. only one party provides a statement, or there are multiple statements given by one party.

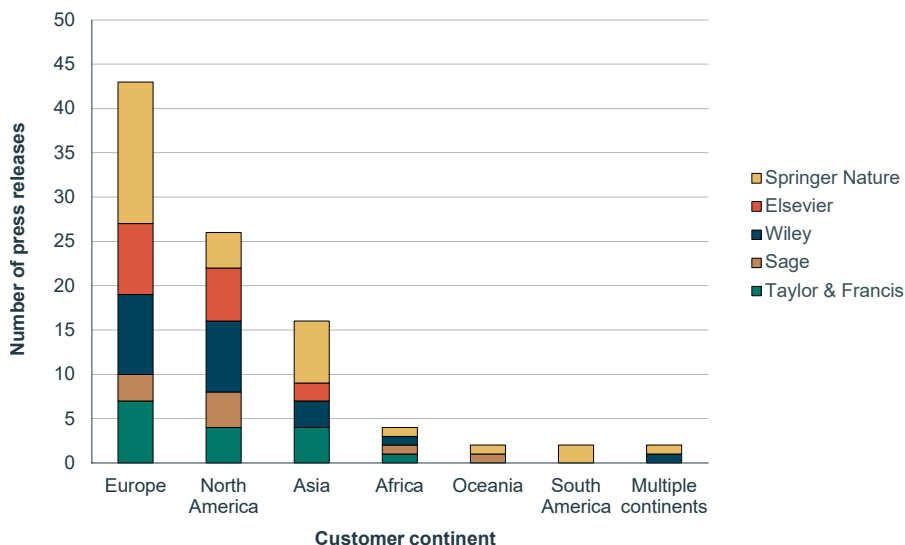


Figure 1. Distribution of the 95 press releases per continent per publisher. Source: Authors' own creation using Microsoft Excel version 2506

Table 2. Count of statements within the press releases`

Subset	Count
Total number of press releases	95
Includes a customer statement	86
Includes a publisher statement	82
Releases with statements from both publisher and customer	74
Releases with statements from only publishers	8
Releases with statements from only customers	13
Releases with multiple customer statements	9
Releases with multiple publisher statements	2

Inter-coder reliability

To assess the degree of agreement between the coders (the authors), inter-coder reliability testing was performed using Cohen's Kappa score. Inter-coder reliability is a "numerical measure of the agreement between different coders regarding how the same data should be coded" (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020:2). We followed a high-level process involving three steps of ICR proposed and used in existing studies (Burla *et al.*, 2008; MacPhail *et al.*, 2016): developing a coding scheme, evaluating the ICR, and conducting a final review. The ICR function in Nvivo, which incorporates Cohen's Kappa calculation, showed that the average overall unweighted Kappa score across all documents and the lower-level final codes was 0.866, which indicates a high level of agreement of applied and unapplied codes across the text segments. To finalize the coding into one unified set, the coders met and discussed their diverging assessments and disagreements until they were resolved.

After coding was finalized, we calculated the average and median number of codes that were applied per statement, where the median was 3 for both customers and publishers, and the average 3.65 for customers and 2.93 for publishers.

Results

The main descriptive results concerning individual code occurrence in the dataset, split by customer and publisher statements, are provided in [Table 3](#). Please note that the totals of each theme are not equal to the absolute sum of all individual codes under that theme since many statements were coded with different codes belonging to the same theme.

[Figures 2 and 3](#) provide a glance at the 100 most common words within the customer and publisher statements, respectively. The word clouds were generated using the default settings for this visualization function in Nvivo, which creates word stems and ignores stopwords. Names of individuals were manually removed from the list of frequent words. These visualizations provide a glimpse into the positive, aspirational and high-level language often used by both customers and publishers. Customers have an emphasis on their own environment with prominently featured words such as university, library, institutions, community and authors, while publishers often highlight aspects such as partnership, commitment and their enabling role.

In the following, we provide the results of a code theme relative weight and co-occurrence analysis, exploring how frequently codes belonging to different themes appeared within press releases and what degree of overlap there was between them. To make this analysis more

Table 3. Number of individual coding references in the dataset

Codes	Customer	Publisher
<i>Dissemination</i>	77	77
Greater visibility or scientific impact	34	48
Increasing access to content through immediate OA	42	29
Maximizing publishing opportunities	28	21
<i>Economics</i>	39	4
Control and redirection of funding streams, gain control of total cost of publication	10	0
Cost effective	16	0
Publicly funded research is made immediately available for everyone	6	1
Sustainable regarding costs	21	3
Transparent prices	4	0
<i>Equality</i>	36	16
Access to knowledge is more equally distributed	17	4
Addressing the role of power and inequality in knowledge production and sharing	2	2
Enabling fairer access to paid OA options for authors across the research disciplines (within the institution)	19	12
Integrating diverse scientific traditions and ways of knowing into scientific production	2	0
Equitable in general	3	1
<i>Licensing</i>	5	3
Liberal licensed – enabling reuse	1	3
Copyright retention	4	0
<i>Management-workflows</i>	26	25
Workflows enabled by the publisher	2	2
Customized solution provided	4	11
OA accessibility and author engagement	20	9
Building relationship ties between publishers and institutions	4	5
<i>Systemic transformation</i>	35	38
Sustainable model	7	16
Transition and transformation towards OA	32	34
<i>Other benefits</i>	33	34
Benefits in aligning with science policy	7	2
Benefits to society	8	13
Benefits to the research system	7	10
Benefits to the researchers of the customer institution	14	14

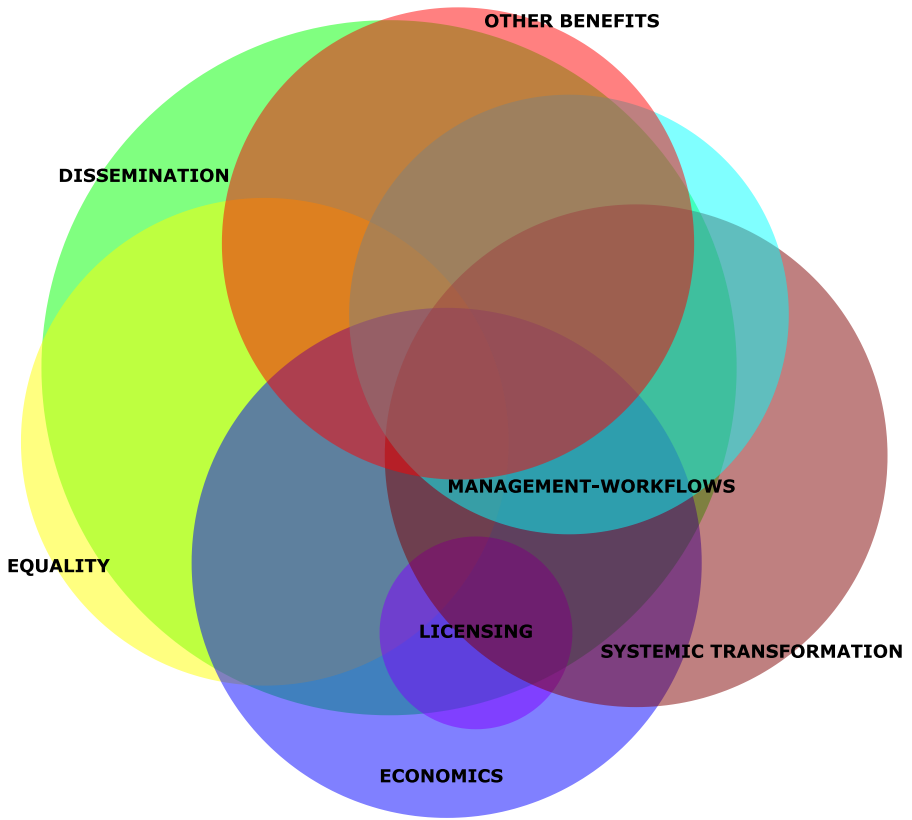


Figure 4. Themes in press release statements by customers. Produced by the authors using DeepVenn (Hulslen, 2022)

Based on [Figure 4](#), the most common theme from customers in the press releases relates to dissemination, which has overlaps with all other themes to various degrees. Economics and systematic transformation had the highest shares of statements relating only to those themes exclusively.

From [Figure 5](#), we can see that the publisher themes differ proportionally from that of the customers. While they share dissemination being the largest theme, the publishers more often have that as the only theme in their press release statements. Systemic transformation was the second most common theme, with more overlap with other themes compared to customer statements, suggesting that statements include various other types of argumentation rather than just talking about systemic transformation. What is particularly notable is the very small share of statements that include the theme of economics, and in particular, in comparison with customer statements for which the theme was very prominent.

Analysis of individual coded themes

In this section, we review the findings attached to each broader theme and present details with excerpts from the press release statements for all individual codes that accrued 10 or more total codes within the dataset. We make reference to individual TAs in the format of Year-Publisher-Country to distinguish between them.

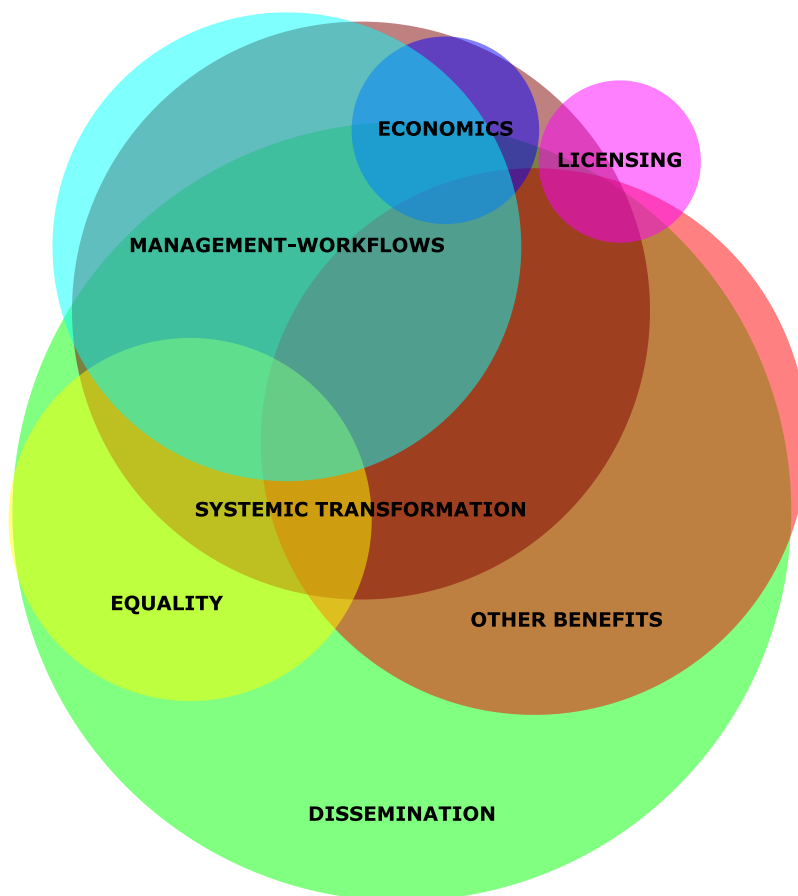


Figure 5. Themes in press statements by publishers. Produced by the authors using DeepVenn (Hulsen, 2022)

Dissemination

The most frequently appearing code theme in the entire dataset was dissemination, with roughly equally strong prevalence across the publisher and customer statements.

Greater visibility or scientific impact

One of the frequently discussed motivations for signing the TA deals by the customer and publisher representatives is ensuring greater visibility of research outputs for scientific impact. The statements from the customers showed a strong desire to make locally produced research openly accessible globally, e.g. “*I am excited about this opportunity for more California scholars, from UC and beyond, to make their work freely available so that people around the globe can benefit from and build on their discoveries.*” (2024 Wiley USA), and “*South Africa’s research will become more visible as Wiley’s hybrid journals transition toward full open access.*” (2022 Wiley South Africa). Most of the publishers’ discussions about greater visibility and impact centered around scientific discovery and progress. For instance, a publisher’s representative put it in the following way “*... this deal deepens our commitment to a truly open future, one which we believe is key to advancing scientific discovery and delivering real life benefits for all.*” (2021 Springer Nature Spain).

Increasing access to content through immediate OA

Over the entire dataset, the most discussed motivation for signing TA deals by the customer representatives was increasing access to scholarly content. Representatives of universities and research-performing organizations noted that the agreements would provide more OA publications for their researchers. Some examples of customer statements: “*It is good for Danish research that we have reached a solution which ensures immediate OA to publications in Elsevier journals from Danish universities, [...]*” (2020 Elsevier Denmark), and “*We are committed to achieving full OA by 2024 and this agreement is a big step towards that objective.*” (2020 Elsevier Switzerland). An example of a publisher statement assigned this code includes: “*We are incredibly proud that our current agreement with Bibsam has enabled over 90% of research content to be published OA, covering a large proportion of Sweden’s research output.*” (2022 Springer Nature Sweden).

Maximizing publishing opportunities

Several customer representatives noted how the TA deals would foster increasing OA publishing in hybrid journals while removing the threshold of APC for authors, e.g. “*As the agreement allows unlimited publishing in hybrid journals, we can look forward to many more open access publications from Swedish researchers in social sciences and humanities.*” (2020 Sage Sweden), and “*This contract will enable researchers to increase the number of articles they can publish OA whilst reducing exposure to additional spend, making UK research more accessible and more sustainable – which in these times is absolutely essential.*” (2021 Springer Nature UK).

Publisher statements were relatively similar in content and style to the ones from customers for this code, e.g. “[...] *we have been able to agree on a solution which will enable scientists in Germany, whether from small or large institutes, whether from the hard or social sciences or humanities, to publish OA with us.*” (2020 Springer Nature Germany), and “*We are incredibly proud to have agreed this TA with FinELIB—one which will support Finnish researchers with OA publication in a wide selection of high-quality global OA journals, [...]*” (2022 Springer Nature Finland).

Economics

The coding theme of economics was the most divisive between the publisher and customer statements, where customer statements were more strongly represented. Overall, customers often mentioned a mix of short- and long-term economic motivations for signing the agreements.

Control and redirection of funding streams, gain control of the total cost of publication.

No publisher statements included this reasoning, suggesting that it serves mainly the customer perspective and motivations to sign such agreements.

For customers, an economic motivation commonly expressed in the press release statements was the strivance to gain a better insight and control into the monetary flows that go into the direction of a publisher, e.g. “[...] *we will gain control over the rising expenses. This is an important step in the transition to open science. [...] An important piece of the puzzle in the transition to an openly available science system is that the payment flows are redirected, [...]*” (2019 Elsevier Sweden), and “*... it puts an end to hybrid APC payments by authors in parallel to library subscription payment [...] it enables greater financial control as pre-payments decrease each year.*” (Springer Nature, 2020 Germany).

Not many statements indicated what, if any, new investments would be made with the funds saved, with one exception: “[...] *freed up collection budgets to make meaningful reinvestments in open access initiatives and infrastructure.*” (Elsevier Canada 2021).

Cost effective

This code was applied when the statements contained expressions for the agreements being able to provide a cost-effective solution. Like with the previous code, it was only customer

statements that were found to include this reasoning. The following are examples of statements where this code was applied: “*The resulting deal builds on the success of the first three-year agreement and will continue to deliver cost and administrative efficiencies to UK researchers and their institutions.*” (2019 Springer UK), and “*Our main objective for this agreement was to increase open access publishing options as cost effectively as possible, . . .*”. (2021 Elsevier Denmark).

Sustainable regarding costs

We could identify a number of statements that indicate a particular form of financial argument – that these agreements are framed as sustainable concerning costs. Both customers and publishers were found to incorporate this reasoning, with it being substantially more common among the customer statements.

The following excerpts from customer statements illustrate cases for which this code was applied: “*There is greater than ever imperative for such agreements to meet our open access expectations and to be financially sustainable for the sector.*” (2019 Springer Nature UK), “*We have achieved our goal of finding a sustainable model for German institutions and Wiley.*” (2023 Wiley Germany).

The publisher statements were similar in tone, as exemplified by these excerpts: “*Sustainability is at the core of our licensing program, and this decrease in costs sets the stage for a future where more content is available as open access, [. . .]*” (2021 Elsevier Canada), and “*This deal is testament not only to our strong partnerships and experience in delivering sustainable national transformative deals, but also to our commitment to finding achievable pathways, for all economies, to open science*” (2021 Springer Egypt).

Equality

Five subthemes are discussed below under the general theme of equality, a theme where customer statements appeared more frequently than those of publishers.

Access to knowledge is more equally distributed

There are several discussions on how the TAs have helped to ensure equitable access to knowledge among participating universities and research institutions. Customer representatives expressed it in, e.g. the following ways: “*This groundbreaking agreement will allow for more open, equitable access to information.*” (2021 Elsevier USA), “[. . .] *ensuring their research is immediately and permanently available to all readers without barriers.*” (2023 T&F Ireland), and “[. . .] *ensuring access to learning materials for all students, irrespective of their institution.*”. (2021 Springer USA).

From the publishers’ perspectives, equity in access to of information in several instances highlighted traditionally disadvantaged groups in terms of access, e.g. “*The partnership enables affiliated researchers from South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia to access an extensive range of journals and empowers them to publish their work in an open-access format for global reach, visibility, and impact.*” (2024 T&F South Africa), and “*This TA is important in allowing these schools to begin building up their publishing impact. It also enables Black college students to have access to the same content as their peers at non-HBCU institutions.*” (2024 Springer Nature USA).

Enabling fairer access to paid OA options for authors across the research disciplines (within the institution)

Across the universities and research institutions signing the TA, there are several discussions on how the deal would help in reducing the cost barriers being faced by researchers who want to publish OA but have limited funding to do so. An example of this includes the following customer representative statement: “*Moreover, it opens venues for open access publishing to*

disciplines lacking the supplemental resources to pay directly for such access, giving a broader reach to academics from across the institution.” (2023 Elsevier USA). Similar statements also echoed from the publishers’ perspective, e.g. “SAGE is committed to providing accessible publishing routes to open access and in championing social and behavioral science researchers who historically receive less funding than others.” (2022 Sage Australia).

Licensing

There was surprisingly little mention of licenses within the statements, only found within one customer statement and in a couple of instances for the publisher statements. Copyright retention of scholarly works was only evident in the press statements released by the customer representatives from some universities in USA and Africa.

Management-workflows

Since the start of publishers introducing a mix of different business models for their journals, as well as individually negotiated package deals and discounts with institutional customers, the management and optimization of such workflows has been a persistent challenge.

Customized solution provided

It was particularly publishers that often brought up their capability to provide customized solutions, often framed as groundbreaking or innovative, as something that facilitated the forming of an agreement.

Some example customer statements include: “*The collaboration and flexibility from both sides led to a truly tailored approach, . . .*” (2021 Elsevier USA 2), and “*We thank Elsevier for developing such a flexible framework that offers choice and helps address the needs of individual universities.*” (2023 Elsevier Japan).

Publisher statements with this code included: “*Both sides showed flexibility to reach a truly tailored approach, based on the needs of the research-intensive UC community, [. . .]*” (2021 Elsevier USA), and “*We are delighted to be working together with this group to develop new transformational agreement models and processes that could have a wider application across the world.*” (2022 Wiley USA 2).

OA accessibility and author engagement

The benefit of TAs for enabling OA accessibility and increasing author engagement with OA publishing options had stronger representation from customer statements, but a group of publisher statements also contained this reasoning.

Examples from customer statements include: “*The deal displays the effectiveness of open access publishing making it as simple as possible for researchers and universities.*” (2019 Springer Nature UK), and “*IREL is very happy to proceed with this major agreement, which will help thousands of Irish authors easily make their work open access upon publication*” (2021 Wiley Ireland).

Publisher statements with this code included: “*By making it easy for researchers, 77% of our UK corresponding authors’ work is now available for free immediately at the point of publication (Gold OA) [. . .]*” (2019 Springer Nature UK), “*It’s part of our commitment to distribute research as widely as possible and simplify the publishing process for authors across Europe.*” (2020 Sage Sweden).

Systemic transformation

The systemic transformation theme is grounded in the coded reasoning being built on a long-term framing that often goes beyond the immediate contract that has been signed.

Sustainable model

This code was applied when the reasoning alluded to TA models as a sustainable path, not just economically but rather on a higher level. Both customers and publishers had a number of statements that included this, but it was particularly prominent among publishers.

Some example customer statements include: “*Enabling more Egyptian researchers to take advantage of access to world-class publications and the ability to sustainably publish their high quality research open access for global dissemination, ...*” (2021 Springer Nature Egypt), “*This agreement advances UC’s goal to accelerate the shift to a more open, fair, transparent and sustainable scholarly communication system.*” (2022 Sage USA 2).

Publisher statements with this code include: “*TA’s are a key driver in the sustainable transition to OA.*” (2021 Springer Nature Spain), “*This agreement is a significant step towards a sustainable transition to immediate open access for UK research ...*” (2022 Elsevier Jisc).

Transition and transformation towards OA

This code had a close to equally strong presence among both customer and publisher statements. What the exact object of the transformation is interpreted as seems to differ between actors: journals, publishers, country article output, agreements or the broader journal publishing system.

Some example customer statements include: “*This is an important step in the transition to open science.*” (2019 Elsevier Sweden), “*Most importantly, this agreement lays the groundwork for authors and research institutions to make Open Access the default in scholarly communication.*” (2020 Springer Nature Germany), “*South Africa’s research will become more visible as Wiley’s hybrid journals transition toward full open access.*” (2022 Wiley South Africa).

Publisher statements with this code include: “*This agreement accelerates the transition to open access in the Netherlands.*” (2016 Wiley The Netherlands), “*We know from experience the truly transformational effect these agreements can have with our existing deals seeing entire countries’ research output being ‘flipped’ from being subscription access to being immediately available to all.*” (2021 Springer Nature Australia).

Other benefits

Benefits to society

Publishers had a stronger representation among statements including this code. Many statements from both customers and publishers included direct references to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was positioned as an argument for why an increase in OA is needed to deal with the health and societal challenges presented by the widespread disease.

Customer statements included: “*The COVID-19 pandemic is the latest example of how global problems are best solved when we can easily share research results across sectors and national borders.*” (2020 Elsevier Denmark), “*The last 18 months have shown us, more than ever, the need to provide and support immediate access to research and knowledge to help make new discoveries and make timely advances in medicine and climate knowledge. [...]*” (2021 Springer Nature Egypt).

Publisher statements included: “*The importance of helping researchers advance science and improve health outcomes for the benefit of society has never been more critical, and we are committed to playing our part in making Danish research output available to all.*” (Elsevier Denmark 2021), “*We recognize the importance of increasing transparency and accessibility of scientific research so that it can help inform societies and policymakers worldwide*” (2023 Sage USA).

Benefits to the research system

Several statements from both customers and publishers reasoned that the signed TAs will benefit the research system at large.

Customer statements included: “As more universities and research institutions support open access, scientific knowledge will advance at an unparalleled pace.” (2021 Elsevier USA), “[. . .], we hope to contribute to the growing global open access movement and promote more organic exchanges of knowledge between Korean and international researchers through a continuous collaboration with Wiley.” (2022 Wiley South Korea).

Publisher statements with this code include: “In this new landscape, we support the ambitions of all community stakeholders, including researchers, funders and institutions – by facilitating greater openness and ultimately increased reproducibility.” (2016 Wiley The Netherlands).

Benefits to the researchers of the own institution(s)

This reasoning appeared almost with equal balance between the customer and publisher statements. Some example customer statements include:

“IREL is very happy to proceed with this major agreement, which will help thousands of Irish authors easily make their work open access upon publication” (2021 Wiley Ireland), and “We’re looking forward to strengthening the relationship with Sage and working collaboratively to provide great outcomes for local researchers.” (2022 Sage Australia).

Publisher statements with this code included: “This pilot contract with KEMÖ is a great opportunity to explore new ways to support their researchers to share their research globally, [. . .].” (2021 Elsevier Austria), “Our agreement with UC delivers a real win for the world-class researchers across the UC system, supporting them to publish open access and read high quality, trusted research by others in Elsevier journals.” (2021 Elsevier USA).

Discussion and conclusions

From the results, it is clear that even a distinct OA publishing model, OA as facilitated through TAs, carries a lot of different expectations and motivations even among a fairly homogenous group of stakeholders (consortia/library/university representatives as customers, and sales executives from commercial publishers). [Fecher and Friesike \(2014\)](#) and [Moore \(2017\)](#) both emphasized the diversity of perspectives that co-exists in relation to open science and OA, respectively, a diversity that can be beneficial in enabling diverse actors to work together on common things despite not having the exact same reasons or points of emphasis in doing so. While factors related to broader dissemination and economics were among the strongest unified reasonings among customer statements, there was still a wealth of other, more diverse reasonings given that all had the common element of reasoning for the engagement with TAs. Compared to the most similar previous study analyzing customer-side free-text comments in ESAC ([Rothfritz et al., 2024](#)), the results share many similarities. By having used the inductively identified themes from the earlier study as part of the data material to construct the codebook for this study, it is possible to confirm that all themes from the earlier study, both the positive and negative, got strong support also through the client’s reasonings within the press releases.

Aspects related to equality and systemic transformation were frequently mentioned by customers, but both being complex concepts the statements only get into limited depth concerning each. The perspective of customers in general spanned the immediate own environment (one’s own researchers, and the national research environment) or the abstract global wider society and research system. Not much attention is given to cross-cutting intermediate levels, such as disciplinary researcher communities, or other actors in the broader journal publishing landscape outside the bounds of the agreement(s). Interestingly, we found a fundamental ambiguity in how the “transformative” element of TAs was operationalized in the press releases, similar to that of [Borrego et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Marcaccio and Centivany \(2022\)](#) through their TA contract analysis, as different statements seem to point to different things. Some statements discussed them as transforming agreements themselves (from reading to authorship), journals (from subscription to full OA), and some in the context of transforming

country publishing output (from being closed access to OA). Concerning the equity theme, the main facet concerned increased equal global reading access that is offered to content published through the agreements. Deeper inclusivity, as aspects related to open science, such as incentivizing the design of inclusive infrastructures as mentioned in [Albornoz and Chan \(2018\)](#) were nowhere to be found within the statements.

We found that some international external factors were also used within the reasoning narratives in the statements. One such aspect mentioned several times was COVID-19, for motivating the advancement of OA from both customers and publishers. Alignment with surrounding science policy and ensuring compliance with such broader contexts was also mentioned by both customers and publishers, giving examples such as cOAlition S with the PlanS initiative, Wellcome Trust policy compliance and several national OA policies.

If we consider what the study can contribute towards knowledge in the realm of power dynamics between the two stakeholder groups as per the theoretical lens of the Janus-faced corporation by [Cox et al. \(2001\)](#) described earlier, there are some key insights that can be drawn from the results.

The traditional selling of subscription-based read access to paywalled content has long been widely critiqued for being opaque in pricing, with individually negotiated institutional deals with non-disclosure clauses hindering information sharing between customers. The addition of escalating individual fees paid for hybrid OA further added to the economic pressure and dissatisfaction of the customers. The introduction of TAs has brought with it a change in this aspect of the power balance, as evidenced by the strong emphasis on customers bringing up economic reasonings such as transparency, cost-effectiveness, sustainability, and increased control of funding streams and very little of those being brought up by any publisher. There is now a more open and collaborative environment for information sharing of full contract details among customers, particularly within the ESAC network but also informally between institutions and consortia. In that sense, customers have gained more control over something where publishers used to have complete information about the pricing and terms found in the agreements with all customers.

If we consider the other side of the Janus-face, the supply side of manuscripts towards publishers, that seems to be an area where one could interpret publishers, on the other hand, to have gained power and ground through the introduction of TAs, but seemingly so in cooperation with the customers. Both publishers and customers brought up dissemination benefits and establishing efficient workflows and making OA as accessible for authors within their statements, something which does work in the favor of the supply-side of publishers, particularly during these pioneering years of TAs where not every publisher has moved as quickly to roll them out, together with technological solutions that facilitate a smooth end-user experience for researchers.

Somewhat a surprise was the similarity in framing and reasoning given between many customer and publisher statements. In several statements customers praise the publishers using language and expression that is more familiar to how publishers tend to market and describe themselves, and on the other hand, many publisher statements narratively place themselves as working in a very direct way with researchers and their immediate interests, language that customer institutions commonly also use since they often represent the employers of said researchers.

Despite this study being rich in having a large number of statements from both customers and publishers, it is limited in its capacity to unravel insight beyond TAs and particularly in the form that the actors want to disclose such information publicly in the form of a press release. Previous research has shown that TAs should also not be considered in a vacuum when drawing holistic conclusions about their use and role among institutions and countries that engage with them. As [Moskovkin et al. \(2022\)](#) found, countries engaged with signing TAs are also more often engaged with other forms of OA advancement. Countries advance OA in a number of ways and TAs are often just one, albeit cost-wise large, part of it. As such it would be interesting to find out more holistic reasonings for engaging with different forms of OA within

an institution or country, and what role TAs are seen as having within a broader portfolio of different OA advancement mechanisms.

Through the thematic analysis of reasonings related to TAs in this study we have aimed to lay the groundwork for both continued research on TAs, as well as on other existing and still to emerge OA publishing models. The identified themes used for categorizing the reasonings can be applied into any such new context to study how emphasis is distributed among them among a specific population. Future qualitative research continuing in the line of inquiry on TAs should seek to gain interview access to informants engaging with signing TAs, who could, through the veil of anonymity, provide richer reflections on TAs and reasonings concerning them than public statements provided.

Perhaps due to the purpose, format and tone of press releases, or perhaps due to perspectives at least at the time of signing the agreements reflecting this, there was an overall strong commitment to the TA model as a sustainable future path towards OA among both customers and publishers. The reduced friction, if not to the point of incentivization, for researchers to publish in journals part of TAs they are privy to, strengthens the market position of publishers offering TA agreements with smooth workflows. In future negotiations, there is not just reading access on the line but also authorship, which raises the stakes and power in the hands of a few publishers.

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