Scholarly publishing, peer review and the Internet

Peter Roberts

Abstract

The Internet is arguably one of the most significant technological developments of the late 20th century. From its modest beginnings some decades ago - where the use of networked computers was largely limited to a select group of technical specialists in research institutions, the military and government - to the present situation, with a complex global grid of more than 50 million users, the Internet has become an increasingly important medium of communication in a variety of public and private spheres. In the international academic community the arrival of the Internet has received a mixed reception, with responses ranging from unbridled enthusiasm to outright hostility. My preferred stance is one of cautious optimism. This paper addresses one domain of academic activity where I believe such a stance might be appropriate, namely, scholarly publishing. A number of different forms of writing in cyberspace are identified, and some of the arguments in favour of moving from print-based publishing to electronic environments are assessed. The paper reinforces the need for rigorous systems of peer review in scholarly work, and considers possible futures for serials in cyberspace.

Full Text:

Open-access is a model for publishing scholarly, peer-reviewed journals on the Internet that relies on sources of funding other than subscription fees. Some publishers and editors have exploited the author-pays model of open-access, publishing for their own profit. Submissions are encouraged through widely distributed e-mails on behalf of a growing number of journals that may accept many or all submissions and subject them to little, if any, peer review or editorial oversight. Bogus conference invitations are distributed in a similar fashion. The results of these less than ethical practices might be...