THE JBBA

INTERVIEW

OPEN ACCESS
ISSN Online: 2516-3957
ISSN Print: 2516-3949
https://doi.org/10.31585/jbba-5-2-(5)2022

Open Access Blockchain and Cryptoasset Research:
Why it matters now more than ever before

An Interview with Professor Naseem Naqvi, Editor in Chief of The JBBA

Correspondence: editorial@thejbba.com
Published: 06 August 2022

Q1: Why should policymakers care about Open Access?

Approximately $2.3 trillion is spent each year funding 8 million scientists to produce 2 million research papers. $10 billion a year is then spent globally by universities to access scientific research which is published in subscription journals - that is approximately $5000 per article. UC Berkley alone spends approximately $30 million each year to access paywall, subscription journals. The vast majority of this is public research, which was already funded by taxpayers, who must then pay again to access the research outcomes. Einstein once said that, if he was able to see far it was because he was standing on the shoulders of giants; We cannot stand on the shoulders of giants if the giants are behind a paywall!

Having said that, economics-based access arguments have not (yet) helped us to gain access to an open and equitable knowledge exchange. For policymakers to make timely, evidence-based, and contemporaneous decisions, we need full and immediate open access to quality research.

Q2: Why should researchers care about Open Access?

Science is currently 50% open access and is on track for 70% - but researchers still do not necessarily care about openness and have missed an opportunity to align scholarly activities with larger goals and values [1]. What is the number one priority for a researcher after his or her research is published? – it is to make an IMPACT. The London School of Economics defines impact as "a recorded or otherwise auditable occasion of influence from academic research on an actor, organisation or social process taking place outside the university sector itself – whether in business, government, civil society or elsewhere." [2]. Now imagine the research is behind a paywall and only accessible to those with the ability to pay – will that research ever achieve true global impact?

The open access mantra is a mentality researchers and universities need to embed in their philosophy when upskilling young researchers. Open Access research receives greater exposure which means the practitioners around the globe can immediately start applying findings into action and the public can access these findings. This allows research to be debated by policymakers, taxpayers get value for money, and practitioners worldwide can access ground-breaking research outputs without having to worry about paywalls. In most countries, it is now a mandatory funding requirement for research to be made available open access to comply with the grant rules and funder policies. Open access articles also have a 62% citation rates worldwide compared to 38% with subscription articles.

Q3: Is Open Science the same as Open Access?

Open science is so much more than just open access to data. We need to recognise that research outcomes are not just publications - if we want to bring about culture change, we need to focus on transforming scholarly/research processes, not just the products. We must ensure that scholarly networks are inter-connected, and access to knowledge is open, borderless, and readily available. We need to craft open scholarship policies that place universities and scholarship directly in the service for society.

We need a cohesive global approach to Open Science. It is not enough to open the information; Open Science requires the infrastructure to be opened too. In some areas of Blockchain and Crypto research, access to research opportunities, open labs and pastoral support is far more important than access to research papers. Science is the discovery of universal truths, so it makes sense to have the results universally available. Where the system needs resources and funding to facilitate an open access environment, we must avoid preaching to the choir, but rather equip the choir.

Q4: What is the role of enterprises in supporting Open Access blockchain and cryptoasset research?

Enterprises are an essential component of a quadruple helix

innovation ecosystem (with the government, academia and public being the other 3 pillars). Enterprises have the technology, but do they have the courage?

A USAID (US Agency for International Development) study looked at 43 Blockchain projects and companies claiming to have solved various problems using distributed ledgers. The study found that almost no company was willing to share their results and MERL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning) processes [3]. Open access industry research is vital in supporting the mission of unlocking knowledge.

All science will soon be data science and Open Access industry research will play a major role in translating lab data into pragmatic real-world applications for the society. All DLT enterprises and consortia should develop their own shared open-source research-base and have the courage to walk away from closed legacy systems.

Q5: Are we putting too much emphasis on metrics, such as Impact Factor?

We have an epistemological discrimination in academia. That discrimination is also deeply rooted in notions of prestige, power, and impact. While I am a big fan of alternative metrics, such as attention and impact scores, these metrics must not be interpreted in isolation. For example, an Impact Factor tells us the number of citations received by the journal – it tells us nothing about the quality of the author or the research paper under consideration.

Q6: How does Open Access to research benefit the developing economies?

We cannot just dress up Open Access and call it equity. We need to see power. We need to give it over to the communities that would participate in the research, benefit from it and affected by it. More than 50% of JBBA readers come from developing countries – with the journal being fully Open Access, all they need is an access to internet to read and download cutting-edge content from anywhere in the world [4]. We need to engage and create a scholarly communication cycle relevant for local communities. A useful guide to doing and sharing science is thinking in terms of 5 R's:

Respect, Reciprocity, Responsibility, Relevance and Relationships.

Q7: Have we done enough to prioritise Open Access and Open Science? Are incentives aligned?

One of the biggest challenges for next decade is knitting together a cohesive global policy environment for open science. Latin America has a model of Open science (government and universities subsidise research dissemination) for a broader reach. It is a model that we should aspire to, instead of 'wins' elsewhere that extract resources. Creating a common, new way of incentivising outside of impact factor has been a challenge because without indicators we don't have policy. We have adopted Open Access without changing the scholars' behaviour and reward system and may have missed a big opportunity. In Science, particularly Blockchain science, we need to focus on what we need, what we have, what we can use, who is going to use it and for what purpose. These are the fundamental questions to ask for an Open Access advocate.

Q8: With wide variations in regional and local policies, how do we make tangible progress with the Open Access movement?

Sadly, we never use the moral argument for Open Science, instead use the ROI argument. This must change. We have made considerable progress with Plan-S and that should be applauded. We have the technology, tools, and resources, but do we have the courage? - 'Open' is not the end goal, but is, or should be, an enabling strategy to achieve equity for humanity. We keep that at centre of all interventions. The term "open" applies to access, discoverability, citability, visibility, archiving and preservation.

It is true that traditionally our policies tend to be country-based but it's time we shift this paradigm and position our policies in the global context. It is not about being on the right side of the border - what we do at local level must be translated to a global level. This is particularly paramount for technologies such as Blockchain which transcends national borders and promises to underpin the future of global digital economy.

Professor Dr Naseem Naqvi FBBA is the founding Editor in Chief of The Journal of The British Blockchain Association (The JBBA), the world's first fully open access scientific Blockchain research journal available in print and online. He is also the founding Chair of the Centre for Evidence Based Blockchain, and the founding President of the British Blockchain Association.

References:

[1] N. Naqvi., 2019. Key Takeaways from the 1st UN Open Science Conference *https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/key-takeaways-from-1st-un-open-science-conference-naqvi-frcp-fbba/*

[2] Impact, London School of Economics: *https://www.lse.ac.uk/cpec/impact*

[3] N. Naqvi., 2020. Evidence-Based Blockchain: Findings from a Global Study of Blockchain Projects and Start-up Companies: https://doi.org/10.31585/jbba-3-2-(8)2020

[4] The JBBA: *https://jbba.scholasticahq.com/*

