In February 2020—or “back in the old days before coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19),” as it feels now—we were thinking of a suitable hook for an editorial about Open Access and Open Science. Fast-forward only a few weeks, and parts of the global economy have come to a standstill, national borders have been closed, quarantines and curfews have been implemented, social distancing has become common sense, and most people would be able to name their favorite TV virologist. Which also means that the hook for an Open Access and Open Science editorial suddenly presented itself rather forcefully in the shape of COVID-19. Most of us are affected by COVID-19 in a multitude of ways both in our personal and professional lives. It has reminded us of the interconnectedness of the entire global community, and the common social and economic challenges facing all humanity, many of which have been intensified due to the economic slowdown. The unfolding COVID-19 pandemic has also amplified various forms of inequity, which while playing out differently in various economic contexts serve as a vivid reminder of latent forms of discrimination and bias affecting hundreds of millions of human beings across the planet every day. In many contexts, COVID-19 has also elicited heartbreaking ethical decision-making for politicians, policy makers, administrators, managers, and family members and we will live to think through and analyze the repercussions and implications of these for many years to come. From a teaching point of view, this certainly raises serious questions regarding the ways in which our institutions prepared decision-makers and our citizens for this type of crisis.

From a research perspective, COVID-19 is possibly representative of the types of external shocks that we expect to be facing much more frequently in the not-too-distant future in light of the series of grand challenges (Eisenhardt, Graebner, & Sonenshein, 2016; George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016), we are confronted with. Overwhelmed health-care systems, rising unemployment, spiraling global debt, disrupted supply chains, and a range of other developments raise urgent questions in relation to degrowth, radical innovation, or resilience. At the same time, this type of massive discontinuous change (Winn, Kirchgeorg, Griffiths, Linnenluecke, & Günther, 2011) also provides us with unexpected opportunities: enforced or encouraged changes in travel behavior, production, and consumption patterns result in a sudden reduction in global carbon emissions and other dimensions of our ecological footprint. As such, they have the potential to form a punctuated equilibrium (Romanelli & Tushman, 1994) with regard to pro-environmental awareness and behavior, policy measures and, more generally, parts of the transition toward a more sustainable development. One rather unexpected outcome of the COVID-19 crisis has arguably already been the rapid digitization of the Higher Education sector, and there are other outcomes that are still unfolding, although our conscience and consciousness are not yet able to keep track. All of these changes highlight the need for rapid development of solid theory, practical decision-making models or ethical decision-making guidelines, and various new tools that can be useful during this pandemic, and more importantly post-pandemic, to be better prepared for expected future outbreaks.

WHY OPEN ACCESS AND OPEN SCIENCE NOW?

There have been an impressive number of immediate natural science initiatives in response to COVID-19. For example, COVID-19-related Open Access data repositories have been created (Xu et al., 2020), modeling those established for research into the human genome (Yozwiak, Schaffner, & Sabeti, 2015); real-time data visualization tools are provided by various actors (e.g., John Hopkins University, 2020; Roser, Ritchie, & Ortiz-Ospina, 2020; WHO, 2020); and Nature has established an “Open Peer Review platform” (Johansson & Saderi, 2020). Closer to (our disciplinary) home, noteworthy initiatives include the “COVID-19 Insights” series operated by a number of business sustainability networks (e.g., GRONEN, 2020) or the Academy of Management Learning & Education COVID-19 “Call for Questions” proposal (AMLE, 2020).

All of these initiatives have in common that they aim to make research more inclusive and more immediately available, and thus blend into more general developments that have been labeled as Open Access and Open Science. While Open Access refers to the free availability of research outputs, typically in digital format, Open Science goes beyond that in calling for public accessibility of research data and more generally a collaborative research process (OECD, 2015). Ultimately, Open Access and Open Science are complementary ways of confronting the contemporary for-profit publishing model as we know it (Hiltzik, 2020).

In the natural sciences in particular, Open Access and Open Science have emerged as mechanisms to promote quicker, more collaborative, and more inclusive knowledge generation. In the social sciences, the relative lack of these mechanisms—coupled with an oftentimes painstakingly slow peer review process—amplifies the
risk that our research remains too slow, too fragmented and, quite simply, not relevant for decision-makers. Many of us will be able to recall cases of publishing a manuscript that was already somewhat outdated at the time it first appeared in print. Beyond the shortening of publication cycles, Open Access and Open Science hold a number of other generic advantages. Open Access publications are generally associated with wider readership and higher citation levels (Tennant et al., 2016); Open Science can help accelerating the pace of knowledge generation based on the fact that datasets are publicly and readily available for fellow researchers. There is also a quality dimension to Open Science, as a more transparent handling of datasets pushes professionalism and seeks to ensure the implementation of scientific norms that are otherwise difficult to check in the social sciences.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

As a first step, we would like to encourage you to consider Open Access and Open Science as options for your own research. There is of course a quite significant financial dimension to this question, in particular linked to Open Access. However, we would like to highlight two increasingly relevant pathways:

Open Access agreements

BE:ER now has a wide and increasing variety of resources for authors seeking to contribute to the common good such as national affiliation policies as with Germany (Projekt DEAL) or associated university groups such as the Dutch VSNJ Agreement. These policies are part of a coordinated strategy to enable a large-scale transition of today’s scholarly journals to Open Access. To date, our publisher has engaged with nine of these separate agreements, facilitating both increased access to already published research and allowing authors to publish their own primary research and review articles Open Access, retaining copyright of their works. In many cases, the Publish and Read (PAR) fees and Gold Open Access APCs related to these policies are paid centrally via participating institutions.

Open Access repositories/research collaboration groups

Authors of articles published in BE:ER are permitted to self-archive the submitted (preprint) version of the article at any time, and may self-archive the accepted (peer-reviewed) version after a 24-month embargo period. Self-archiving is often referred to as Green Open Access. The final version of record may be shared within private research collaboration groups including those on “Scholarly Communication Networks (SCNs)” which have signed up to the STM sharing principles (STM, 2015). These private groups must be formed by invitation for a specific research purpose and be of a size that is typical for research groups within the discipline. Sharing of articles must be limited to members of the group only.

PARALLELS BETWEEN OPEN ACCESS AND COVID-19?

Speaking metaphorically, both Open Access and COVID-19 have invaded our lives without prior consent or permission. They share a lot in common in terms of showcasing stubborn resilience and indifference to national borders and affecting large communities around the globe. Of course, COVID-19 has affected the entire humanity, and Open Access has been more restricted in terms of having implications in the context of the academic community. But, we expect the ramifications of Open Access to also be long-term and far reaching, and change over time the rules of the game and expectations for publication in the academic community. In the same way that countries and human beings across the globe are now adapting to the realities of COVID-19, researchers and scholars will find ways to adapt to the realities and ramifications of Open Access. In fact, we hope and call on all scholars to strive in the realms of their specific countries and institutions to embrace Open Access given the advantages identified in this editorial relating to wider readership and circulation, and more efficient knowledge building and dissemination. In relation to COVID-19, we encourage our readers to reflect on the positive and resilient aspects we can derive from the pandemic’s massive disruption to our day-to-day lives and their potential implications for business ethics and social responsibility. We hope to see how these two new trends will affect our lives over the next decade or two, but this editorial was intended to provide “food for thought,” and to entice researchers, scholars, and our readers in general to think actively about those two issues or trends that have proven to be of global interest and concern.

Dima Jamali1
Ralf Barkemeyer2
Jennifer Leigh3
Georges Samara1

1Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship, American University of Beirut, Olayan School of Business, Beirut, Lebanon
2KEDGE Business School, CSR Centre of Excellence, Bordeaux, France
3School of Business and Leadership, Nazareth College, Rochester, USA

Correspondence
Dima Jamali, Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship, American University of Beirut, Olayan School of Business, Hamra, Bliss Street, PO Box 11-0236, Beirut, Lebanon
Email: dj00@aub.edu.lb
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