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OAPEN-UK: an Open Access Business Model for Scholarly Monographs in the Humanities and Social Sciences

[Extended Abstract]

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Abstract. This paper presents the current findings of OAPEN-UK, a UK research project gathering evidence on the social and technological impacts of an open access business model for scholarly monographs in the humanities and social sciences.

Keywords. open access, scholarly monograph, humanities and social sciences, culture, technology, business models, research study

Introduction

OAPEN-UK is a 4-year research project, which will gather evidence to help stakeholders make informed decisions on the future of Open Access (OA) scholarly monograph publishing in the humanities and social sciences (HSS). Managed by JISC Collections and funded by JISC and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the project is taking a collaborative and real time approach to addressing the challenges, risks and potential opportunities of unfettered online access to scholarly monographs.

JISC Collections is a shared service of UK higher and further education institutions established by the funding councils to centrally negotiate and licence digital content to support education and research. It collaborates with institutions and publishers in studies to examine the needs and behaviours of students and researchers and undertakes research on future electronic publishing models.

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1. The Monograph Market

The academic monograph is under threat. Increased costs and lower print runs are impacting on the principle means by which researchers share their knowledge and disseminate their findings. In 2011, the publishing of academic monographs remained predominantly print based with sales of e-monographs only accounting for around 6% of publishers' revenue. Yet print sales have been in decline for the last two decades; in the US, between 1980 and 2000, "a monograph's average library sales plummeted from around 2,000 copies in 1980, to 1,000 in the late 1980s, to 500 in the 1990s, to a little more than 200 in the early years of this century."^[1]

In recognition of the need to find new profitable models for scholarly monograph publishing and to encourage the move to electronic a number of new cross-publisher platforms have been launched – OUP's University Press Scholarship Online (UPSO), Project Muse, Books at JSTOR and CUP's University Publishing Online. These new initiatives continue to rely on libraries having budget to spend on monographs and we are yet to see their success. But there is another model that could potentially help to increase dissemination and reduce the burden on libraries – Open Access.

A European project, Open Access Publishing in European Networks (OAPEN)^[2] explored the challenges and issues surrounding the publication of OA HSS monographs at an international level. It stimulated a lot of interest but what became very clear was that whilst OA publishing has no boundaries to access, there are critical components, such as the funding model, that require investigation at a local level due to the differences between the education and research set up of different countries.

2. Culture and Technology

The bulk of research regarding the role, impact and adoption of OA publishing has occurred in the sciences and journals market. Relatively little research has been undertaken in HSS and even less in relation to digital publishing of monographs. In the reports and articles that are available, the perceived 'traditional' mindset and how this shapes the adoption of new modes of publishing by HSS scholars is debated.

OAPEN found that the "main obstacles for the development of Open Access eMonographs in the HSS are cultural and institutional"^[3] and that scholars are hesitant to adopt a new publishing model as they perceive it to be of less value to their careers and of lower quality than established print publishing. In 2010 Harley et. al.^[4] "confirmed the important impact of each discipline's nature, culture, and traditions on many scholarly communication habits in research universities" and how "these traditions, which rely heavily on various forms of peer review, may override the perceived 'opportunities' afforded by new technologies".

However, a report from the Research Information Network^[5] suggests that "such perceptions may be out of date" and that researchers are "working with new tools and technologies, in increasingly collaborative environments, and both producing and using information resources in diverse ways".

Thus, it is clear that an evidence based approach is required for research into OA publishing models in HSS to fully investigate attitudes of scholars.

3. Introducing OAPEN-UK

OAPEN-UK^[6] is collaborating with publishers, authors, research funders, learned societies, academics and institutions to gather evidence to help stakeholders make some informed decisions about how they may work towards an OA model for HSS monographs, if indeed it is feasible.

OAPEN-UK is piloting the OAPEN model, where an OA version of the monograph is made available as a PDF using Creative Commons licensing, but the publishers will also make a print version available for sale to help recoup costs. This hybrid model recognises that a move to OA will not happen overnight and that while a transition takes place, publishers will continue to publish print – just as academics will continue to read print and want print versions for reward and recognition.

Palgrave Macmillan, Taylor & Francis, Berg Publishers, Liverpool University Press and University Wales Press are all participating in OAPEN-UK. They have had matched pairs of HSS scholarly monographs selected for inclusion in the pilot, which will run for three years from September 2011. The pairs were matched on publication date, subject area, age to print sales ratio, price and format history. A total of 60 HSS scholarly monographs were selected, making 30 pairs.

A title from each pair has been randomly placed in either the experimental group or the control group. The experimental group titles are available on the OAPEN Library, in addition to the publisher's own website, institutional repositories, the authors own website and offer a 100% view in Google Book Search. The control group titles are available as eBooks for sale under the publishers normal licensing and route to market models.

4. Research Plan

OAPEN-UK is undertaking a large programme of qualitative research to gather data surrounding the social and cultural influences on the adoption of an open access monograph publishing model.

The project has been broken down into a number of work packages, which will span the lifetime of the project. Year 1 of the plan has included an initial literature review to inform an annual benchmarking survey, focus groups and initial scoping interviews. This review will be made available on the project website and updated quarterly.

The annual benchmarking survey has been designed to track the changing opinions of all project participants towards OA monograph publication. Participants were surveyed at the start of the research; this will be repeated at the end of years 1-3. This presentation will discuss the initial 'lay of the land' from the results of the first survey.

A number of focus groups have been held with project stakeholders to identify the most significant concerns for each group. The presentation will contrast the various issues raised from these focus groups, such as financial sustainability, scale, metadata and standards, functionality, preservation and plagiarism.

Scoping interviews and surveys have been undertaken to expand the projects understanding of issues raised in the first round of focus groups, particularly those areas which caused contention. In order to avoid any skewing of the data, a mapping exercise has been undertaken for both the focus groups and scoping interviews to ensure that key stakeholders are not missed.

Over the next 2 years of the project quantitative data will be collected, such as usage statistics and sales figures.

The project proposes that usage data will be made available on a monthly basis from all platforms, e.g. OAPEN, Repositories, publisher and aggregator platforms etc. However, the research plan identified two major issues that needed to be overcome before valid analysis could be performed. These issues were also raised in the initial rounds of focus groups and interviews.

The first issue surrounds the comparability of the data. Publishers and aggregators often use either COUNTER BR1 or BR2 reports, which cannot be reliably compared. Furthermore repositories may not record any usage at all for PDF downloads. The second issue is one of discoverability; there may be a disparity between the visibility of the control and experimental groups, which may skew the data. This presentation will investigate ways forward to resolve these issues, such as the potential use of PIRUS2[7] to develop a standard tool for books, based on existing work for article downloads, which could then be applied to all data sources. In addition the use of supplemental data from publishers and OAPEN could be used to establish whether discoverability is an issue.

Print and electronic sales data is being gathered over the lifetime of the project and analysed against usage data to identify trends and impacts between the experimental and control groups. Combined with the results of the first year of qualitative activity, there will be a real focus in the second year on the business model, including the processes and mechanisms required to support OA monograph publishing. Work packages for Year 3 (aside from the recurrent annual benchmarking surveys and focus groups) will be agreed in year two when priorities have been identified by stakeholders, the project will also respond to changes in the scholarly information and electronic publishing landscape.

All the evidence gathered throughout the project will be pulled together to provide a comprehensive examination of the market and steps that should be taken to ensure the effective dissemination of humanities and social science research.

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