

Publishing Companies and Open Access

Myth, rhetoric, and reality

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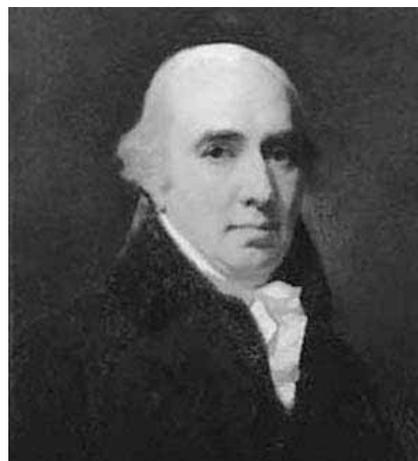
Michael Huter

Introduction

Thank you very much for inviting me to this conference. I am speaking on behalf of the Austrian Publishers Association and I will make a few remarks on Open Access from a publishers` point of view. As suggested in the subtitle, I will proceed from myth to rhetoric in Open Access and finish with some aspects of reality both in open access and traditional publishing. Let me start with a quotation:

The progress of knowledge must be wonderfully aided by the effect of the press in multiplying the number of scientific inquirers, and in facilitating the free commerce of ideas all over the civilized world; ...

You are not expected to know the author of this quotation. It is **Dugald Stewart** (1753-1828), a Scottish mathematician and moral philosopher (no, this was not a contardiction at the time). Dugald Stewart, an admirer of Adam Smith, thought that the printing press would function as a factory of the mind. The powers of the "increased number of cultivated minds", "combined with all those arising from the division and distribution of intellectual labour", will bring about the progress of knowledge.



Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), Scottish mathematician and moral philosopher

You will certainly recognize this quotation. It is taken from the **Budapest Declaration**:

An old tradition and a new technology have converged to make possible an unprecedented public good. The old tradition is the willingness of scientists and scholars to publish the fruits of their research in scholarly journals without payment, for the sake of inquiry and knowledge. The new technology is the internet.

It is the conviction that science combined with new media technology will lead to progress of knowledge that joins these quotations almost seamlessly. The optimistic tone and the vocabulary easily bridge the gap of more than 200 years that separates them.

What does this mean? That the emergence of new media is connected with high hopes as to the production of knowledge? Certainly, so. Or maybe that the advocates of a new movement make use of rhetoric language? Granted. We have the benefit of hindsight and we certainly do not want to prove an 18th century intellectual wrong. On the other hand, nobody would reproach today`s scientists for believing in the progress of knowledge, either.

Yet, something remains to be explained. In a way, both texts are implying the concept of knowledge society. Of course, Dugald Stewart did not use the word “knowledge society”. It was he, however, who coined the phrase of 18th century Edinburgh as “Athens of the North”. In the rhetoric of the age of enlightenment he could not have aspired to anything higher. This is “knowledge society” *ante litteram*.



Edinburgh: “Athens of the North”. On the right hand side the memorial erected to the memory of Dugald Stewart.

2 Knowledge Society

If there is anything missing in the OA debate, it is the critical examination of the knowledge society which is its inseparable and necessary backdrop. It is a current concept in the discourse and it seems to be beyond any doubt that nobody ever questions it. It is also a standard argument in any political programme. Moreover, it is an example of utopian thought, or, I had rather say, it is the only utopian thought that we are nourishing.

In an age that seems to be signed by fear and uncertainty knowledge society is a very comforting notion. It is a vision of a future that has already started and the dawning of the age of the knowledge is being taken for granted. If knowledge society is a present reality for scholars it is a promise of politicians. This explains why it is such an attractive idea. Politicians grant money for science and scientists give evidence to the promises in politics. It is flattering science and it is the only utopian concept left for politicians.

It may sound a little cynical but can knowledge society be a not so silent agreement among science and politics? Is knowledge society a project that gratifies scientists ever more dependant on economics and processes of rationalization?

This agreement has its costs. A blind spot is the price for the optimism. Social and economic problems have to be removed. (They only appear as something that will be solved.) Scientists trust in the invisible hand of the market and the not so invisible hand of politics. This may also explain the metamorphosis of the *homo academicus* into a *homo oeconomicus* that we are witnessing at the moment.

Science always was and still is a quest for attention. In the framework of knowledge society we may consider Open Access as the merging of material economy of publishing and the ideal economy of attention.

3 Rhetoric

“Discussion on Open Access tends to be strong on rhetoric but short on facts”

says Sally Morris, chief executive of the Association of Learned and Professional Societies Publishers ALPSP. Let us take a look at rhetoric applied on either side.

In promoting OA the leading figures explicitly create a negative image of publishers, sometimes implying that human progress came about *despite* the activities of commercial publishers. From the publishers` point of view OA is to be considered a business model rather than a philosophy. It is a matter of finance and it will last only as long as public money is being spent in a traditional field of private enterprise and market.

The core argument advanced against commercial publishing as opposed to OA is that authors are being expropriated of their rights. Moreover, publishers are alleged to prevent publications from circulating freely by charging high subscription fees for them, thus denying the free access to human knowledge to huge audiences. The journal crisis is the ultimate proof in this rationale. (Many publishers concede the existence of this crisis, but they do not want the baby to be thrown out with the bath.)

The shortcomings are obvious: In the first place, it is not taken into account sufficiently that publishing has its costs. Moreover, as everyone knows, writing is not publishing. (To my understanding, informal communication among members of any given scientific community is also being mistaken for publishing.) Publishing is a complex process of adding value to content by revising, editing, coding, creating awareness, and archiving it. Secondly, publishers can not be lumped into one group, either. Publishing is not a matter of a few oligopolies that can afford to dictate prices. Last but not least, the rise of prices for STM journals is also the result of an ever increasing production of scientific content rather than the price policy of a few global players.

4 Reality

It is a coincidence that the first study of the financial and non-financial effects of alternative business models in scholarly publishing has been published only a few days ago: **The facts about Open Access**

ALPSP Publications

● Publications ● Bookshelf ● *Learned Publishing* ● Other Journals
● E-newsletters & Lists

The facts about Open Access

A study of the financial and non-financial effects of alternative business models for scholarly journals

Researchers: Kaufman-Wills Group, LLC

Sponsored by: ALPSP, Highwire Press and AAAS
with additional data from
The Association of American Medical Colleges



The study is available on the internet <http://www.alspsp.org>

The objectives of the study were to identify and describe the alternative business models adopted and to develop financial and non financial profiles for the journals studied. It is the first substantial study of the quickly evolving OA landscape.

The study embraces a broad cross-section of journals and business models relying on 500 entities and in depth interviews with more than 20 scholarly journal publishers of all types and sizes, representing more than 4.000 journals. The study covers a wide range of publishers, both for profit and not for profit, traditional and Open Access.

The conclusions confirm widely what was already known before and they seem rather vague.

- It is too early to tell whether Full Open Access is a viable business model.
- Scholarly journal publishing is in an unprecedented state of flux.
- Peer review and copyediting may be less rigorous with Full Open Access journals.

The study, however, does not only rely on empirical evidence, it brings to light many new findings concerning various aspect of scholarly publishing.

Business models

- Subscription Access (traditional access)
- Delayed Open Access (articles available after publication)
- Optional Open Access (author-side payment)
- Full Open Access

Non-financial aspects

- Significant number of OA journals
- Traditional publishers experimenting
- DOAJ: Less impact
- DOAJ: Less submissions
- Low rejection rate
- In-house peer review
- Less Copy-editing

Financial aspects

- No author-side charges
- Other sources of income (sponsorship)
- 40% not covering costs

Results

- Need for new models
- Considerable amount of experimentation
- Various alternative Models

Critical success factors

- Viability of financial model
- Editorial quality

Impact

- Generate of discussion and experimentation
- OA movement consequence of "journal crisis"
- Response of traditional subscription access publishers with new publishing models

It seems as though OA has generated discussion and compelled publishers to developing new publishing models. As to the OA movement itself, it is very hard to predict its success from inside and outside the trade.

5 What Publishers do for the Academic World

I would like to finish this paper with a brief overview on what publishers do for the academic world:

- Building the setting or infrastructure for publications
- Advising authors, editors and institutions
- Completion of actual publications
- Impact and sustainability of publications

You will be familiar with the value chain model that has been proposed by Michael Porter in the 80ies, which has become an international acknowledged standard. (Here you see the primary processes inbound logistics, production, outbound logistics, sales and marketing, maintenance transferred into the field of publishing. The "support activities", including administrative infrastructure management, human resources management, R&D, and procurement are not shown.)

Value chain



Michael Porter: *Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*.
New York, The Free Press.

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Primary activities in publishing include:

- **Development:** generating ideas, identifying authors and subject matters, reviewing advising authors and editors on matters of content, format, market etc.
- **Production:** copy-editing, typesetting, coding, preprint, print, multichannel publishing etc.
- **Marketing:** identifying customers, creating awareness, branding etc.
- **Archiving:** media-neutral formats, securing and protecting content etc.

Georg Siebeck's paper posted on the conference website gives a nice A to Z account on "what publishers really do".

Another way to look at the processes the information chain (DIKW), where each layer adds certain attributes over and above the previous one. *Data* is the most basic level. Information adds context. Knowledge adds *how* to use it. Wisdom adds *when* to use it. (Some even add Truth to this model, but this is certainly outside publishers` realm) As such, DIKW is a model that is useful to understanding analysis and the importance and limits of conceptual works. DIKW is used primarily in the fields of information science and knowledge management.

Information chain



Russell L. Ackoff et al.

Again, this may be a helpful model for understanding the value adding and transforming of content into marketable publications.

Conclusion

In my paper I wanted to show that it is wrong to reduce a highly complex situation to a matter of moral questions, rhetoric and beliefs.

According to a previous study done by ALPSP authors are continuing to publish in learned journals primarily to communicate their findings and advance their careers. Financial reward does not seem to be as important as questions of time. (The delay created by the peer review process seems to have been a driving force behind the OA movement rather than financial aspects.) Their main aim is to reach the widest possible audience, with the quality of peer review and the impact factor of the journal. In deciding where to submit their work, the perceived reputation of the journal, its impact factor, subject area, international reach and coverage by abstracting and indexing services are extremely important.

In my opinion it is understandable that authors, now having the means of production and mass dissemination, tend to make their part an absolute. (It is a matter of course, though, that there is no publishing without authors.) On the other hand, publishers may have failed to create awareness for their part in the publishing process after the internet meteor has struck. Publishing never was and will never be merely a matter of technology and media. It is a matter of developing, disseminating and protecting content in the most general meaning.

The competition on the market together with the arrival of new participants and the emerging of alternative models will not lead to utopia. If the result will be an improvement of the system of scientific communication much will have been achieved.

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