

BOOK TO THE FUTURE: 21ST CENTURY MODELS FOR THE SCHOLARLY MONOGRAPH

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Abstract

There are many similarities between the fifteenth and twenty first centuries in the impact of technological change on information flow and consequent cultural and societal impacts. New modes of distribution offer improved opportunities for access to and distribution of scholarship, particularly for the scholarly monograph.

Introduction

The digital information environment has ensured that the twenty first century will be a global watershed, like that of the fifteenth century in the Western world, for changes in the creation of and access to knowledge. By 1500 nearly 1500 print shops had printed eight million volumes comprising 23,000 titles. (Eisenstein, 1979) Vespasiano da Bisticci's Florentine manuscript scriptorium had gone out of business by 1478, with his forty-five scribes made redundant. Who will be the 21st century information chain equivalents?

The world of scholarly publishing is a complex one. At one end of the scholarly publishing spectrum are the annual multi-million dollar profits of STM global publishers such as Reed Elsevier; while at the other the plight of many university presses and learned societies. Cox has outlined the rise of Robert Maxwell and the Pergamon publishing empire which was eventually incorporated into what is now Reed Elsevier. (Cox, 2002)

In 1951 Elsevier was a purely Dutch company before becoming the largest STM publisher in the world by the end of the twentieth century. Over recent decades a number of other powerful publishing houses, notably Springer, Wolters Kluwer, Thomson Scientific, Blackwell Publishing and Taylor & Francis, have expanded to take 52% of the global STM market, which totalled 9.2 billion dollars in 2005. Reed Elsevier has reported an 11% rise in annual pre-tax profit performances for 2005. The 2005 adjusted profit before tax increased 9 percent to £1.002 billion (\$1.75 billion), compared to the previous year.

Just as the Gutenberg revolution had profound work practice and publishing implications, so there is no divine right for any of the players in the information sector to survive on historical lines. The 2005 'Royal Society' debate in the UK on Open Access publishing and its implications saw some STM publishers arguing to the British government for a 'level-playing field', but who determines the chronological playing field and on what basis?

Per Saugman, who built Blackwell Scientific Publications (BSP) into one of the top scientific and medical publishing houses, died in January 2006. However the first fifteen years of BSP saw hardly any growth and Saugman once said that there were only fifty good medical books to be published each year. Blackwell, like Elsevier were relatively small publishing players in the middle of the twentieth century, so

again when does one define the level playing field. Is it only when it suits major STM publishers?

In the context of the STM publication explosion, it is too simplistic and unrealistic to say, as some publishers have said, that since R and D budgets have risen threefold therefore library budgets should have risen accordingly. Most articles are still little read and little cited. The UK NESLI statistics in 2005 revealed that most useage of the UK 'Big Deal' acquisitions by British universities came from a small number of journals.

One publisher who does not wish to be publicly named has said, "more research largely means we publish more crap"! Richard Charkin, the CEO of British Publisher MacMillan and currently the UK Publishers Association President, was particularly revelatory when he stated in the UK *Bookseller* for 23 September 2005 that, "most of our words aren't read, so it's how you package it that really determines the profit".

The profits of the major STM publishing multinationals are essentially based on sales to libraries, particularly of universities and research institutions in North America. Reed Elsevier publications absorbed half the University of California Library budget in 2002 for online publications, yet Elsevier titles accounted for only a quarter of the journal use. (Willinsky, 2005) Candee has noted that the University of California annual budget for licensed content by 2005 was \$27 million. (Candee quoted in Poynder, 2005) How many of the articles purchased are actually used/read/downloaded and how is "value for money" defined?

In addition to the quite significant double-digit price rises of the 1990s by the major commercial multinational publishers, the rise of the so-called "Big Deal", ie aggregated packages by publishers has led to the STM access vote taking larger and larger proportions of a library's budget. This has usually been at the cost of the social sciences and humanities in general, and the monograph in particular.

Many North American University Councils and Faculty Boards have issued statements in recent years calling on scholars to change scholarly communication practice. However, few major practical changes seem to have resulted. The various 'White Papers' issued in December 2005 by the University of California Senate promise, however, promises to contain more "teeth" for institutional action. (University of California, 2005)

The University of California papers included the following words, which are relevant in terms of potential reconsideration of scholarly communication models in universities: "the current model for many publications is that faculty write articles and books, referee them, edit them and then give them to a publisher with the assignment of copyright. The publisher then sells them back to the faculty and their universities, particularly to university research libraries. While there clearly are costs of publication, a number of publishers (particularly, but not always, for-profit corporations) earn munificent profits for their shareholders and owners".

Most science researchers operate in Mode 2 research frameworks but resort to traditional Mode 1 formal publication for the dissemination of that research. (Houghton, Steele, Henty, 2003) Many researchers have often distributed the contents

of that research through electronic colleges or personal web pages well before the formal publication process. Depending on one's viewpoint of the "Faustian bargain" between authors and publishers, the scholarly publishing environment has been in crisis for a number of years. While this has been particularly reflected in the debates on serials, many humanities scholars have experienced declining sales of their monographs and a lack of appropriate outlets for their research publications. There is no doubt that the last two decades have seen a very significant decline in the purchase of research monographs by university libraries.

The Future of the Scholarly Monograph

John Fell's ambitious program of publication for the Oxford University Press in the late seventeenth century led to the following comment from the Master of University College, "the vending of books we never could compass; the want of vent broke Bp. Fell's Body, public spirit, courage, purse, and presse". (Bodleian Library, 1978)

This budgetary crisis for Oxford University Press was subsequently overcome and OUP is now one of the most profitable publishers in the world. However, its monograph production is extremely selective and it no longer specialises in monograph publishing in several disciplines. Thompson has noted the distinctions between the dominance of OUP and the Cambridge University Press in the UK and the plethora of relatively smaller presses in the USA to the benefit of the former. (Thompson, 2005)

A number of university presses have tried to generate extra revenue by moving into general trade publications and by publishing fiction, travel and cook books. It is debateable in 2006 whether this has been overall a successful policy and the net result has been a continuing diminution of academic monographs being produced.

Mary Sue Coleman, President of the University of Michigan affirms: University presses are "awash in red ink" and survive only with infusions of money from university funds. "The bottom line, for me and for you, is that our publishing houses and our authors can only benefit financially and reputationally from the widest possible awareness of books and their availability."

The British Academy was sufficiently concerned in 2005 as to the future of the scholarly monograph that it included a section in its report *E-resources for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences*. (British Academy, 2005) The following words are extremely relevant in this context:

"In the 1960s and 1970s, far fewer monographs were published than now, with routine global sales of 1500 or more. But these sales levels were not sustained, and a declining sales step-curve has been evident throughout the past quarter century, with a vicious circle of declining sales driving higher prices driving declining sales. Individual publishers have responded by issuing more and more individual titles, but with lower expectations of each. Global sales can now be as low as 250 or 300 in some fields. At some point in the 1990s, the UK academy ceased to be a self-sustaining monographic community: the subjects that have survived and/or thrived in this context have been those (like economics or linguistics or classics) with international appeal.

Thus even if major academic publishers can sustain some support of less popular titles across their lists, they cannot sustain large numbers of low-sales titles, however highly esteemed, in specialist fields. Moreover though authors now undertake the bulk, if not all, of the copy preparation in many cases, publishers clearly have large real costs both in handling hard copy distribution and, though to what extent they really contribute is not completely clear, in terms of marketing, as well as, usually, copy-editing costs.

The main barriers to primarily e-publishing for highly specialist monographs appear to be the general conservatism of much of the scholarly community, along with the fact that many specialist libraries are unable to handle digital materials effectively. Much of the conservatism, as with journals, comes from the entrenched belief that quality control of the scholarly object itself somehow evaporates with e-publication, even if the whole reviewing and editing process is electronically done; and, further, that this implies that the academic reputation that comes with monograph publication will be undermined.

Cronin and La Barre indicated, from a survey of the major Ivy League universities in 2004, that a scholarly monograph is still an essential prerequisite for promotion and tenure in those universities, yet the outlets for monograph publishing via university presses have declined. (Cronin, 2004) The Modern Languages Association in America had highlighted in 2002 the problems of scholarly monograph publishing, particularly for the younger scholar. MLA returned to this topic in December 2005 deploring the “fetishization of the monograph” and called for new metric to demonstrate scholarly worth, such as a body of articles, translations of works, electronic databases, etc. (Inside Higher Ed, 2005)

It makes little sense for researchers to spend many years writing a monograph, only to find either that there is no outlet for their publication or that their monograph is published in such a small edition that global or local distribution is extremely limited. Thompson has noted: “the new millennium is proving to be a testing time for academic publishers ... the problems are not temporary ... but rather are symptomatic of a profound structural transformation ... many academics ‘depend on the presses to publish their work ... yet they generally know precious little about the forces driving presses to act in ways that are sometimes at odds with the aims and priorities of academics ... the monograph can survive only if the academic community actively support it ... real benefits could be gained by using new technologies in the world of academic publishing ... enabling publishers to exercise much greater control over the management of their resources and stock, through for example, digital printing and print on demand”. (Thompson, 2005).

Ironically, Thompson’s own, *Books in the Digital Age* published in 2005 is not available in any electronic form. Thompson’s manuscript was completed before the ‘take-off’ of institutional repositories and E-Press public good developments. Emerging models of ‘public good’ for dissemination of university research will impact on publishing scholarly monographs. Columbia University, for instance, supports infrastructure for development of new models for organizing, presenting, disseminating and sustaining digital scholarly communication.

Princeton University Press, when it was founded in 1895 had as its mission “the promotion of education and scholarship and to serve the University”. The twenty-first century digital publishing environment allows for the same values as those stated for Princeton University, but distribution and access models are now radically different. Digital publishing technologies, linked to global networking and international interoperability protocols and metadata standards, allow for an appropriately branded institutional output to serve as an indication of a university’s quality and also as an effective scholarly communication tool

Daniel Gilman, John Hopkins University Press, said in 1880. “It is one of the noblest duties of a university to advance knowledge and to diffuse it ... far and wide”. This statement fits into the twenty first century Open Access models which are currently mutating into practical outcomes.

Open Access, Institutional Repositories and Publishing Practice

It seems likely that scholarly publishing will evolve along two distinct paths in the near future: one in which large multinational commercial publishers increase their dominance of the global STM market, and the other in which a variety of Open Access (OA hereafter) initiatives emerge and become commonplace.

OA is here taken in its widest sense of making scholarly research available to readers through the Internet free of charge, notably through the mechanisms of placing research outputs in Institutional/Subject Repositories, the ‘Green’ strategy, and the ‘Gold’ route of meeting publisher article costs to ensure OA.

Evidence from those publishers who provide material free of charge on the web is that free access to books on the web actually generate more conventional book sales. A South African Open Access publishing project made books available free of charge online, but then the sales turnover of the HRSC Press in question rose by 300%. The conclusion was that “availability of full text online for scholarly publications does push up sales”. (Eve Gray and Associates, 2004)

It is now time to consider new public good options, or rather old ones by universities returning to publishing their own scholars’ output. Making such output free on the net with POD output is one of the major platforms of the new e-presses. The Australian National University e-press strategy is for: all ANU publishing of scholarly works to be conducted through a single ANU E Press; Open Access to outcomes of ANU scholarship is a core value of the E Press; the E Press to be built upon a set of digital publication services provided centrally; and central services focus on production platforms, web based discovery and access.

The models exemplified by the ANU E-Press and the University of California eScholarship provide pointers for the future. The ANU 2005 figures are impressive for downloads from fifteen academic titles. PDF book and chapter downloads totalled 55,000 to May 2005. This figure excludes additional mobile device downloads, etc. A sample survey in September 2005 revealed 1905 book down loads of the award winning book, *The Spanish Lake* demonstrating a new digital market.

Most PhD students in the Social Sciences and Humanities will never see their thesis published in traditional monographic form by a university press. Some publishers who see commercial potential in a thesis require considerable reworking of the thesis, but the vast majority of theses are of no commercial interest. PhD students would be better served by their supervisors (who are often locked in historical frameworks of publishing) by making their thesis available on the net through the various local and national digital theses programs.

In recent years, institutional repositories have developed and currently include material ranging from digital theses to books to digital objects. If these are included in new reward systems they could provide a framework for a fundamental shift in the processes of knowledge distribution. Institutional repositories have potentially significant benefits for institutions if they are integrated holistically into university frameworks. The place of the institutional repository within the University's mission and strategic plan is a crucial first step.

As Lynch has cogently stated: "At the most basic and fundamental level, an institutional repository is a recognition that the intellectual life and scholarship of our universities will increasingly be represented, documented, and shared in digital form, and that a primary responsibility of our universities is to exercise stewardship over these riches: both to make them available and to preserve them". (Lynch, 2003)

It is arguable that institutional repositories and Open Access have much greater potential for scholarly distribution and access in the social sciences and the humanities than for the sciences, which by and large have a well defined distribution system for their research, albeit often at high prices. Yet the number of humanities documents in institutional repositories is currently far lower than that in STM disciplines. (Allen, 2005) This result has been confirmed by the recent major German study, which in a survey of one thousand researchers, found that more doubts were expressed about Open Access publications by researchers in the social sciences and the humanities compared to those in the sciences. (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 2005)

Academics in the Social Sciences and Humanities do not understand the potential of institutional repositories for the dissemination of their scholarship (which is often published in journals of limited distribution) and because an innate conservatism places them in outdated historical frameworks. The example of leading repositories such as the University of California needs to be more widely known. The University of California had 2,421,218 full-text downloads by late January 2006 from its eScholarship Repository [<http://repositories.cdlib.org>], which offers faculty on the UC campuses a central facility for the deposit of research or scholarly output in a variety of forms.

Digital Textbooks

The book itself needs to be reconstituted for the digital era both in the context of the tradition of the scholarly monograph and in the arena of the digital textbook. The latter may come more quickly, as students of the Google generation and publisher trends are likely to offer digital slices faster than academic conservatism allows. Thus,

if it is priced too highly – no one will buy it; if can't be found – no one will use it; if can't be printed – no one will read it.

There is considerable movement in the area of digital text books and course readings as students, with less money than ever, try to adopt the iPod and music download frameworks into publishing. Will the scholarly text book be ultimately transformed by such initiatives as the California Open Source Textbook Project (<http://www.opensourcetext.org/>): Libertas Academica (<http://www.la-press.com/>) and Wikibooks (http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Main_Page)?

The UK firm of Taylor and Francis has seen a significant, if as yet still small, as part of total revenue, increase in rental downloads for its textbook material. Chapters or whole books can be rented digitally for as little as one night. The new 'digital natives' will play an increasing part in the determination of trends for e-learning information access.

Thomas and McDonald have stated there is a need to achieve a balance between the traditional values of libraries and the expectations and habits of the wired generations. (Thomas and McDonald, 2006) Campbell has also explored the place of the library as a virtual destination and the implications for services in the twenty first century. (Campbell, 2006)

The digitization of material in the scholarly environment fits perfectly into the 'long tail syndrome'. Google Print, Microsoft and Amazon's initiatives in this area allow for models which bring back out of print material into a global information environment. While the material may not be heavily used, the serendipity of searching and global user interest will provide sufficient momentum in this arena. We are moving from an era where content is king to one in which convenience is king for most content.

Conclusion

Lynch has argued that "we are in the middle of a very large-scale shift. The nature of that shift is that we are at last building a real linkage between research libraries and the new processes of scholarly communication and scholarly practice, as opposed to just repackaging existing products and services of the traditional scholarly publishing system and the historic research library". (Lynch, 2006)

The impact of Open Access Initiatives could have a profound impact on scholarly knowledge distribution. The process will be both liberating and disruptive. Liberating in that it could release a large amount of scholarly material in a variety of forms globally without the financial barriers imposed by multinational publishers. Disruptive in that confusion may reign as access models bed down

Institutional programmes of scholarly advocacy are needed in order to allow the global liberation of text. The new business models for E-Presses are often predicated on "public good" foundations rather than a return to the investor in a shareholder context. Universities will need, however, need to adopt an holistic approach to scholarly communication and information issues in the digital environment so that institutional budgetary and reward systems can change.

Access to knowledge in the twenty first century could be liberated in terms of cost for the vast proportion of material created. As history since the fifteenth century has shown, the ability to predict knowledge access and transfer patterns is a complicated one. Without doubt, the digital revolution has brought us to another set of information crossroads. While some information highways could lead to scholarly dead ends, hopefully there will be sufficient open access pathways, particularly for scholarly monographs, that can be implemented for the benefit of scholarship in particular and society in general.

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Biography

Colin Steele is Emeritus Fellow of the Australian National University. He was University Librarian 1980 - 2002 and Director Scholarly Information Strategies 2002-2003. He is the author/editor of seven books and over 300 articles and reviews, including *Major Libraries of the World* (1976). He has been an invited keynote speaker at conferences in a number of countries including USA, UK, China and South Africa.