

Mark Borden 104 LIS 9001 The Libraries role in Piracy

I was not even in high school when Napster first came out and the idea that I could access what I wanted, for free, was a game changer. Needless to say I became extremely adept at copyright infringement as a teenager in a time where breaking disc based protection was a common topic for my friends and I at lunch. I was from a single parent home so we had a very modest lifestyle and my Mom thought it was great I could get the stuff I wanted, and all my friends had, without eating into her carefully planned budget. It was only when I got a little bit older when those same friends would complain, now in the pub, that they could not sell any of their created music and video games because people either kept “ripping them off” or were just too accustomed to not paying for anything. What I am getting at with my little anecdote is both they and I learned that nothing is free and someone, somewhere, down the line paid for the material we enjoy. So when I first heard of open access (OA), while it sounded great to me as a student, I was cautious about being too optimistic because I know that someone is paying for servers, computers, storage, and bandwidth. To those ends in this paper I wish to consider the question of OA by examining some of the concerns and criticism that have risen in the literature and evaluate the merit of those claims.

Both Drott (2007) and Oppenheim (2008) both note that arguably the biggest contributor to the OA movement has been the rapid increase in journal prices which far outstrip inflation. Commercial publishers contest that these increases are justified because user services have advanced enormously due to electric access, which is not entirely without merit, and that these steep growth in price are not limited to just them but are occurring throughout the publishing world (Drott, 2007, 84). Related to that they put forth the contention that the prices of these journals are reflective of their quality (Drott 2007, p.84-5) this, again, may not be entirely

without merit. Without getting too far down the “journal quality” rabbit-hole, which could be its own essay, I would like to bring up some concerns I have seen raise in the literature I have used for research in this paper. The most interesting examples discussed by Zuccala (2009) in her article about how lay people interact with OA information. Specifically Zuccala (2009, p.14-5) cites a situation in which spurious HIV/AIDS information, namely a fringe belief the disease does not exist, could have critically implications if it falls into the hands of a lay person which could possible use it to information treatment decisions. My personal thoughts about this objection are that this type of information already exists in abundance on the accessible internet and preventing individuals from having access to it behind a pay wall because they might misuse or misinterpret it robs them of agency in their lives. I found evidence that suggests, at least in open-source software, that the wider an audience has to that type of material the more scrutiny it tends to garner (Andersen-Gott, Ghinea and Bygstad, 2011). Andersen-Gott, Ghinea and Bygstad (2011) conducted a study looking at reasons why commercial companies contribute to open-source software and it is suggestive that even lower quality material does lead to key innovations if enough people get their hands on it.

Drott (2007) presents an argument which presents evidence to suggest that a movement to open access would merely shift money around rather than reduce costs. Drott (2007, p.94) arrived at this conclusion by comparing the “author pays” model, which he mentions is the most prominently in open access, to the current model and found that the numbers were comparable per article, \$300 to over \$3,000 for OA versus cost estimates for a “journal of average selectivity” of \$470 to \$1,320. This argument is bookended by Drott (2007) with the assertion that if the author’s institution pays that fee, which seemed to be the trend at the time this article, was published, that universities most likely would just pull that money out of their library budget

and that larger schools would assume most of the economic burden of publishing costs (Drott, 2007, p.94-5). Oppenheim (2008, p.580) counters this point by offering up that the “author pays” model is incorrectly named, which Drott (2007) does implicitly account for as noted above, and there are other business models outside of this. For example, Oppenheim (2008) cites a study wherein institutional repositories have shown too potentially offer up huge savings for academic institutions which is a counterpoint to the objection raised above. What I gather from this is almost a concession that maybe there are problems with the “author pays”, however one wants to interpret that label, but I also think Oppenheim (2008) hits the nail on the head by arguing that in itself should not be an indictment against OA. If anything I think that recognizing the current most popular model has problems is how some of those concerns voiced by Drott (2007) are going to get address. I also personally found this interesting because Birdsall (2000, 7) suggests that a present ideology is “selling” information directly to the consumer, cutting libraries out of that loop, which, in essence, privatizes and deregulates public services which is in some conflict with Drott (2007) . In Drott’s (2007) model cutting out private corporations will have a similar outcome as libraries see their budgets cut by universities to accommodate fees associated with open access.

Admittedly I am pulling this out from a larger thesis; however, I do not necessarily view this as a slight against OA, although when presented like this it may take some of the sheen off, from the perspective of the end user. That is to say, based on Drott’s (2007) findings, the cost appears to be the same with the key difference being one model has the advantage of allowing anyone to access this information. The losers here would be the institutions disproportionately footing the bills and their librarian’s budgets but this model does a lot to alleviate Oppenheim’s (2008) contention that this is partially an ethical argument. To expand on that Oppenheim (2008,

579) expresses valid concerns that taxpayers are funding a great deal of this research without being able to access it which they would under this model. This becomes a bit dicey when we consider private colleges in the States, which according to Oppenheim (2008) accounts for 58% of STM literature, but those types of hiccups illustrate how complex this issue is in practice. I think these types of examples illustrate the broader concept penned by Birdsall (2007) which puts forward the idea that economics, politics and power all factor so heavily into discussions about information policy that is really hard to predict if open access will address the concerns voiced by librarians until rubber hits the road.

Regarding the literature I consulted for this paper I would say Drott (2007) is far and away the most disparaging about the potential about OA, for many of the reasons listed above, and offers up archiving as an alternative. Oppenheim (2008, p.581-2) also looked into archiving, “gold route” and “green route”, and seem to be more or less, on the same page albeit with differing levels of enthusiasm. I found it interesting that Zuccala (2009, p.2) only mentions that this topic has been “widely debated” and then immediately moves on to another subject. From what I can gather those terms refer to the ability of the author to release preprints, or pre-published, copies of their articles given the wording of their agreement with the publisher. Gold meaning it is simply OA and green being almost situational which may or may not be competing models depending on which article I read. Drott (2007) mention this is a common practice in rapidly changing fields, his example was physics, for researchers to exchange, or make available, these preprints which green model journals allow for. Drott (2007) does go on to summarize the advantages of this model, however, it was not made entirely clear why this could not coexist alongside OA. I understand practically that true OA would negate the need for these green

journals but I view it as more of a bridge and the economic realities of how this all shakes out will determine how far we travel down it.

In closing I would like to offer up my opinion on OA based on the readings I have done for this essay. I will start by saying my attitude has changed from one end of the process to the other. It was hard to find articles that were critical, maybe dismissive, of OA which I wanted to try and form a balanced viewpoint which is why I leaned into the Drott (2007) reading a little heavily. I came into this with the thought process that, at least it seems like the rate OA is chugging along that it is inevitability so falling on one side of the fence, or the other, should be an easy thing to do. What I actually found is the water is far more muddled than I had anticipated and the “how” around OA is just as fascinating as the if/when question. My take away from is two main things. The first being that even if OA happens on a large scale it is almost universally accepted, at least in the resources I consulted, that kind of the top tier of paid journal is going to be on the other side unimpeded. Secondly that if OA is to happen, and I hope it does based on what I have read, that it should be allowed to organically. My big take away is that, based on the number of models being suggested and given that this is pretty much untested waters, any wide sweeping policy change to force OA may cause unintended ripples. My concern with this would be it could inadvertently sabotage cost savings some of these models show the potential to have. The totality of my research has lead me to the conclusion that OA has the obvious potential to solve many of the problems that facilitated the movement occurring, however, I am cautious about landing too hard on the OA side of the fence, for the time being, while the large issue of business model choices remains unanswered.

References

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