Concerns of Open Data

Open Data hasn’t been fully embraced by everyone. Before these people commit to Open Data, they see problems that need to be solved first. These problems create barriers to making their data public. Researchers cite legal, practical, and competitive concerns that have kept them from advocating and acting for Open Data.

Legal concerns that cause apprehension for some are about rights and data confidentiality. From the findings in the Tenopir et al. (2011) paper, one of the main concerns of researchers is that they don’t have the rights to make the data public (Houtkoop et al., 2018, pg. 77). Part of this problem can come from sponsored research. Sponsors can require confidentiality in the study, meaning they don’t want the data to be available to others (Leetaru, 2017). Funding is integral in conducting research, and that funding can come from private sponsors trying to use the results for future products. Sponsors don’t want to potentially miss out on profitable results because someone else uses the data first to do so. Researchers don’t want to not be able to conduct the research they want to, so they could be forced to keep the data private since they don’t have the rights to make it public. There is also data confidentiality regarding participants and those involved in the study that cause concern. Anonymity is crucial in conducting sensitive research, and some worry that making the data public would hurt those who participated. However, there are ways to ensure this confidentiality- I will go on to talk about ways to do so.

Practical concerns that create barriers for some are about the process itself of making data public. Money, time, set standards are seen as three practical complications to pursuing Open Data. In the paper from Tenopir et al. (2011), the two biggest concerns cited by researchers were lack of funding and inefficient time and one of the most common minor concerns were researchers not having set standards for making data public (Houtkoop et al., 2018, pg. 73). Lack of funding leads to researchers fears of wasting time and money because of lack of set standards. For researchers who are new to Open Data, it might be hard finding out all the intricacies of it, such as where and how to make their data public. No set standards means that for many researchers in order to make their data public, they must find out how and where to publish data and then actually publish it. However, this process could mean less time and money being devoted to aspects of the study that may be required or mandatory. Over the next few years, however, the practical concerns of making data public can be assuaged due to the face that there will probably be set standards by then so everyone can know exactly what to do and it will be time and financially efficient to do so- I can talk about where this is at now, and how easy it is to do this process right now and where it is heading.

People also are concerned about Open Data due to the competitive nature of conducting and publishing research. Competitive barriers are ways in which making data public would disadvantage the original researcher. Loss of credit is an issue, where researchers don’t want to make their data public before they publish their own results because they don’t want their data “scooped”, or the data is published by another researcher before your own is (Houtkoop et al., 2018, pg. 73- 77). With making data public, researchers may also feel that a loss of control over their own work is a competitive barrier to Open Data. For example, researchers asked in one study said they were concerned about others rejecting their own conclusions because they analyzed the data differently, others findings errors in the data, others misinterpreting the data, and “loss of control over intellectual property” (Houtkoop et al., 2018, pg. 77). Some studies can result in data that can become “patentable intellectual property” but making the data public can hurt the patent process (Barron, 2018). In that case, making the data public can result in both a loss of control and a loss of potential money and funding from sponsors. One way for researchers to maintain their competitive edge is requiring secondary researchers to cite the original researchers when using their data (Houtkoop et al., 2018, pg. 73). More ways I can go into- Journals pre-accepting work to publish, etc…

References

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