Description

The Internet is making it easier for open access journals to mount an assault on big publishing companies. These industries insist on keeping their profitable model, wherein they charge high prices to academic libraries for accessing content. Open access promoters, on the other hand, placed emphasis on free knowledge dissemination and have thus revolutionized the academic publishing scene.

Academic publishing became a private business around the 1960s, when research costs could no longer remain sustainable by public investment and patronage. Publishing houses began charging high prices for subscriptions that were only affordable by a few wealthy universities and research centers. The two biggest publishers, Elsevier and Springer, are often accused of restricting academic communication and disloyal competition. Today, technological disruption and the Internet are opening new paths for those who desire to place new agents in the academic publishing game.

Open Access Sites Face Competition

Open access sites, such as Public Library of Science or Academia.edu, usually offer online academic journal services for free. They are supported by non-profit agencies, donations, or crowdfunding—the modern patronage. Users just need to sign up on the sites to access the content; therefore, no physical distribution costs exist. However, this free circulation of knowledge implies important changes in the manner researchers gain access to the content and the presentation of the content itself.

The first big change is related to the new ways of sharing knowledge online. Open access journals count on dissemination tools that are interesting for younger researchers, for example, E-books. Besides, they count on social media to promote its use and reinforce their brand image. Thus, they are not limiting access to researchers and academics but making it accessible to everybody, regardless of the user's economic, social, or intellectual position.

The idea of free circulation of knowledge is actually one of the forces that gives an impetus to patronage. There are plenty of wealthy (or more modest) individuals, companies, and many other institutions willing to contribute economically to research and development. Moreover, we can also consider universities, research centers, or academies as potential donors, considering the fact that economically contributing to these open access journals is much cheaper than paying for publishing sites subscriptions.

Does This Situation Change Characteristics of Academic Publications?

There are few reasons to believe that offering open access to knowledge can affect quality. However, there are some common practices that might change while managing knowledge without imposing high charges.

Since many open access platforms do not rely on big budgets to correct and edit academic manuscripts

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, a new proofreading procedure is developing—peer-to-peer crowdfunding. This peer-to-peer editing process includes the fact that many researchers or experts in a field contribute to correct the papers. Sometimes, this review is done after the paper is published.

Another interesting point to consider is the importance that prestige and seniority have in these sites. Unlike big publishing houses, open access sites do not select papers considering the researcher's position. Besides, practices such as coercive citation may seem unnatural when publishing on these sites.

Offering Free Access to Sources

It looks like there is no need to say more about how open access sites can pose a threat to big publishing houses. Nevertheless, the fact is they count on many ways to expand their importance and to become a real competitor. The Internet and its infinite ways of offering cooperation are the perfect allies for researchers and publishers to stand up to the huge academic publishing giants.

Category

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