

Open Access Initiatives in the Developed and Developing World: How to Combat Global Information Inequality

"The mind was dreaming. The world was its dream."

Jorge Luis Borges

Introduction

Any mind is allowed the satisfaction of creation, of pondering, of the access to limitless information. That is where the significance of library and information professionals becomes concrete. Information professionals are charged with making information accessible, equal, and representative. The American Library Association (ALA) Code of Ethics states:

We significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.¹

If we imagine that "citizenry" speaks to global citizenry; that the value of informed citizenry is not exclusive to the United States, then librarians and information professionals (LIPs) might strive for information equality internationally. The access to information should be considered a basic human right. There are a multitude of ways that LIPs can promote information access but this paper will explore Open Access (OA) and the ways in which LIPs interact with the concept especially within institutional guidelines, particularly within the confines of an academic scholarship. It is not hard to imagine that LIPs are not dusty gate-keepers of the past but rather pioneers of an equitable future for all.² Utilizing the ALA's code of ethics as a loose definition of what it means to be an

¹ admin, "Code of Ethics of the American Library Association."

² This is not to say that all LIPs' interests are aligned with this philosophy but there is an undeniable presence of LIPs in the social justice scene.

LIS professional, the assertion can be made that when referencing these professionals they are interested, if not wholly invested, in information equality for global citizens.

When addressing information equality the vast differences between developed and developing countries is integral to the issue. With an eye towards infrastructure, competencies, access and availability, the favor lies with those in the developed world. This paper will address how to rethink what it means to provide resources--particularly in a scholarly setting--rather than focusing on how LIPs can facilitate the necessary infrastructure for information and communication technologies (ICTs). This involves engaging with the resources and ICTs currently available in a meaningful and transformative way for the intended users. The goal is to eliminate as much Western influence as possible and allow for LIPs in developing countries to generate systems beneficial to and representative of their patrons. With a strong focus on access to scholarly research and the implications of Open Access in this setting and the importance of understanding, identifying, analyzing, and disseminating quality information and research, it is possible to look forward to solutions to global information inequality. By focusing on OA and LIS global cultural initiatives, I intend to show ways global LIPs can facilitate this progress.

Open Access: an overview

Open Access operates under the premise that information should be freely and widely accessible. In the early 2000s, there were a series of global conferences that defined OA. They were the Budapest Open Access Initiative in 2002, the Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing in 2003 and the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities, also in 2003. Peter Suber, a philosopher interested in open access and recognized as one of the leading voices in OA, generally refers to the statements calling them the BBB definition of Open Access.³ The Budapest Open Access Initiative states:

By “open access” to this literature, we mean its free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself.⁴

It is important to note that this statement speaks more than free-of-cost access but freedom to use this information. The Bethesda⁵ and Berlin⁶ statements have similar definitions that have two criteria to consider a work OA. They call for “free irrevocable worldwide right of access to, and a license to copy, use, distribute, [etc]...”. The founding principles of OA petition for more than just the elimination of payment barriers that restrict the availability of information but other forms of restriction—ones that define and circumscribe use and re-use, such as restrictive licenses (another way of distinctly stunting the dissemination

³ “Peter Suber, Open Access Overview (Definition, Introduction).”

⁴ “Budapest Open Access Initiative | Read the Budapest Open Access Initiative.”

⁵ “Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing.”

⁶ “Berlin Declaration.”

of information). This echoes the language of the ALA Code of Ethics, “We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.”⁷

Since the advent of the Internet, information has become disseminated on a far-reaching and fast-paced scale. Information is no longer slow and insular. A connected world ideally facilitates equal information flows; although the Internet has granted greater access to information, the flow is not equal. This disproportionately affects those existing outside the rigorous confines of higher education despite and because of the OA movement.⁸

In order to fully understand OA, and the ways in which it impacts the spread of information, there needs to be comprehension of how the world of scholarly publishing operates. The careers of scholars and academics are intertwined with their research—“publish or perish”,⁹ a blunt term used to denote the value of publication in the academic community. Research and global development rely on the structures that validate information. Legitimate research begets legitimate advancements, with scholars being rated on the impact of their research. This is not confined to Western academia but is a value of academia across the globe. Traditionally, the approach to publication involved submitting work to a journal that requires some form of a fee from the reader in order to access the article

⁷ admin, “Code of Ethics of the American Library Association.”

⁸ Open Access is not inherently bad, but as discussed later in this paper, companies are exploiting this model in developing countries and publishing false information under the guise of being an academic and peer-reviewed journal.

⁹ Although unable to find origins to the term, it is mentioned in many of the sources throughout this paper and is believed to be an academic colloquialism.

(subscription, pay-per-view, etc).¹⁰ There are now three main approaches to publishing:¹¹

- **Toll Access:** publications are behind a paywall. Fees come from user/subscription.
- **Gold Road:** publications are behind a paywall but are also available in an Open Access repository.
- **Green Road:** publications are made freely available either in an Open Access repository or journal.

Open Access reimagines the toll access publication system. Instead of placing content behind a paywall, the onus is on the researcher to cover fees in order to be published. This model allows for publication costs to be covered but reevaluates where fees originate in order to favor the dissemination of knowledge.¹² The fees are usually covered by the grants, employers, institutions, or, in some cases, it's waived for researchers in developing countries.

Traditional subscription based journals used Toll Access to generate revenue to cover the costs of reviewing and printing information. This model made sense in a print based world but began to show signs of weakness once scholarship became digital. The cost of publishing on a website is far less than the costs associated with print publication. OA changes the payment model to one which is arguably in favor of both the researcher and the author.¹³ Peter Suber, author of "Open Access" reports that OA "literature is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions." When scholarly works are

¹⁰ "Peter Suber, Open Access Overview (Definition, Introduction)."

¹¹ "Open Access."

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

freely available they are easier to access and thus the citation/impact factor would increase.

A study done by Gunther Eysenbach at the University of Toronto tracked the impact factor of OA articles versus Toll Access articles. The study showed that OA articles are 2.9 times more likely to be cited than non-OA or Toll Access articles allowing for increased dissemination of information.¹⁴ As detailed by Harnard, et al in “The Access/Impact Problem and the Green and Gold Roads to Open Access”, other studies suggest that OA articles impact is 336% higher than that of non-OA articles. Suber also notes that OA allows the author to truly pursue their areas of interest or expertise because they are not catering to a journal that makes judgments based on the popularity of research.

Implications in developing nations

Academic institutions in developing nations do not have the buying power that those in the developed nations have to pay or negotiate the subscription costs of Toll Access; however, subscription access can be too costly for institutions with buying power as well.¹⁵ This paves the way for OA to take precedent in both the developed and developing world. Allowing information to be freely available for use and reuse serves both the author (citation impact) and the researcher (access).

¹⁴ Eysenbach, “Citation Advantage of Open Access Articles.”

¹⁵ “Frequently Asked Questions | UCLA Library.” Accessed December 6, 2016. <http://www.library.ucla.edu/support/publishing-data-management/faq#1>.

However, unregulated and predatory journals—defined as journals that operate under the guise of scholarly publications but do not actually peer-review the articles they publish¹⁶—take advantage of the author fee system by forgoing peer-review and accepting all submissions with an average author fee of 178 (USD).¹⁷ The services these fees are intended to cover are null. The only way of monitoring these journals is through the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)¹⁸ and “Beall’s List”.¹⁹ (It is important to note that Beall’s List and the corresponding website are currently deactivated. There can only be speculation but Beall was involved in a lawsuit as to the credibility of his claims.^{20 21}) While the monetary motives are obvious, the ramifications are more complex.

Predatory journals exist because of an initiative led by developed country led initiative to provide scholarly sources to anyone with internet access and the desire to learn. The model of asking authors to pay for publication, on a base level, seems legitimate, particularly when revenue is forgone without subscription fees. However, predatory journals exploiting this model exist in regions where the need for freely available scholarly sources are most dire. "Four

¹⁶ “Beall’s List of Predatory Publishers 2016.”

¹⁷ Shen, Cenyu, and Bo-Christer Björk. “‘Predatory’ Open Access: A Longitudinal Study of Article Volumes and Market Characteristics.” *BMC Medicine* 13 (2015): 230. doi:10.1186/s12916-015-0469-2.

¹⁸ DOAJ, “Directory of Open Access Journals.”

¹⁹ Beall’s List is a non-authoritative list of journals that have been determined to be predatory by Jeffrey Beall, a librarian at the University of Colorado. Although he is recognized for his work, the list has been controversial at times. The DOAJ is recognized as more of an authority source but, as with Beall’s List, if the researcher does not know of its existence, the resource is invaluable. Ulrichsweb.com also notes if journals are referred to but, again, the issue is knowing the resource exists.

²⁰ Kulkarni, Sneha. “Beall’s List Of ‘predatory’ publishers and Journals No Longer Available.” *Editage Insights* (19-01-2017), January 19, 2017. <http://www.editage.com/insights/bealls-list-of-predatory-publishers-and-journals-no-longer-available>.

²¹ Wilson, “Librarian vs. (Open Access) Predator.”

major geographical clusters of ‘predatory’ publishers were found in India, Nigeria, the U.S., and the U.K. A common practice has emerged in which many such OA publications are run in India with branches in the latter two countries.”

²² Predatory journals have been buying journals in developed countries that look or were once reputable.²³ Journals often mention members of their editorial board and their citation impact as credentials.²⁴ Predatory journals, in many instances, do not actually have an editorial board or the impact they claim.²⁵

Researchers in developing countries rely on affordable resources to gather information and build the foundation for their own research. In predatory journals at best, the research is not reviewed, at worst it is plainly false. The push for global information equality under Western terms has allowed for systems of exploitation such as this to exist and permeate in environments on the fringes of Western research.

A prime example of this is Mary Abukutsa-Onyango, a researcher from Kenya who was disregarded by "scholarly" journals because she was not associated with a prestigious university and did not have previous publications to bolster her resume. However, Abukutsa-Onyango sought out an Open Access journal to

²² Xia, Jingfeng, Jennifer L. Harmon, Kevin G. Connolly, Ryan M. Donnelly, Mary R. Anderson, and Heather A. Howard. “Who Publishes in ‘predatory’ Journals?” *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 66, no. 7 (July 1, 2015): 1406–17. doi:10.1002/asi.23265.

²³ “OMICS International Continues Violating Canada.” *Scholarly Open Access*, November 29, 2016. <https://scholarlyoa.com/2016/11/29/omics-international-continues-violating-canada/>.

²⁴ “FTC Charges Academic Journal Publisher OMICS Group Deceived Researchers | Federal Trade Commission.” Accessed December 6, 2016. <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2016/08/ftc-charges-academic-journal-publisher-omics-group-deceived>.

²⁵ Jalalian and Mahboobi, “Hijacked Journals and Predatory Publishers.”

publish her work. The research and impact Abukutsa-Onyango conducted was incredibly influential and eventually recognized in the appropriate manner. The focus on how the research was published is definitely of interest but the way the research was approached is equally as important. Abukutsa-Onyango recognized that the research she was pursuing had implications outside of the academic world and not only conducted her research with this in mind but she published it in a manner that was accessible to all the stakeholders, scholarly or otherwise.

The importance of this anecdotal evidence extends past the OA conversation and explores the question of information dissemination, particularly scholarly information, in a developing nation. The research conducted was done in a way that was inclusive to all involved, from farmers to scholars. Each group was approached in a way that was familiar to them. Not only was a scholarly article published but Abukutsa-Onyango created brochures that utilized language and information that allowed her research to have the most impact with all of the stakeholders, not just those with a scholarly investment. Abukutsa-Onyango shows that scholarly research, despite the "scholarly" title, does not have to adhere to the rigid professionalism prescribed by the Western model of scholarly research.

Exploring Open Access as an answer to information inequality

It is reasonable to begin combating predatory journals with a US-based initiative to generate guidelines for what constitutes a scholarly source in an effort to begin

to solidify what constitutes a reputable source. These guidelines should be regulated by an authoritative organization.²⁶ Journals that have proven themselves to be reputable should be identified and recognized as legitimate sources and given an official rating or "seal of approval". The bodies governing academic standards should develop policy that adheres to what it means to be a viable source and issue accreditation to journals based on these standards. By beginning to enforce this, predatory journals will be easier to identify.

US government intervention is helping pave the way for Open Access initiatives. The National Institute of Health spearheaded this movement by requiring that their grant-research be made publicly available.²⁷ This was the first initiative of the US government to require research done with government funds be made available to the public. The Obama Administration publicly stated their interest in openness as well.²⁸ These kinds of mandates paved the way for creating more direct and explicit guidelines for how access is to be approached. The White House also issued a memorandum in support of OA. In 2013 they issued "\$100 million... to develop a plan within six months to support increased public access to the results of research funded by the federal government."²⁹ There are no established guidelines for how research conducted with these grants should be published or how easily accessible the data should be. Under the Freedom of

²⁶ DOAJ. "Directory of Open Access Journals." Accessed December 6, 2016. <https://doaj.org>.

²⁷ "When and How to Comply | Publicaccess.nih.gov."

²⁸ "Transparency and Open Government."

²⁹ "White House Announces New US Open-Access Policy : News Blog."

Information Act, this research is to be publicly accessible as well. These government initiatives, though vague in relation to information dissemination, are a step in the right direction

Organizations such as the International Federation of Library Associations approach information dissemination on a global scale. Three of their four core values mention access as a goal.³⁰ They have developed programs to not only team up with the United Nations to promote education but also have formed the Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) Advisory Committee to “protect intellectual freedom and freedom of expression.”³¹

Utilizing resources such as the IFLA, library associations can help generate global initiatives than can be enacted on a smaller scale. For instance, the IFLA also hosts yearly conferences. By using these conferences to focus on what librarians and information professionals can do to promote OA at home, the content opens up the opportunities for librarians in developing countries to model this behavior. As part of the IFLA, the FAIFE makes an effort “to report violations of free access to information and freedom of expression.”³² If the FAIFE has created reports of either reputable or non-reputable journals, this information can be widely shared and utilized as an authoritative voice.

³⁰ “More about IFLA.” <https://www.ifla.org/about/more>.

³¹ “IFLA -- Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) Advisory Committee.” <https://www.ifla.org/faife>.

³² *Ibid.*

Lastly, the ways academic and research institutions are responding to the call for Open Access is important. Currently there is a lot of ambiguity around OA and Fair Use. Institutional guidelines are adopted in ways that are not clearly explained to staff that interact with patrons who need to be advised on the limitations and scope of use. There has been a push, as of late, for universities to require scholarly work done by faculty, staff, and students to be included in an institutional repository. These mandates, though not without issue, are another step forward on the path to Open Access.

One of the reasons predatory journals are allowed to exist is due to lack of understanding of scholarly sources. In a study of academics in Ethiopia, participants were surveyed about their knowledge of OA journals. A majority of the respondents were aware of OA journals and the ones who were not overwhelmingly noted that they believed it was the responsibility of librarians to make these resources known.³³ It follows to assume that if it the responsibility of librarians is to make OA journals known, they should also be aware of how to identify and avoid predatory journals.

This is where I propose the strengthening of international professional organizations that encourage research and understanding on scholarly sources. Webinars and global conferences can be utilized to not only teach awareness but discuss how to adapt these practices in ways that are culturally appropriate.

³³ Mammo and Ngulube, "Academics' Use and Attitude towards Open Access in Selected Higher Learning Institutions of Ethiopia."

Although the organization of conferences can be costly, the push to promote awareness is something that can be done locally and initially with little monetary investment. There are already professional organizations that work to promote LIS initiatives on a global scale, it is just a matter of increasing awareness—something that can be integrated into LIS curriculums.

The American Library Association provides accreditation to LIS programs. Many library positions require a degree from an ALA accredited institution to be employed as a librarian. They also accept similar accreditation if a person receives the degree abroad. A step can be taken forward if all associations require training in how to identify legitimate scholarly sources either through professional development programs or as part of core competencies in the curriculum of accredited programs. Recognition and initiatives have already been executed to identify and negate the influence of predatory journals. What does need to happen is wider accredited recognition. Although this issue does affect LIS professionals in the US, more emphasis needs to be placed on how global advancements are being affected. By promoting global thought in the LIS field as a whole and in LIS curriculums, professionals can begin to combat the dissemination of potentially faulty information.

Conclusion

The LIS profession is not insular, it is not solitary, and it is not immune from cultural and worldly responsibility. Many professional library organizations state

explicitly their investment in freedom of information. In order to protect and promote access to legitimate information library and information professionals need to educate themselves and others on how to identify reliable sources.

Increasing focus on the importance of legitimate scholarly Open Access sources can pave the way for forming alliances, programs, and reports that have an authoritative voice. This voice helps to eliminate ambiguity or confusion about what sources constitute as reputable. By strengthening national and international institutional relationships this information can be disseminated more readily and become an easy reference point for all libraries--academic or otherwise. By taking small steps as professionals and members of organizations, LIPs can begin to enact change that will affect information access and protect against the dissemination of untrustworthy information. The avenues and resources to enact this change are available, it begins with recognizing why this issue exists and the small steps needed to begin addressing the issue.

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