

Hybrid OA Journals: A Progression or a Destination?

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Abstract

The proliferation of Open Access (OA) journals has provided authors of scholarly works a choice in how their works are published and archived. In doing so, open access journals have become competition for the mainstream so-called Toll Access (TA) journals. Some of these traditional journals have therefore realized the potential of offering authors and institutions their own open options and thus formed hybrid OA journals. This article will examine in detail exactly what a hybrid OA journal is and whether or not it qualifies as truly offering an open access option for authors. It will also determine the reasons that traditional journals have gone hybrid and it will take a look at how successful they are. Lastly the article will explore the impact that hybrid OA journals have on the open movement to determine whether they support or undermine it.

What is a hybrid OA journal?

A hybrid Open Access (OA) journal is a journal that publishes scholarly articles under two economic models. The first economic model that it employs is the traditional Toll Access (TA) model that accepts journal submissions and publishes those that are accepted while selling a subscription based service that for a price, gives access to readers. The second economic model that it employs is one where the author pays a fee to the journal to make the article open to readers, regardless of whether or not they subscribe to the journal. This second model gives open access to readers without requiring a fee from them. It is an economic model that is used by some fully OA publishers, like the Public Library of Science, although all OA journals that use this model offer an economic hardship waiver (Open Access Directory, 2009).

Most hybrid OA journals were once traditional toll journals that have adopted the second model, giving a choice to the authors. A hybrid OA journal uses both models to sustain itself, as well as adhere to mandates issued by research foundations and institutions. In addition, hybrid OA journals offer a choice to the author regarding open access and, in some cases, to the copyright and licensing after publishing. This choice is given to authors only after their submission has been accepted for publication (Elsevier, 2009). Many hybrid OA publishers that once criticized OA journals for using what is termed an "author-pay" model make this distinction very clear. "In this model, the publisher doesn't impose anything on the author, but, after the article is accepted for publication following a process of peer review, the author is given the option to publish his or her article with open access." (Velterop, 2007).

What one journal calls "Hybrid OA", another journal calls "Sponsored Article". There are many names that these TA journals chose when they adapted some open access options into their business practices. Ranging from "Author Choice" from the American Chemical Society, to "Free to Read" from the American Physical Society, and "Oxford Open" from Oxford University Press these different names also illustrate differences in the hybrid model (Wikipedia, 2009). The full breadth of

these publisher copyright and self-archiving policies is available at the SHERPA/RoMEO site (<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/>) where it is possible to look up each publisher to determine their specific guidelines. These guidelines are always changing, too. As the OA movement gains more traction and popularity, it has a direct impact on TA journals and their hybrid options. While these traditional journals were at first reluctant to change their practices, we will explore how marketplace pressures from authors, institutions, and funding agencies have forced them to adapt and change their electronic access policies.

So are hybrid OA journals “Open”?

To determine this we need a definition for what “Open” means in terms of the Open Access Movement. This is not easy to do for there exists as many definitions for the word as there exist opinions about it. The Budapest Open Access Initiative (OAI) was one of the first groups of like-minded scholars that came together to discuss open access and how to facilitate an open model for scholarly research (2002). They came to the following conclusion:

“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. The only constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited.”

Peter Suber, a leading scholar in the OA movement has taken the text of the Budapest OAI and summarized it with four criteria. Open access means that the article is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions. (Suber, 2007). If we apply these criteria to hybrid OA journals we must apply them individually. As we mentioned, each publisher, and in some cases each journal, has its own name and specific policies for their program. And these policies are continuously changing! Therefore Suber suggests that we ask nine questions of these hybrid OA programs to determine if they offer true open access options for authors (Suber, 2006). These questions are derived from the four main criteria above that he uses to determine open access. They include questions about their copyright and licensing policies, pre-print and post-print rules, general questions about the author’s fees and waivers for economic hardship, and ask about subscription price reductions. In answering these questions, Suber points out the deficiencies for most of the hybrid OA programs that currently exist. The most glaring issue is subscription price reduction based upon the additional revenue that journals receive from author’s fees. While several hybrid OA publishers have modified their policies and copyright and licensing policies with Springer leading the way (Velterop, 2007), and opened up pre-print and post-print rules starting with Elsevier (Suber, 2006), only Oxford University Press has issues subscription price reductions based on OA options (Van Orsdel & Born, 2008). This suggests that Suber’s questions give us a more complete picture of understanding the degree of openness that each publisher or journal provides.

Many libraries and universities also use these questions to gauge open access options when issuing their own policies regarding publication. Both the University of California at Berkley (2008) and Columbia University (2009) note differences between authentic OA journals and hybrid OA journals on their websites. As of September 14th, 2009, the University of California at Berkley joined several other prestigious schools (Cornell University, Dartmouth, Harvard University, and the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology) in announcing a “Compact for Open Access Publication”. (Peek, 2009). This compact commits these universities, and any others that join, to “the timely establishment of durable mechanisms for underwriting reasonable publication charges for articles written by its faculty and published in fee-based open-access journals and for which other institutions would not be expected to provide funds.” (Compact for Open-Access Publishing Equity, 2009). This compact acts as additional financial support for the OA model. Tellingly, this compact does not include hybrid OA journals. Reasons for the decision to bar hybrid OA are based upon Suber’s nine questions. While slowly adapting, hybrid OA journals do not yet meet all the criteria for open access and they also do not need additional financial support. Stuart Shieber substantiates this in his article “Equity for Open-Access Journal Publishing” published in the open access journal *Public Library of Science Biology*. “Hybrid and delayed open-access journals already receive revenue through subscription charges, even for the articles that they make freely available.” (2009). They do not need the support, he insists, because they do not provide benefits or discounts to subscribers based upon the amount of OA articles in their journals. Although he acknowledges that not all publishers will agree with him, he concludes that “an institution that covered hybrid fees for all articles emanating from it would, at best, see a tiny compensating reduction in subscription fee.” (Shieber, 2009). Although hybrid OA programs do offer a degree of open access, the other players in the marketplace such as authors and institutions clearly have their doubts. The impact of this Compact for Open Access Publication is too new to be observed. If history is any measure, however, hybrid OA journals will have to continue to adapt, as they have in the past, to meet the market mandates to compete in the academic publishing world.

Why did traditional TA journals go hybrid in the first place?

Stevan Harnad, founder and moderator of the American Scientist Open Access Forum, reiterates the history in his blog posting, *Wrong Advice on Open Access: History Repeating Itself*. “In the year 2000, 34,000 biological researchers worldwide signed a boycott threat to stop publishing in and refereeing for their journals if those journals did not provide (what we would now call) Open Access (OA) to their articles.” (2009). But it wasn’t until the Budapest OAI, in 2002, created a specific plan for introducing open access that the traditional journals began to pay attention. The OAI determined that creating two alternatives to the traditional publishing model would help bring open access to scholarly research. They advocated two very specific types of OA— self-archiving in open repositories called “green” OA and new open access journals, known as “gold” OA (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002). From that initiative it would be almost two years later that the Public Library of Science (made up from the same biological researchers that signed the boycott threat in 2000) would launch their well-respected PLoS OA journals. Given the prestige and the unity of these authors, and the attention that they were garnering from governments and universities around the world, traditional journals had no choice but to pay attention.

Elsevier was the first publishing giant to formally counter the open access movement. In a formal written response to questions posed by the UK House of Commons’ Select Committee on Science and Technology, Elsevier raised many concerns about the ideas of open access. They insisted that their costs were actually lower per user, and that users gained easier access to their articles (Elsevier, 2004). They maintained that the author-pay model would induce journals to accept sub-par articles in order to achieve sustainability. They also contended that publishers “must continue to make articles available in multiple media formats” and that OA journals couldn’t provide print copies to the populations that relied upon them. (Elsevier, 2004, pg.2). This last claim is the only one that still stands. The OA model has proven itself to cost less than “publishing a subscription-based e-journal” (Van Orsdel & Born, 2008). In accepting the author-pay model for their own programs, hybrid

journals have taken the sting out of perceived “vanity press worries” as Shieber argues in his online pamphlet, *Is open-access journal publishing a vanity publishing industry?* While it may be necessary to consider the need for publishing in multiple media formats, Elsevier, along with other major publishers, soon acknowledged the need to adapt to the changes in the marketplace. They even admitted this in their official response. “The recent period of rapid, intense innovation in STM publishing—the context in which Open Access has emerged—is far from over.” (Elsevier, 2004).

In addition to the pressure from scientists and institutions, traditional publishers had to attend to the rising cry from libraries regarding what they termed as the “serials crisis”. The serials crisis refers to the sharp price increases for subscriptions to TA journals over the past 20 years. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) estimates that expenditures for serials by research libraries increased **210%** between 1986-2001 (Association of Research Libraries, 2004). In their paper, *Framing the issue: Open Access*, they issued a call to action in embracing the OA movement as response to the pricing monopolies held by the publishing giants. The ARL added the influence of academic libraries, in many cases the primary consumers of TA journal subscriptions, to push open access options for scholarly articles. It was their hope that this would impact the pricing of TA subscriptions by introducing OA competition and other economic models of support. So far this has not been the case. Although many hybrid OA publishers have insisted that libraries will not pay twice for the open articles that are included in their journals (once via subscription and again via author-pay), only Oxford University Press has decreased their subscriptions because of the addition of author-pay articles. Indeed, one of the main criticisms of hybrid OA publishing is the lack of transparency over pricing structures and incomes (Van Orsdel & Born 2008). Although academic libraries have not seen a decrease in subscription price, their support for OA was nevertheless valuable in effecting change.

In response to the burgeoning OA movement, traditional journals began to loosen their exclusive TA models in 2004. Elsevier began by permitting post-print archiving for some of their journals. (Suber, 2006). Springer was the first to create an “Open Choice” option for its entire collection of journals a month later, including a specific open access license. (Velterop, 2007). Blackwell's “Online Open” and Oxford University Press' “Oxford Open” programs began in 2005, followed by Elsevier's “Sponsored Article” program in 2006. After that most of the other major publishers followed suit and offered OA options with varying degrees of pre- and post-print liberties and licensing choices... for a fee. These fees were paid by either the authors who wrote the scholarly articles or by the agencies that funded them. Although some of the first arguments from publishers against OA were directed at the author-pay model, hybrid OA journals justified their programs by declaring that they offered authors a choice (Velterop, 2007). Authors could choose the traditional publishing route or they could pay to have their articles open to the general public. This choice made it very safe for traditional journals to offer OA options because either choice had economic support.

The real changes came, however, when funding agencies began to mandate specific open access options. These mandates were opposed by publishers because they took away the choice made OA a requirement. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) signed a law in 2007 requiring that grantees make their work available in an open access format within a year of publishing. This mandate would give journals an exclusive publishing term and, at the same time, eventually make publicly funded research available to the public. Days later “the European Research Council announced the first European Union (EU)–wide mandate on January 10, calling for grant recipients to put research articles and supporting data on the web within six months of publication.” (Van Orsdel & Born, 2008). In order to meet the requirements of these funding agencies, authors had to comply. In order to compete with OA journals, TA and hybrid OA journals also had to comply. A month later Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences was the first university anywhere to mandate self-archiving (Green OA) in an institutional open repository. Although most publishers condemned the mandates claiming a violation of their intellectual property rights, journals had no choice but to continue to change their policies to align with the market and the mandates issued by the market players (Van Orsdel & Born, 2008).

Are hybrid OA journal successful?

“The momentum for hybrid journals is understandable. The option is nearly risk-free for publishers. If the uptake is low, they still have subscription revenue to pay the bills. If the uptake is high and subscribers start to cancel, they have fee revenue to pay the bills.” (Suber, 2006) Hybrid OA journals give traditional journals a model to comply with funding mandates and to compete with existing OA journals while allowing them two economic models for sustainability. Furthermore, they retain the prestige and influence that they have built over the years as traditional journals. They also preserve all of their existing internal structures in place for quality peer review and market dissemination. This includes all of the resources for the non-research article content that they include in their publications. Adding to their value, this content consists of book reviews, commentaries, and editorials in addition to any advertising they may incorporate into the journal. (Crawford, 2009). So yes, for now, hybrid OA journals are very successful.

In addition to the advantages afforded them by their traditional model they combine the proven advantages of OA articles such as increased citation, dissemination, and positive public relations. “OA articles enjoy at least double the rate of citation when compared to closed access, but also potentially as much as two and three times the rate of citation.” (Joint, 2009, pg. 497) The rate of citation is a relatively new method of examining a scholarly paper’s dissemination and overall effectiveness. Given the ease of tracing and counting citations in an electronic format verses an in-print format, it has rapidly become an important measure of success. It is another way that scholars and universities can prove their worth to funding agencies and so journals are also very interested in this benefit.

Lastly, hybrid OA journals enjoy having some moral ground to stand upon. “Open access is a choice,” Jan Veltero, director of Springer’s Open Access program states in the same named paper, *Open access is a choice* (2007). Many publishers declare that offering authors a choice about who pays is fairer than a set author-pay model. They claim that shifting the burden of cost from the reader to the writer will hurt research institutions while helping corporate institutions who do very little research and yet use academic research for profit (Veltero, 2007). It should be noted, however, that OA journals employ different models for sustainability, and the author-pay model, which often includes an OA economic hardship fee waiver, is just one of many.

Then what are the drawbacks?

The serials crisis continues virtually unabated. The prices for journal subscriptions, even for hybrid OA journals that have author-financed articles, in most cases, are still rising. EBSCO’s Serials Price Projection report for 2009 indicates increases from anywhere between two and twenty-five percent depending upon the currency of the journal. (EBSCO, 2008). In response to this, several prestigious universities have announced a “Compact for Open Access Publication”, specifically excluding hybrid OA journals, as mentioned above. Hybrid OA journals have not been transparent regarding their pricing structures and it is very difficult to determine the impact that OA articles have had on the pricing of hybrid OA journals (Estelle, 2009). While publishers insist that subscribers are not paying twice for articles, once as the author and again as the subscriber, it is hard to prove exactly what universities *are* paying for. With the economic downturn impacting universities and funding agencies alike, scholars and their institutions are looking for new ways to increase their citations and decrease their expenditures.

It is costly for authors to choose an author-pay model, which may be a deterrent, especially if their funding agencies will not pay. It can also be confusing to find a path through the constantly

changing arrangement of hybrid OA options and licensing policies. Some of these options have arrangements with funding agencies already in place and others do not. Rosie Redfield, a molecular biologist, chronicled her journey through the maze of Elsevier's Author Sponsored program on her blog, *RRResearch*. "The Elsevier sponsored-access system is confusing, the policy is not clearly explained, and the necessary information is hard to find." (Redfield, 2008). Ultimately there are more restrictions concerning copyright and licensing issues for an author, more than one would find with an OA journal. Authors must navigate through each journal's specific policies regarding pre and post-print guidelines, copyright and licensing agreements, fees, and benefits. The remuneration is not as complete for authors who want complete open dissemination for their research. While hybrid OA journals are evolving their policies and adapting to the market place, it may not be fast enough for researchers.

How do hybrid OA journals impact the OA movement?

"Hybrid journals are good for OA roughly in proportion to author uptake. To that extent they enlarge the body of OA literature." (Suber, 2007). These journals have offered authors options that have increased the available knowledge in the world. Hybrid OA has also augmented awareness of OA issues to scholars and researchers simply by offering these options in their traditional journals. Their acceptance of OA has moved the discussion away from the right to have the choice, to what kind of choice should authors have? By utilizing the author-pay model themselves, these publishers have quieted the criticism over author-pay as a legitimate economic model for journals.

While hybrid OA journals certainly have impacted the open movement, it is critical to note that the open movement has also had an enormous impact on hybrid OA. It is critical because it demonstrates the strength and effectiveness of the OA movement. The traditional publishers of scholarly research can no longer impose their publishing policies on authors and institutions. Authors have choices and institutions have mandates and the tables have turned.

In the nine years since 34,000 biological researchers worldwide signed an ineffective boycott threat, those researchers went on to organize an impressive movement that has effectively changed the rules of the market place. While the Oxford University Press has responded to the market by decreasing its subscription rates because of their author-paid articles, other publishers have publically committed themselves "to continue to evaluate its journal subscription prices on a yearly basis, based on a number of factors, including the amount of subscription-model content being published." (Peek, 2009). Even Elsevier has released a commitment to decouple its digital pricing structure from its print price in the August issue of *LibraryConnect*. "Factors (will) include the quality and online usage of each journal, plus the number of articles per journal, as well as whether a journal is participating in our author-pays model called Sponsored Articles." (Silver, 2009). Although we cannot be certain what real effect this will have on subscription costs, the fact remains that *traditional publishers are responding to the OA market push rather than dictating the terms*. Hybrid OA journals must continue to adapt to the ongoing mandates and market forces in order to remain competitive.

Is there a conclusion?

From the beginning, the Budapest Open Access Initiative provided scholars with two models for changing the market in terms of OA publishing. These models have been successful in influencing the market place and all of the players including authors, universities, funding agencies, and publishers. This market effect has forced traditional journals into the innovation and adaptation of OA options that continue to evolve today. Although many criticized the early efforts of hybrid OA

journals as not enough to be considered open access, and those beliefs continue today, it is clear that hybrid OA journals have not reached a single destination but are in the process of adjustment and adaptation. This evolution has and will continue to be determined by an open market that includes real OA options for authors, institutions, and funding agencies. While there is indeed room enough for commercial publishing in the market place, it is no longer the dominant force in determining policy. How this will affect subscription-based economic models, we will have to wait and see. It is obvious, though, that change will continue.

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