Printed Scholarly Monographs

Pronounced Dead Prematurely?

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The scholarly monograph is a topic of discussion, as different stakeholders have different reasons for keeping or abandoning this particular form of publication. Texts in digital form are increasingly pervasive and pose a serious threat to the printed form. This essay aims to explore concerns from the perspectives of scholarly readers, scholarly authors, publishers of academic texts and their different models, and, finally, the perspective of libraries and consortia, to see if there is a possible future for the printed scholarly monograph.

Keywords: *business models; digitisation; OAPEN; Open Access; scholarly publishing*

The scholarly monograph is at a turning point in its existence, as a subject of many discussions of what measures should be taken to go in to ensure the best possible way for researchers to publish and read scholarly texts. Changing roles of libraries in combination with different ways of allocating budgets, as well as digital reading are some important factors influencing the future of the scholarly monograph. At this point in time, the monograph is often available in both print and digital form, but there is a chance that the print form will disappear. This essay will further explore possible threats to the printed form, concerns from the perspectives of the scholar as a reader, the scholar as an author, the publishers and different models used for publishing and finally the perspective of the library, to see if there is a possible future for the printed scholarly monograph.

Paper vs. Screen Reading

The first question that comes to mind is: do scholars still want to read a printed version, or do they prefer a digital version? "Paper versus screen" has been a subject of research, and the findings provide a dual outcome: digital reading is preferred for short, shallow reading, often used for skimming through the text, whereas reading off-screen is deemed suitable for immersive deep-reading.

This is partly due to the (in) tangibility of the text, since the way readers handle books and devices have different effects on how easily texts can be read. Typically, the internet is used for searching texts, and fragmented texts are the most read texts online. Longer texts, where the reader concentrates on the reading, are preferably read on paper.[1]

> 'Committees responsible for selection and promotion continue to perceive printed monographs as more prestigious than a monograph published digitally'

When reading, the brain goes through the same movements as when writing, since the same areas responsible for writing are activated.[2] The mental involvement with text goes even further, since the brain also connects parts of the text to their location on paper pages, which cannot be done when reading from a screen.[3] It is because of this connection that paper is easier to navigate and more easily remembered. This is important for any kind of reader, but even more important for scholars who depend on their readings for their writings.

Scholars make use of paper for immersive reading, and part of this process is making annotations and highlighting parts that might be useful. It serves scholars in two ways: increasing the understanding of a text, by slowing down the pace, as well as ensuring that they can revisit the relevant passages for their own research.[4] Most scholars do not read digital texts completely on screen, but rather print these, since 'the traditional habit of highlighting and annotating text has not migrated to the digital environment'.[5] Skimming through a text can help decide to either discard it, or read it with more focus. This skimming can be done digitally, while the reader is not yet committed to read the text in full and can be a first step towards immersive reading.[6] Since the annotations are often still handwritten, the text has to be available offline.

Digital texts can more easily be adjusted to the reader and are more easily accessible through the internet.[7] The drawback is that these texts come with many distractions on the page itself, as well as the option to click on parts of the page that will lead to other pages or pop-ups. Even if the reader does not intend to click,

there is an urge to do so, which in itself is a distraction from the text.[8] This urge exists because people have wandering minds, there is a need to keep fighting it by paying attention to reading, and it is much easier to just click than keep fighting off external distractions in our minds.[9] The text itself is static, it remains the same constantly, so it is hard to keep paying attention to it.[10] The clicking urge is further increased by eye-catchers that try to get the user to go to another page, so the reader is prone to interruptions during his/her readings.[11] Immersion is further disrupted by images that can be found everywhere. Images add meaning to texts and can carry meaning in themselves; through this self-contained meaning, they can be a distraction for the reader.[12]

Besides the distractions within programs, computers can be a distraction in themselves. Computers are multifunctional, which makes it hard to use them for just one task at a time.[13] Their multi-functionality demands attention from the user and can pose a serious threat to the immersive reading process. It also reminds the user of unfinished tasks, by sending notifications from different programs that are running in the background. It is difficult to ignore these notifications, and this maintains the awareness of the device. In off-screen reading, the reader's conscious mind wanders to an alternate reality, whereas newer technology keeps the reader aware of reality, with technology as an ever-present object.[14]

E-readers have gotten rid of a great deal of the distractions, since they do not have all the apps, advertisements, and backlight issues that computers or tablets have.[15] Still, the reader is aware of the technology, since e-readers are not one with the text. There is a distance between the content and the form, because the content can change without a change in the device itself. This is impossible with a book, pages have to be turned in order to reveal new content and it is not possible to change the text on a page without turning it.[16] This difference creates an awareness in the reader of the e-reader technology, while the book as an object easily fades into the background, enabling the reader to focus solely on the content.[17]

Concerns of authors

In scholarly communication, the authors are also part of the group of readers, making this a special group within the field. The authors, especially those within humanities and social studies, depend on monographs for their careers. They are encouraged to write monographs for promotions, but it is also viewed as a prestigious contribution that might lead to further career opportunities, such as grants for new research.

The prestige that comes along with monographs is greater than with articles, and there is still a tendency in academic circles to think that printed monographs are more prestigious than those available online.[18] Further evidence suggests that committees responsible for selection and promotion continue to perceive printed monographs as more prestigious than a monograph published digitally.[19] Some people from

a focus group indicated that universities have 'effectively outsourced their tenure and promotion decisions to the publishers who commission and select content'.[20]

Open access publications are believed to be less critically evaluated, thus of lesser quality, than printed materials.[21] Even though the process for open access publications can be just as strict, the way they are perceived is far from positive and it will take time for researchers to change their opinion. This belief is further influenced by the funding models that some open access publication platforms hold: through processing fees for authors. There is a suspicion towards authors who pay their own fees, and this is seen as 'vanity publishing'.[22] Of course, this is part of the idea that the one who pays is essentially the one making the final decisions, and that publishers will accept anything as long as they can make a profit. On the other hand, the author might be concerned about the marketing for his/ her monograph, since the publisher receives money no matter what.[23] The publisher no longer relies on book sales to have an income, so why bother to pay marketers for the promotion of the material? The point of publishing a monograph is that people will read the work and, more importantly, they will cite it. This leads to more prestige for the most quoted authors, but if the authors and their works cannot be found and read, they will not be as likely to receive a grant or promotion.

New ways of selling (e-)books

In summary, readers as well as authors are still interested in the print version, but are publishers still willing to provide printed texts, and is this financially sustainable? Digital publishing does cost as much as traditional printing, with material costs and the costs of the physical distribution of the books. Yet, there is still a need to cover other costs, for example for the editing process and the marketing of monographs (assuming that publishers will still need to market books if author's fees do not cover everything). The printed version has material costs but at the same time, the consumer is willing to pay for them, whereas digital material is often viewed as having to be (nearly) free, since there is no physical product. Publishers need to find out how they can deal with these expectations and make enough money to continue their work. Since it is essential for scholars, especially in the humanities, to publish monographs, publishers must find ways to do so. Different models to publish monographs have been developed, but are these still considering printed monographs, or is print left out of the equation?

A decline in print title sales and little revenue from e-books in the humanities and social sciences calls for a new approach regarding book sales; the traditional model cannot be sustained.[24] Scholars have the option to bypass publishers digitally, so this is a threat to the already declining sales;[25] publishers have to find ways to enhance and emphasise their services in order to stay relevant.[26] One way to

enhance their services is to come up with metadata plans and standards, for which they have more time and expertise than researchers have in general. It is imperative that new ways of doing business are created, but what are some new models that are used?

Ice-cream model

One model that is used, is the 'ice-cream' model, which is used by Bloomsbury Academic. This model takes into account the need for open access, meeting the expectation of free materials. The publisher provides a free HTML version on a creative commons non-commercial license, which would be the 'plain vanilla ice cream' as Frances Pinter describes it.[27] They provide extra services to enhance the experience of the reader, such as more accessible formats (the 'cone'), e-books that contain extra metadata and extra materials (the 'toppings').[28] In this model, it is entirely up to the reader how much money they want to spend on the monograph or article. The free version is used as a marketing tool, as it draws in the customers, who can check the content before paying anything. Traditional monographs are expensive, and there is an audience that can't be reached by selling printed books. Through digital means, some scholars want to 'bypass publishers altogether'[29], in order to provide affordable books. This model can compete with those scholars.

OAPEN

An open access business model that is currently in use, is OAPEN. The OAPEN project is funded by JISC and the Arts and Humanities Business Council.[30] Open access business models are already used for journals and articles, especially in the STM fields.[31] Many open access models still rely on different versions of the publication, as is the case in the aforementioned ice-cream model. The OAPEN project is a collaboration between stakeholders in the field of publishing, such as publishers, academics, and their institutions that focus on publications in the humanities and social sciences.[32] The OAPEN model provides publishers with a sum of money to provide a PDF format of monographs under a creative commons license, the publisher can still sell prints and e-books.[33]

ILCOAb

A third model for funding is working in consortia to combine funds and negotiations with publishers. One example of this is the International Library Coalition for open access books. This is a possible solution for a problem that occurs within libraries; their budgets cannot buy all essential scholarly books since the 'corpus of research material is expanding whilst the funds to pay for dissemination are contracting'.[34] Books are ordered from the publisher by the coalition if enough members are interested; the price that is paid covers all pre-printing costs, which is often one-third of the costs of a monograph.[35] The publisher will provide an open access file, but is still allowed to sell different versions of the book.[36] The funding model benefits both sides, since the title price per library decreases tremendously, based on how many libraries take part in the

consortium. This will help libraries use their small budgets to buy more materials. Scholars benefit since they have access to more materials and the discoverability of their work increases. The publisher, on the other hand, has a guaranteed revenue and can still sell books to increase profits.[37] The larger a consortium is, the more demands it can make.

Consortia may focus on just their field, which would make them a specialist group with knowledge of the preferences from their own specific field. An example of this is the 'Sponsoring Consortium of Open Access Publishing in Particle Physics (SCOAP3), hosted and organized by CERN'.[38] This consortium has gained open access to a few prestigious journals, showing that consortia in a highly specific field of interest can work.

(University) Libraries

Another contributor to the discussions about paper versus print are the libraries. They are the ones who traditionally bought and stored books, and made them available for readers. They have seen their budgets decline in recent years,[39] while having to deal with buying both the physical books and journals, as well as paying subscription fees for digital content.[40] Adding to that is the expanding amount of monographs that are being published.[41] This in addition to the pressure from patrons to provide more services, such as extra computer rooms.

Libraries did notice a trend in citations from journals and articles: as the online availability increased, a decrease occurred in the number of journals and articles that were cited.[42] A 2004 study within a university library found that print books were less frequently demanded after the titles became digitally available.[43] Libraries had to start thinking about other options than to just buy books and find out who is going to use them later. One solution to this particular problem was the demand-driven acquisition, in which a number of requests would lead to the purchase of an item. This reduced the amount of purchased materials, and consequently, the amount of money that was spent on monographs decreased. This does increase the risk of missing out on buying a book that is later deemed important, and undermines the traditional task of preservation. Being part of a consortium could be a feasible solution for this, since the libraries within a consortium do not have to purchase all of the materials themselves; they can share copies and archiving responsibilities.[44]

Providing and preserving books was a logical role when dealing with printed materials, but for digital materials there is more room for discussion about who is responsible for preservation. It might be wise to look at other options, such as a centralised depository; or a decentralised system, which might be a risk since open access monographs could disappear altogether if there is no central institution keeping track of them, or if the publisher responsible for the preservation ceases to exist.[45]

Conclusion

In summary, the readers are still interested in reading scholarly monographs in printed form, since they want to do some deep reading and add their own remarks to the texts. However, that only goes for the deep reading part, while most texts are just being skimmed in order to see if they fit in with the current research. Deep reading is done on paper because there is no practical alternative, as screens are too distracting and e-readers do not offer marking- and note-taking tools to the satisfaction of the reader.

Additionally, the authors and their institutions seem biased towards a printed version, for this is deemed more prestigious and selection committees focus more on print than on digitally published texts. Open access is not seen as having equal standards of peer-reviewing and accepting, and the perceived quality is further doubted through the publication fees that are payed by the authors themselves. This view of print quality versus digitally published quality might change in the future, especially when digital publications are normalised, but that will be a slow and gradual process.

Publishers have already begun to realise that their business models based on printed monographs are not sustainable and they are coming up with newer models to secure their position in the field of scholarly communication. These models include print but are mainly focused on providing digital texts and additional data. From a publisher's perspective, the monograph has moved from the main product to a by-product, while the content is kept similar to traditional texts and digital texts are often just the print versions published through a digital platform.

Finally, libraries are seen as the keepers of printed books, with rows of monographs on their shelves. This image is gradually changing to an image of an expertise centre, with most of their collections preserved in a depository. Libraries are working together on stretching their budgets, since there is an emphasis on providing access rather than owning and lending items. Libraries too are focusing on the digital material in increasing numbers, but at the same time, they do acquire the most demanded printed materials.

'Digital publishing does cost as much as traditional printing, with material costs and the costs of the physical distribution of the books'

Overall, the emphasis on the digitally available texts is dominant and as scholars are getting more used to working with screens and e-ink, the need for a printed monograph declines. Current models within publishing companies as well as libraries are already making a shift towards the digital world and

the new options that it provides. The printed monograph has been declared dead on multiple occasions, but all of the stakeholders are not yet prepared to let it go for very legitimate reasons. New technological developments will further increase the use of digital texts, but until then, the printed monograph is here to stay.

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