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# Maximum Dissemination: A Possible Model for Society Journals in the Humanities and Social Sciences to Support “Open” While Retaining Their Subscription Revenue

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## Abstract

It is well recognized that one of the hardest problems in the open access arena is how to “flip” the flagship society journals in the humanities and social sciences. Their revenue from a flagship journal is critical to the scholarly society. On the one hand, it is true that the paywall that guards the subscription system from unauthorized access is marginalizing whole categories of scholars and learners. On the other hand, “flipping” to an APC-based model simply marginalizes some of the same people and institutions on the authorship side. Various endowment or subsidy models of flipping create the idea of Samaritans and “freeloaders,” which brings into question their sustainability.

I propose rethinking the relationship between publisher and author. The publisher should act as the expert in dissemination and should take on the responsibility of maximizing the dissemination of the author’s work by providing the author’s accepted manuscript (AAM) to an appropriate repository and taking down the paywall. When requests for an article come to the publisher, instead of presenting nonsubscribers with a paywall, they instead direct the request to the repository in which the AAM has been archived.

This walk-through of the Maximum Dissemination model is followed by:

- A statement from Princeton’s Professor Stanley Katz, president emeritus of the American Council of Learned Societies
- A YouTube video by Associate Professor of Sociology Smitha Radhakrishnan, which is available at [youtu.be/sPO66vuTFJO](https://youtu.be/sPO66vuTFJO)

## Note

In a separate submission to the proceedings of this session, N. V. Sathyanarayana, a librarian from Bangalore, India, and founder of Informatics (India), provides his critique of this model and gives further ideas about where the Maximum Dissemination approach might prove useful (Sathyanarayana, 2019).

## Remarks

For this discussion to be as clear as possible, I want to make some **stipulations**.

These stipulations are really important since I do not believe there is a one-size fits all solution to open access that works across all disciplines. Each discipline has its own context, and forces for or against a transition to open access. Here are the stipulations I’m making for today’s discussion:

Imagine:

- That the researchers and scholars in a particular discipline have expressed really strong support for their discipline to transition to open access. They may not fully understand open access, and may have many questions or concerns—but they generally favor the idea that no one should have financial or technical barriers that prevent them from participating in the scholarly communications process.
- The discipline’s society publishes the flagship journal in that discipline, which is a subscription journal.
- The publishing operation produces a healthy surplus, which the society depends on for a variety of activities important to the membership, including membership

development, keeping the costs of meetings and conferences low, and providing scholarships, awards, and other activities that the membership appreciates.

The momentum for open access in the various STEM disciplines is accelerating, largely due to recent strong actions by universities and funding agencies alike that are putting pressure on scholarly journals in those disciplines to “flip” to open access. **Nothing in my presentation at this Charleston Conference is intended to blunt those initiatives, which I fully endorse.**

I’ve been on an **inquiry** ever since last year’s Charleston Conference to see if I could come up with a way to move some of the top journals in the humanities and social sciences to open access. I interviewed more than 50 people about this model including:

- Scholarly communications librarians
- Academics in various disciplines
- Library directors in both R1 and teaching/learning institutions
- Publishers
- Executives of scholarly societies
- Lawyers
- And, of course, open access advocates

Out of this emerged a possible model.

Addressing the stipulations:

- This is not a model for every journal or every discipline.
  - In fact, I’m a fan of APCs in STEM.
  - And I’m a fan of the Open Knowledge Project and OJS—providing inexpensive ways for thousands and thousands of open access journals to be subsidized at a very low cost.
- This is not a model for a struggling journal—it’s for journal with a strong brand in a discipline that wants to go open.
- For example, you would not choose management science, even if it is one of the social sciences. They could not care less about open access.

- But what about a discipline like bioethics? Exclusion of whole populations from accessing data that has been collected from those very populations—this seems problematic, given the values that bioethicists are likely to aspire to.

Yes, this is an unusual model.

- It’s none of the 12 ways to fund an open access journal.
- It’s not one of the 15 ways enumerated of how to flip a subscription journal to open access.
- And it is not any of the 28 ways that Alicia Wise and Lorraine Estelle have recently enumerated to make a journal Plan S compliant (Wise & Estelle, 2019).

This is more than just a model and a bright idea. It’s also an attitude.

**The attitude?** As I pursued this inquiry, I often found myself channeling a librarian whom some of you may know, Chris Bourg. I’ve only met Chris once, back in 2013 at a meeting of acquisition librarians at Timberline Lodge in Oregon. Her keynote speech was a call out to acquisition librarians to pursue a **Courageous Acquisition Strategy**.

That appeal, “**Be courageous in your job,**” has stuck with me ever since. I’ll often ask myself, “What would be a courageous way to do this?” Being called on to be courageous has a sense of “Why are we doing this? What are our key values? How can I make a difference for now and in the future?”

Let’s first enumerate why scholars in a specific discipline would want to go to open access. What groups of people and institutions are being marginalized by the current system where a paywall prevents unauthorized access?

- Emerging scholars (between institutions)
- Retirees
- Unaffiliated scholars
- Underresourced librarians (and every library is underresourced in some discipline or another)

It’s important to take note of the fact that it is not the subscription model per se that causes the

marginalization of individuals and institutions—it is the paywall guarding that content that shuts readers out of scholarly communication.

Replacing the paywalled subscriptions with APCs completely solves the marginalization of readers and learners, but it then marginalizes some of the same categories of authors.

There are models without APCs but they all tend to transform the journal operations from a profit center into a cost center and that, in turn, generates a need for support from “Samaritans” and the fear that the operation will be overwhelmed by “freeloaders.”

### So, What to Do?

How about changing the relationship completely (starting with the “attitude”) between publisher and scholar?

Eighty-one percent of scholarly publishers worldwide are listed on the Sherpa/Romeo site as acknowledging that authors can share their submitted manuscript. Many more do as well, but just not clearly enough on their website to be picked up by the Sherpa/Romeo curation process.

But how many actually share? About half of the scholars I interviewed over the past year (the exceptions being those who are library researchers) are *not* even aware that their publisher acknowledges that they can put their author accepted manuscript into an open repository.

### What Would the Courageous Society Publisher Do?

Why not this: when accepting an author’s accepted manuscript (AAM) (this is the last submission, after peer review and any edits done by the author to respond to peer reviewers):

Send the author an e-mail:

- Congratulations. Excellent work. Your peers agree. We will take it from here.
- We are the *experts* in **dissemination**, and we will do everything in our power to have your ideas disseminated around the world. We’ll find you an audience and maximize the chances that your article will be read and appreciated by the right people.

- Here’s what we will do:
  - We will present your author accepted manuscript to an appropriate repository (institutional, subject, national).
  - We will develop our published version and include it in our journal along with all of the other content our journal is valued for (news, conference announcements, letters to the editors, postpublishing comments, etc.).

### And here’s the really courageous move:

- We no longer have a paywall, so when we publish your article and you e-mail, tweet, or post news about it on Facebook, everyone in the world will have access to your work. When they click on its DOI or URL, or find your article via Google Scholar, they will click through to our site and they will either get our published version (if they or their institution is a subscriber) or we will direct them to your author accepted manuscript. No one will be shut out.

### What does this mean for the publisher?

- You keep all your sales and subscription processes in place.
- All your sales and marketing staff remain.
- All your agreements, channel strategies, and bundles, too.
- All your accounting and revenue tracking—no changes.
- Yet—no more marginalization of readers anywhere.
- And you’ve not introduced APCs (which marginalize authors).
- Nor required fundraising activities so the Samaritans can cover for the “freeloaders.”
- And you’ve demonstrably showed the academics in your discipline (who want there to be open access) that you truly have their interests at heart—and all this is great for your brand).
- Most of your members have probably not even heard of Plan S. Now they don’t even have to hear about it. Following this

Maximum Dissemination model provides for immediate Plan S compliance.

### What's wrong with this model?

- Most obvious: Why won't our subscription revenues simply tank? After all, if people can get the stuff for free, why would anyone subscribe?
  - Take note of the user-experience of the nonsubscriber and the subscriber:
  - Nonsubscriber:
    - 1, 2, . . . 8, 9, 10 copies of author accepted manuscripts, written in Word by people who are not particularly proficient in Word.
    - No markup of the citations with links to the cited sources.
    - Not yet copyedited.
    - Not meaningfully collocated with other articles in a set.
  - Subscriber:
    - Nicely formatted. Linked to related articles.
    - Organized in a meaningful collection.
    - Letters to the editor, news, conference announcements, overlay reviews, reader comments.
  - When Maximum Dissemination was presented at the the Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP) in May this year, Toby Green, then publishing director for OECD, reported during the Q&A that his peer-reviewed journal operation (which produces more than \$10 million annual revenue) introduced "free to read" of the publisher's version with no delay. This is a far greater risk than what's proposed here of providing access to the AAM. Yet in four years he has seen no reduction in revenue.
- There are many other things "wrong" with this model. But, so far, none of the ones I've heard about measure up to what's right about this model:
  - Eliminates all marginalization of readers.

- Does not replace that with marginalization of authors.
- Leaves in place all the current revenue and dissemination channels.
- Measures up to the broad sense of what open access means.
- And it's Plan S compliant.

In some ways this model is a throwback to what the publisher-author relationship was a hundred years ago. The publisher took on all the tasks and efforts with the available technologies of the times (melting lead, cutting down trees, printing on paper, packaging up the copies, putting them on boats)—going to every length possible to find an audience for their authors. Then the Internet came along—and the cost of almost all these functions has gone to virtually zero. This model proposes that publishers shun the artificial scarcity in the interest of dissemination. The resulting "citations benefit of open" will accrue, not just to the author, but also to the journal, the publisher, and the society for which it operates.

Below are the statement from Professor Stanley Katz of Princeton University (comments at the Society for Scholarly Publishing 41st Annual Meeting, May 30, 2019, San Diego, CA, for Session 2F: "No, Really—A Discipline Can Flip to Open Access and Still Provide Sustainable Subscription Revenue to Its Scholarly Journals, But Only If . . .") and the link to the YouTube video from Associate Professor Smitha Radhakrishnan of Wellesley College.

I am Stanley Katz and I am a professor at Princeton University. I'm in the Woodrow Wilson School here teaching Public Policy, but I was for eleven years the president of the American Council of Learned Societies from 1986 to 1997. I'm painfully aware of the financial challenges to humanities societies and for a long time, many of us in the humanities have wondered how we could simultaneously support the ideal of Open Access while at the same time supporting what has become the traditional humanities article publication model—subscriptions.

Our journals, and indeed, our professional societies, have been supported by subscriptions and memberships and we have not benefited from the mostly federal research subsidies available to the scientific journals. Our understanding has been that if the content of humanity journals was made freely available through Open Access,

then the economic model for support of the journals would disappear. “No subscriptions—No journals” was our understanding.

The problem was exacerbated over the last generation of scholarship by the rapidly increasing specialization of humanities scholarship and therefore the steady increase in the number of humanities journals along with a corresponding decrease in the number of subscribers to individual journals. The total number of humanities scholars has been at best steady state and there is a limit to the number of paid subscriptions each scholar can afford. This has meant that most humanities scholarly societies have resisted the call to move to Open Access even of the green variety despite the political appeal of the Open Access ideal. The problem has been to discover a mode of free access that would not endanger the humanities publication model; it appears that Maximum Dissemination may provide a realistic alternative.

The idea, as I understand it, is to provide manuscripts accepted by a scholarly journal to open repositories so that they would be freely accessible through traditional modes of access. The open repositories would be such archives as institutional, subject, or national repositories which are recognized to be sustainably accessible. The publisher then directs

any non-subscribers to the appropriate archive. There would no longer be any paywall, and this approach would provide full access to the scholarly content for any non-subscriber.

But subscribers would still receive value for their dues since they would have access to a more formidable version of the presentation including full-formatting, links to other related content relating to the article, and to the professional context for the article. The bet here is that this enhanced presentational value will be enough to induce potential subscribers to maintain their subscriptions even though any potential reader would have free access to the basic content.

That’s the idea—and to me it seems to be a quite possible way for us to move forward in an Open Access world. Thank you for hearing me out.

Stanley N. Katz  
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Director, Princeton University Center for Arts  
and Cultural Policy Studies  
President Emeritus, American Council of Learned  
Societies

Comments from Associate Professor Smitha Radhakrishnan can be found at <http://youtu.be/SPO66vuTFJO>.

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