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Open Access and self-publishing in the academic communication: a case study

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Abstract

Commercial publishing houses dominate the academic publishing sector, and they discourage the sharing culture to protect business interests. Authors and institutions have no control over the publishing processes and lost the copyright on the works after publishing. The traditional model of publishing gives more financial commitment to authors. Self-publishing gives full control to the authors over the publishing processes. Open Access model gives the publications faster impact and greater user engagement. This article shares the experience of self-publishing an Open Access book in a higher education institution.

Keywords: Scholarly communication, Open Access, Publishing, Self-publishing, Academic publishing, Creative Commons.

Introduction

Scholarly publishing is an integral part of education and research activities. The use of scholarly literature is essential for the advancement of education and research. Traditional publishing models do not favour the social purposes of knowledge sharing by the academic and research community. Authors contribute the articles free, and publishers lock them behind paywalls (Logan, 2017). Copyright creates monopolisation in the publishing industry and discourages the sharing culture among the user community. Works resulting from public-funded education and research should open up for free access to fulfil the social objectives. The alternative publishing choices and practices opened up possibilities for authors, academic and research institutions to control the publishing processes and release publications for free access (Nosek & Bar-Anan, 2012). Open Access initiative gained popularity with the spread of the Internet and the World Wide Web. Open Access literature

is "digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions" (Suber, 2008).

To a great extent, the Open Access initiative has eliminated the dominance of commercial interests of traditional publishers in scholarly publishing. Many studies revealed that the significant citation advantage for Open Access articles. Many leading scholarly publishers impose an embargo period to prevent subscription loss. There are many online services and initiatives available to assist authors and institutions in sharing scholarly publications in Open Access (Tennant et al., 2016). Self-publishing is another service that helps to overcome many of the drawbacks of traditional publishing. The author and the publisher get complete freedom and control at all stages of self-publishing. The self-publishing service offers more possibilities for content creators to publish books using cutting edge technologies. Self-publishing services allow the authors to directly intervene in publishing processes with the help of a computer with an Internet connection. The first electronic self-publishing platform, Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) started by Amazon in 2007. It was e-book only and added paperback option, which uses print-on-demand technology in 2016. Michael Tamblyn, chief executive of e-book retailer, Kobo says, "For us, 12% of the books we sell globally are self-published" (Shaw, 2016). This article shares the experience of publishing an Open Access book using a self-publishing service in a higher education institution.

Problem statement

People from literary, educational, and scientific fields need to publish various documents to meet education and research goals. Books are also a prominent medium to convey the creative and intellectual output of the academic and research community. One of the most widely used media to enlighten and delight the human mind. A small number of publishing houses hold dominance over the entire traditional scholarly publishing industry. Traditional publishers are very selective, and they accept works based on their priorities (Hviid et al., 2016). Publishing books through traditional publishing houses is a time-consuming process. Usually, the entire publishing process takes time from six months to twenty-four months. Traditional publishers do not meet all the technological demand of academic publishing (Lobo, 2020). The factors mentioned above shrink the opportunities of authors who would like to publish through leading publishing publishers. Prominent publishers accept works for publication only after rigorous examination. Authors have to pay the publishing expenses in advance, and it makes traditional style publishing more expensive. Many substandard publishing houses misuse the situation, and they assist the authors in releasing books without following any quality measures. The book will be ready as soon as one gives the manuscript and publishing charges. Such publishing houses even arrange ghostwriters to prepare the content.

A situation has arisen where academic institutions can handle the publishing of documents and books on their own with the help of new publishing services. Advancements in printing and digital technology have made the publishing industry more accessible to ordinary people. Academic institutions can now handle all publishing processes, including manuscript preparation, review, printing and selling books in their capacity with the help of self-publishing services.

The way to self-publishing

Mahatma Gandhi University Library has celebrated International Women's Day 2020 differently. Organised a debate on women-centric works in Malayalam literature. The library invited papers on literary criticism on poem, drama, short story and novel. Students, Faculty members and non-teaching staff at Mahatma Gandhi University invited to present an essay in the Malayalam language not exceeding a thousand words on the women-centric works in Malayalam literature. A list of women-centric works in Malayalam literature also made available for the reference of participants. A panel of experts constituted for the selection and review of essays. Overwhelming responses received from the academic community in the forms of articles. Finally, fourteen articles selected for the debate. The debate organised online due to the COVID pandemic situation.

The organising committee decided to publish a book by compiling the articles received for the debate. They recommended publishing the book in Open Access mode using the self-publishing method. The library team took over the assignment and made arrangements for the publishing process. Assigned three library staff as editors of the book. Google Doc, a cloud-based word processing service, arranged for the book's collaborative review and editing. Google Doc allows sharing the document with the author and the editorial team. The comment feature in Google Doc could help the editorial team to communicate with the authors and point out the specific part for improvement. The editorial team instructed the authors to submit the article in Unicode standard. The majority of the articles received were not in Unicode standard, and the editorial team assisted the authors in preparing the content in standard Malayalam script. The collaborative platform of Google Doc was very convenient and saved time for the review and editing of the manuscript and saved time.

Layout and formatting of the book

Google Doc is an ideal choice for preparing the manuscript, defining the layout and formatting content of books, but lacks hyphenation support for regional languages in India. Scribus Open Source desktop publishing software used for the layout and formatting of the book. The Scribus gives hyphenation support to eleven Indian languages, including Malayalam (Thottingal, n.d.). The Scribus software is suitable for layout, typesetting, and manuscript preparation to professional-quality paperback printing. The publishing team found a Scribus expert and handed over the manuscript for professional layout and

formatting. LibreOffice Draw software used for the design of the book cover page. The good quality book cover can be designed using LibreOffice Draw and export to various formats suitable for the publishing industry, including PDF, TIFF, JPG and PNG. The cover page designed by the book publishing team. LibreOffice Draw software is an easy to use tool for amateur designers.

The publishing team chose the Pothi.com self-publishing service to release the book. Pothi.com was the only self-publishing platform in India at that time supported books with content in Indian languages. Manuscript and book cover have to prepare based on the templates available on the Pothi.com website. Cover design and manuscript templates with detailed specifications (page size, margins, gutter) are helpful for the authors and publishers to prepare the files. Standard size for the paperback edition, 5.5 x 8.5 inches size selected for the book. The manuscript and the cover page should prepare into two separate files in PDF format preferred by Pothi.com. The ready to print files in PDF format of the book cover and inner pages uploaded to the author dashboard of Pothi.com. The book will be published and ready to buy at the store.pothi.com within twenty-four hours.

Open Access and copyright of the book

To a great extent, Intellectual Property Rights restrict the free flow of information in society. The academic and research community prepare manuscripts and publish scholarly literature without commercial interests. Copyright is often incompatible with the core principles of sharing, creativity, and learner engagement (Bissell, 2009). Often commercial publishers force the authors to transfer the copyright of the manuscript before the publication. Commercial interests of the publishing houses restrict the circulation of scholarly literature only among subscribers. It prevents the wider circulation of the documents among the stakeholders and fails to meet the social objectives. Creative Commons is the ideal Open License for the free distribution of digital objects on the Internet and suitable for sharing scholarly literature. Adoption of Open Licenses ensures the author's rights on the document, and at the same time, it gives flexible conditions to encourage free use. Authors think that open licensing of the book significantly increases the book's distribution, impact, and exposure (Hilton & Wiley, 2010). Search engines also support Creative Commons License and help users discover digital objects with open licenses on World Wide Web.

The publication team decided to publish in Open Access mode with a Creative Commons license. This book is licensed under the *Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International* License for free use. As per the license, the user must give appropriate credit to the author, may not use the material for commercial purposes. If the user "remix, transform or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original" (*Creative Commons — Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International — CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*, n.d.).

Publishing formats

The book in two formats; ebook and paperback. The ebook is available in PDF format at Mahatma Gandhi University Library website, http://library.mgu.ac.in. Easy to track the number of books downloaded using the statistics module at the library website run on the WordPress content management system. Book in PDF format is suitable for electronic devices like computer, e-book reader and mobile phone. PDF format is good to handle content in regional languages. It is easy to take a printout from the book in PDF format.

Paperback available in Print on Demand at Pothi.com website for those who love to read a print book. The paperback version of the book can buy from the Pothi.com website. The price includes only the printing charge because the authors contributed to the understanding that it is an academic project. Print on Demand is a digital printing method, printing copies only when there is a demand, instead of printing many copies in advance. The printing process automated with the Print on Demand method. Uploading a digital copy of the books, metadata management, printing, marketing, selling, and royalty collection can control in Print on Demand infrastructure (*Print on Demand*, n.d.).

The high upfront cost involved in traditional publishing enhance the publishing expense. Often the traditional publishers charge the upfront cost from the authors. Offset printing is feasible when printing many copies, and then the per-copy cost becomes low. With Print on Demand, authors can print directly from the digital copies of the books stored on servers. The number of copies doesn't influence the cost of the book.

Cost factor

It is possible to publish ebook and paperback editions at a minimal cost in self-publishing mode. Various processes in the publishing of books required different skill sets. Editing, proofreading, layout, cover designing, and obtaining ISBN performed by the review, editorial and library team at Mahatma Gandhi University. The book's layout and the cover page are crucial elements that enhance the beauty and readability of the book. The processes of designing the layout and cover of the book can be accomplished with the help of professionals. Mahatma Gandhi University Library hired the paid service of a professional to prepare the layout of the book. Other activities related to the publishing of book performed by the library staff. The cost of book publishing will be minimal if the publisher/author can handle the pre-press processes.

Benefits of Open Access self-publishing

The institutions and authors can experience complete freedom and control at all stages of self-publishing. Open Access self-publishing is helpful to overcome many of the drawbacks of traditional publishing. For academic and research institutions, self-publishing is a practical

way to release books and documents within a short time, that too done under the full control of the institution. The publisher can select the best professionals in the field for review, editing and other publishing services. Print-on-demand is especially useful for academic books without much of an audience ("The Influence of New Technology," 2016).

The self-publishing service industry makes use of innovative technologies for the publishing processes. They can also handle the publishing works in regional languages. E-book and paperback editions can be made available simultaneously. It is easy to prepare e-books with accessible features suitable for differently-abled people, such as visual and print disabilities. The open e-book standard EPUB3 compatible with Open Web Standards, supporting interactivity and multimedia features to an e-book (De Meester et al., 2014). Self-publishing allows publishing books globally, and readers can access copies from anywhere in the world. Self-publishing services give the authors up to 70% of the purchase price and "allows authors to retain copyright and gives them a non-exclusive deal" (Shaw, 2016).

Action plan for libraries

Libraries in academic and research institutions can lead the publishing process initiative and give awareness of Open Access and self-publishing benefits. Following are some action plan for libraries to develop Open Access culture and introduce self-publishing among the user community:

Take the initiative to start a publication division at the institution. Give awareness and assistance to the user community to start publishing initiatives like journals, books and newsletters in Open Access. Help them in the registration process for obtaining ISSN and ISBN. Assist in finding good quality Open Access publications to publish the manuscripts. Facilitate Open Access institutional repository to archive and showcase the published literature of the academic community.

Organise awareness and hands-on training for the academic community. Introduce various tools that ease the manuscript preparation and publishing processes. Help the academic community to create a scholarly profile using various services like ORCID, Google Scholar, Researcher etc. It helps them to get discoverability and recognition. Give orientations to faculty members, research scholars and students on the benefits of Open Access publishing.

The majority of people reluctant to write, and they require inspiration to initiate the writing process. Identify and give inspiration to write for the persons who possess sound knowledge in their domain. Inform the academic community about the invitations to contribute book chapters, forthcoming conferences and seminars to submit articles.

Introduce the various writing tools and services like cloud-based word processors, spreadsheets, reference management software to save time and secure the documents safe from various security threats. Also, introduce input tools to prepare manuscripts in regional languages in standard encoding systems like UNICODE.

Frame Open Access policy for the institution and inspire the top authority to implement it.

Conclusion

The author's experience demonstrates how Open Access and self-publishing practices can disrupt traditional publishing practices and empowering academic institutions. Educational and research institutions are at the forefront of releasing publications and documents for free access with Open licenses. Open Access movement and Open licenses like Creative Commons have accelerated the availability of Open content on the World Wide Web. Self-publishing is gaining popularity in India also. Leading Indian self-publishing service are made using cutting edge technologies, and they offer e-books and print-on-demand services. Books can publish in all major Indian languages through the leading Indian self-publishing service platforms. Academic institutions can be self-dependent in the publishing of scholarly literature with the help of self-publishing services. Book publishing is manageable for the academic community with the advent of self-publishing services. Self-publishing services reduce the financial commitment, and it's easy to make available literature in Open Access.

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