

A Survey of Open Access Barriers to Scientific Information: Providing an Appropriate Pattern for Scientific Communication in Iran

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Abstract

Serial pricing crisis and permission crisis restrict scholars to their scholarly findings. Scientists as a vital component of scholarly communication are losing their control on it. These crises along with library budget cutback interrupted the free flow of scientific information. This case study investigated academics' views of Shiraz University (Iran) on open access publishing and its four channels. Findings showed that in spite of their low familiarity with open access materials 92% of them had positive view on open access movement. 70% of respondents chose open access journal for their publishing model and the second vehicle is self-archiving (62.5%). Majority of academics knew pricing crisis and permission crisis as an obstacle to their scholarly information.

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of Internet and WWW, three components of scholarly communication, i.e. publishers, authors and libraries confronted with rapid changes in scholarly publishing. The new opportunity brought about by journal pricing crisis and new information technology. The Association of Research Libraries statistics (ARL, 2003) showed that the average annual increase of the serial unit cost was 9% since 1986 and the consumer price index for this period increased 64%. Spiral pricing levels of scientific journals and library budget cutback restrict institutions in providing needed journals. Consequently, great numbers of scientists in the world, especially in developing countries, are unable to access the research findings they need. Basically, there is a gap between the large amount of the scholarly materials that libraries can provide and the literature that scientists need. According to ARL's statistics this gap has widened over 1986 to date.

Scholars are losing their control on a system that they created. Journal spiral prices on the one hand and library budget cutback on the other hand interrupted free flow of scholarly information. Scientists' findings are given away to commercial publishers. Publishers, then sell them back to their libraries at unjustifiable prices. Consequently, **A**: university scholars and their peers in different countries have access to less and less scientific materials published in their fields, **B**: scientists haven't professionally many incentives to work and **C**: at least, this affect science at national level. As a result of the problems described above many scholars and their institutions, in a global attempt, decided to make literature freely available (BOAI, 2002).

This study intends to survey academics of Iran universities on their attitudes toward open access publishing and providing an appropriate pattern for scholarly communication. There are some research studies which are close to this goal. A large-scale survey of journal authors' opinion was carried out on 4/000 senior researchers from 97 countries (Rowlands, Nicholas, and Huntingdon). This survey investigated authors' views on current journal system and open access publishing. Low awareness (82%) of research community of open access, in spite of their positive attitudes toward open access movement, revealed the urgent need to raise awareness of them to this issue. A survey of journal authors on behalf of the JISC and OSI has been carried out by Key Perspective Ltd. (2004). According to this survey authors' awareness of open access is high. The reason for publishing in open access models is the principle of free access to research findings (90%).

A series of studies (RoMEO Projects) funded by UK JISC investigated the intellectual property rights issues relating to open access movement. The aim of study 1 (Gadd, Oppenheim and Proberts, 2003) was to examine the attitudes of three parties (academic staff, universities and publishers) towards copyright ownership and the impact of copyright ownership on the open access movement. Findings showed that "self-archiving is not best supported by copyright transfer to publishers". Respondents from self-archivers and non-archivers are compared in RoMEO studies 2 (Gadd, Oppenheim and Proberts, 2003). The main purpose of this study "was to ascertain how authors wanted to protect their self-archived research papers in order to develop the right metadata." Study 3 (Gadd, Oppenheim and Proberts, 2003) wanted to ascertain how academics expect to use others' papers and also investigated if there was any significant difference between the attitudes of two groups (academics-as-authors and users) towards using and protecting research papers. 99% of academics-as-users expected to display and print open-access materials either freely or under limits or conditions. The findings showed that academics-as-users do not perform all the activities (excerpt, aggregate and annotate) with open-access research papers that academics-as-authors would allow. The study indicated highly significant differences between the two groups on all permissions except display, excerpt and save. In general, academics-as-authors are more liberal on using their works than academics-as-users.