

Reasoning and Interest: Clustering Open Access

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*The conception of an open future with scholarly publications being freely accessible, sharable, and reusable cannot be easily subsumed under a single term. That is, it can. But the term has conflicting objectives. The reasoning behind Open Access interests is diverse with two essential concepts being ‘research advancement’ and ‘economic benefit’. This article clusters stakeholders regarding their Open Access interest and reasoning, leading to the clusters **a** Open Access as a threat, **b** a pain, **c** the ideal Open Access, and **d** the exploitative Open Access.*

A Blueprint for a Range of New Products

Technically, Open Access has a clear goal. There should be no barriers for potential readers—anyone—to access a publication for free online. There is a bit of a dissonance on what precisely that means, which platforms are suitable, whether there is sufficient work undertaken for archiving open online material, and not to forget the various modes Open Access can have, from green to gold, platinum, or brown. Technically, however, Open Access here means: free for the reader.

However, the initial initiative behind Open Access had more in mind than just the reader (Chan et al., 2002; Herb, 2017); it was about opening up scholarly communication. The plan was not to create a blueprint for a range of new products, but to revolutionise scholarly publishing. There are many reasons why the Open Access revolution (partly) failed (Poynder, 2017; Kingsley, 2016; Ward, 2014)—inertia in research processes, budget constraints, the wariness of some stakeholders, and the capitalistic boldness of others, to name but a few. Scholarly communication still is in a power struggle (Paasi, 2015), and Open Access even risks creating new knowledge regimes (Chan, 2017). This is no news, but it's crucial to separate the Open Accesses lest Open Access becomes a useless term that is used by too many stakeholders for too different reasons.

The Reasoning behind Open Access Interests

There are forms of Open Access above the product level which often have no specific name and are rather referred to by their product type. Hybrid Open Access, for instance. Or the excessively high-priced APC/BPC-funded programmes. This creates a tension as the lack of distinctions often makes discussions rather unspecific. An essential distinction is the reasoning behind Open Access interest. The improvement of research with the help of Open Access may be predominantly stated among those in favour of more openness. But the reasoning behind this is increasingly underpinned with economic growth and entrepreneurial competition (Haider, 2018), which is not always as obvious as it seems at first blush.

Reasoning means the logical thinking that underpins an argument (OED). This logic can be internally malfunctioning or externally concealed. Internal malfunctions are due to reasoning being highly subjective and heavily influenced by, for instance, availability heuristics, belief biases, or confirmation biases. The reasoning is flawed.

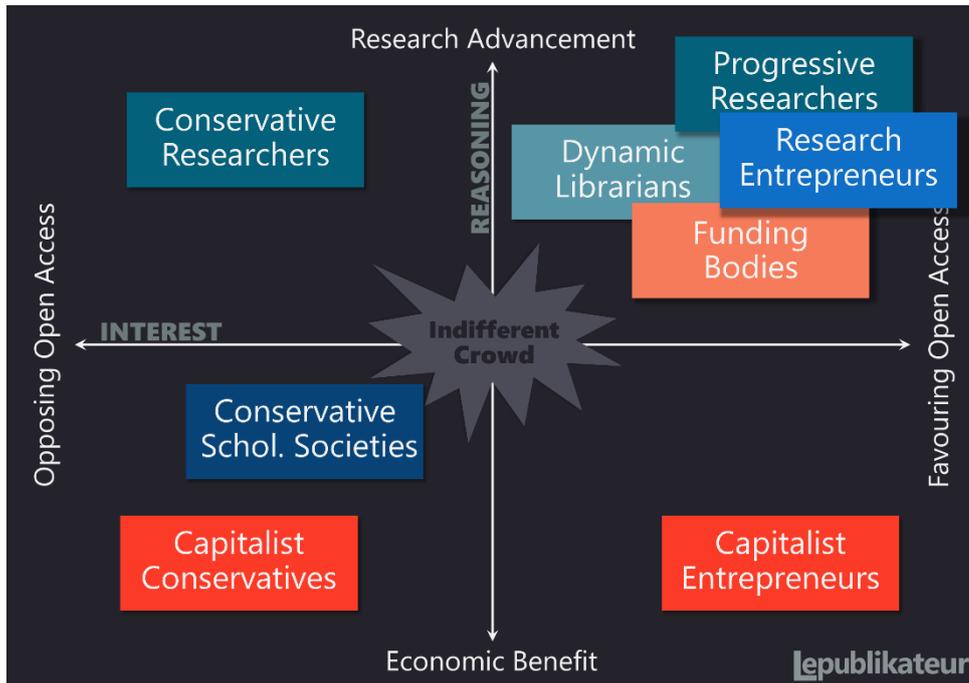
Externally concealed means that the reasoning is disguised when publicly communicated. This mostly depends on a goal, for instance, the change of peoples' perceptions and opinions about a particular cause (may it be politics or a business approach). The reasoning is then used to construct a reality, especially through the systematic deployment of a selection of facts. This constructed reality is communicated with a rhetoric that can be referred to as public relations management. Or manipulation.

The deployment and selection of facts (the external concealment) is therefore made on purpose as opposed to biases and heuristics (the internal malfunctions), especially when it comes to reasoning in a commercial market. Here, the constructed reality is the basis of a sales pitch. The more finely (and believably) the reality is tuned, the better is the future sales potential. There are laws which, to a certain extent, define how far advertisements can go in manipulating public opinion, but this is not the case for the general rhetoric beyond ads.

It's crucial to remember that the reasoning behind one's interests can be concealed, biased, or else be malfunctioning when fundamental change is happening. Especially then, individuals are confronted with abstract ideas about future scenarios, so that interest groups depict developments as inevitable, which is based on biased or concealed reasoning. Such a situation is currently visible in Open Access, where it's hard—especially for those who are no publishing experts—to cut through the rhetoric and to get a specific idea of the reasoning.

Weighing Reasoning against Interest

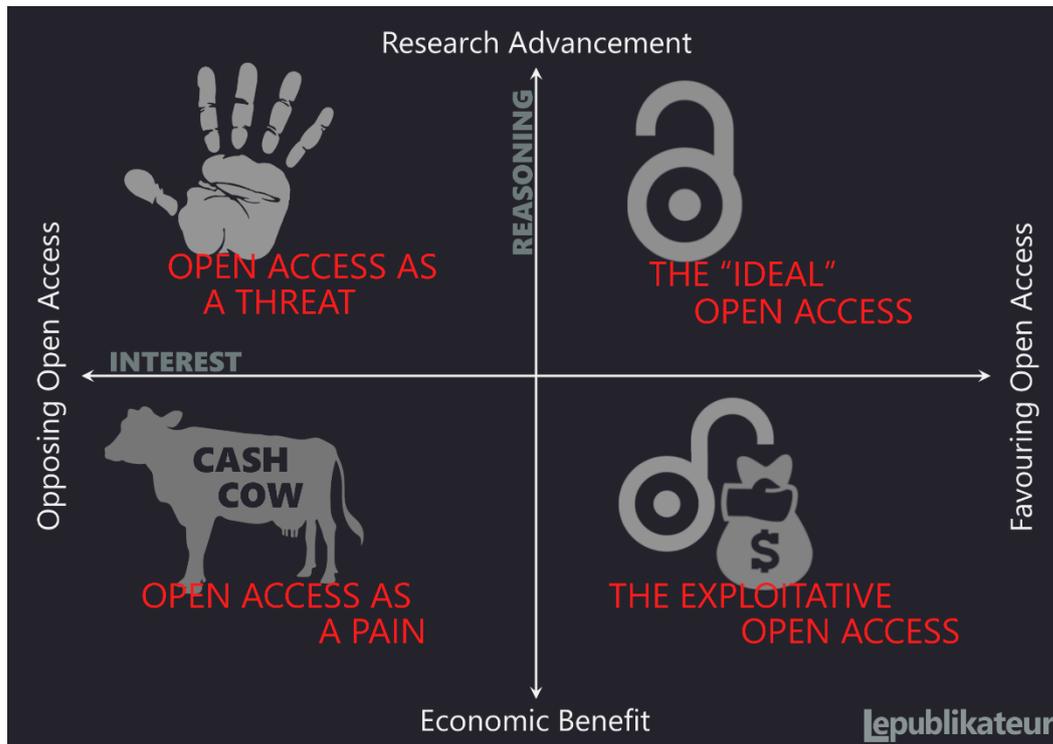
A good way of thinking about the reasoning of stakeholders is to balance it with their pronounced interest. The representation of this results in a map with, for instance, **Interest** from *Opposing Open Access* to *Favouring Open Access* on axis *x*, and **Reasoning** from individual *Economic Benefit* to *Research Advancement* on axis *y*.



This is, of course, not a rigorous model. It reduces arguments to a binary scale of research advancement and economic benefit. The model would be even more complex if it accounted for the many differences in books and journals, STEM and HSS, or Western Establishment and Global South.

However, for progress in scholarly communication, it's crucial to think about what kind of Open Access the various stakeholders involved are aiming for (or against), and to weigh the reasoning behind these aims into one's decision making. The map includes some stakeholders; others are not represented for the sake of overview (more on this below). Furthermore, between those stakeholders that are represented in their extremes (for instance, the conservatives and the progressives) often lies a plethora of more nuanced ventures which are also not represented.

The insight of such a representation of Open Access stakeholders is the opportunity to derive four clusters that provide possible names for the stakeholders' interest-reasoning-balance:



Opposing Open Access for Research Advancement

Conservative researchers (in terms of Open Access) wish to preserve the current publishing environment. They oppose change and vigorously argue against Open Access. Their often biased arguments mostly build upon facts such as ‘Research that is published Open Access is of worse quality than real publications’* and ‘Open Access destroys the integrity of my discipline’, or see Robin Osborne’s polemic as an example (2013). These arguments seem to thrive particularly well in epistemic bubbles. Especially the quality of Open Access publications is a threat for conservative researchers; generalising rhetoric plays an important role for them (Bivens-Tatum, 2014). However, that many publishers don’t differentiate their quality control for a particular publishing mode—may it be Open Access or pay-to-read—is cancelled out which well fits the characteristics of biased reasoning (Kahnemann, 2012). Only for predatory publishers or publishers that exhibit a quasi-predatory behaviour (through aggressive Open Access publication

requests) may fall into a low-quality category. But this is not alone due to Open Access; such market players have been there way before the internet. The most devastating rhetoric of conservative researchers is something like ‘The intellectual barrier to access my research is much higher than the economic barrier.’ Firstly, such arguments are neither pro nor contra Open Access, and, secondly, they show an arrogance that is proving that the ivory tower still is a thing in academia.

Opposing Open Access for Economic Benefit

Capitalist conservatives are those, mostly corporate, publishing managers who strongly oppose Open Access because it is harming their business. For those managers, ‘Open Access is an unpleasant side effect of the internet,’ while the internet itself was actually promising for increased profit margins. Open Access risks to not only diminish those margins again, it also eats into the whole business model of subscriptions. A crucial move to alleviate the pain that Open Access is, is to tie the old model to the new one, which leads to advanced Big Deals. These are often worse than old Big Deals especially as these are the most prominent examples of the rise of new knowledge regimes (Poynder, 2018). Popular rhetoric of capitalist conservatives is to emphasise the importance of quality, which is represented in a company’s brands and Impact Factor scores, like ‘Researchers can depend on our strong brands and reliability in IF scores.’ In return, publishers can rely on their cash cows that are kept alive by brands and Impact Factor scores.

Scholarly societies can probably be seen all over the map, not least because they appear in all forms and sizes. Some societies are entirely researcher-led so that their reasoning is based rather on the research environment; others are led by a mix of researchers and researchers-turned-managers so that the strategic decision making is more business-focussed. Especially for the latter, there are some societies which argue that Open Access cannot replace subscription income. As many societies depend on this income, they are wary of flipping their publications

towards more openness, even prohibiting Green Open Access. This argument is, at times, disguised as something like ‘Open Access destroys a reliable publishing environment.’ This is a threat to the uptake of Open Access because this reasoning may reflect back on the researchers—the members of the society—who are slower in adopting Open Access as a response to the reasoning of their respective society. Another problem is that societies are often heavily dependent on publishers with their publication systems. To flip the publications to Open Access, publishers will demand an additional charge. To turn to their own publication outlets (for instance, OJS for journals), societies may fear to risk losing the high publication and indexing standards they currently enjoy.

Favouring Open Access for Research Advancement

Progressive researchers are probably the loudest species in the Open Access arena. They pronounce the advantages of free access to knowledge with an unprecedented agility. The superiority of ‘open’ publications is proved with (quasi-)scientific evidence. For them, ‘the public has the right to access knowledge that is produced with taxpayers’ money.’ This, in turn, is often the strongest argument against their openness propaganda: as described above, conservative researchers enjoy emphasising the intellectual barrier to knowledge. Even if all publications were open, who’d be able to read them? Who’d want to read them? And wouldn’t the ‘don’t obstruct the production of knowledge’ argument have to go beyond paywalls (for more on this, see Bacevic & Muellerleile, 2017)?

Strong Open Access proponents are often also in favour of Open Science in general, including Open Data and Open Peer Review. This creates a bit of a confusion for outsiders. The technicalities around Open Data may be quite understandable, but Open Peer Review is a whole discussion on its own (Ross-Hellauer, 2017) which should be clearly separated from Open Access. Peer Review may at times be deeply flawed (Smith, 2006), and there is a variety of evidence that some disciplines may be better served with newer (for instance, more open) modes

of peer review. But this discussion is about quality control, and a connection of Open Access to questions of quality control is risky for the whole OA-endeavour.

Research entrepreneurs are Open Access proponents who are fed up with the current system. They don't want to wait for progress to come upon them; they want to drive change. There are many successful start-ups in scholarly communication, many of them exhibit a strong sense for advancing Open Access and Open Science. Some of these offer publishing outlets, others tools for communication collaboration. Some entrepreneurial researchers even get into the established publishers and drive change from within, always with the orientation that Open Access needs to open up scholarly communication, not drive profit margins. For them, 'hybrid is the path of evil.'

A group of librarians is here labelled dynamic because they break out of prevailing boundaries. These boundaries may be the often-debated budget constraints within libraries, problems of shifting budgets from subscriptions towards Open Access, or the ability to free up money for library publishing initiatives. Libraries can take a strong stance for Open Access when they take on new roles, leaving the old mode of the library-as-a-gatekeeper behind (for more on this, see Knöchelmann, 2018). A start is often to help affiliated researchers with advisory work for Open Access, and to provide repositories. 'A green future is possible tomorrow' therefore is the slogan of hope—hope for a low-cost open future. This future could very well be possible right now if there wasn't the profit-seeking establishment.

Funding bodies are the natural drivers of Open Access once they adopt openness as their ideal: funding bodies can force researchers to make their research freely available by implementing Open Access as a funding requirement. It's for this that Open Access is so heavily policy-driven. And this is also why Open Access policy work is so confusing because with a wealth of Open Access publishing options, funding requirements become equally diverse. Funding bodies, especially research institutions or foundations, often have massive budgets and don't depend on

profit. Their interest in Open Access is based on the strong belief that ‘more openness means higher visibility means more impact of your research.’

Favouring Open Access for Individual Economic Benefit

Capitalist entrepreneurs are in favour of Open Access because this gives them a new business opportunity; however, the latter is obscured with cunning rhetoric. In this cluster, commercial exploitation of Open Access is the most prevalent (Herb, 2018). Progressive researchers often see themselves standing on the same line with capitalist entrepreneurs, only to realise later on that there is a yawning chasm in their reasoning. Of course, there are outright exploitative entrepreneurs with straightforward rhetoric, who state that ‘APCs/BPCs are necessary to sustain highest quality,’ or ‘for publications to be sustainable, we need to slowly transform our potential for which hybrid is the best option,’ which is the reasoning behind the thriving business of exploitative Open Access (Björk, 2017; Shamash, 2016; Kingsley, 2016). Yet, this reasoning would only be true if maintaining the current publication industry was a goal. In addition, the proposition of a regional Open Access (Pells, 2017) shows that this form of Open Access entrepreneurship even abandons the one criterium that unites all Open Access approaches: its technical openness for all potential readers.

Besides this straightforward rhetoric, there are more subtle versions the rhetoric of which does indeed look like it favoured a strong research environment. The talk is often of downloads and impact stories which allegedly showed the advantage of Open Access, or a depiction of an Open Access scenario with a particular inevitability that matches the entrepreneur’s concealed reasoning. Arguments may sound like: ‘As the world’s second largest gold OA publisher, we offer insights to make the transition to Open Access possible’ (Hersh, 2017), or we aim to ‘create a critical mass around OA books, journals, and services,’ (Fund, 2018). It’s especially this cluster that drives the neoliberal agenda in academia, which is visible in the measurement and advertisement of (quasi-)performance of Open Access as well as the promotion of a moral

responsibility and openness of the stakeholders (the latter often being reduced to openness of performance measurement) (for more on the neoliberal concepts, see Eagleton-Pierce, 2016). ‘Ethical motivations’ and ‘equal access to knowledge’ certainly are strong motivators (Emery et al., 2017), but the organisation that stresses these values has economic benefit rather than more equality as a goal. It’s crucial to strip all such ventures off their rhetoric to assess in detail whether there may be possible future power struggles, especially for those who are involved in shaping Open Access with their daily decision making.

The Indifferent Crowd

Conclusively, the term Open Access—in general—still means the technical openness of research publications. But there is a wealth of secondary meanings that is often not represented in discussions, and especially not in the rhetoric that leads to purchasing or publishing decisions. Publishing experts very well know about the hidden reasoning of stakeholders, but researchers and librarians may not. The map shown in this article is one approach of representing the reasoning. Though not comprehensive and not rigorous, it provides specific clusters that can be discussed and referred to. It also shows that strategies to drive the uptake of Open Access must be varied. Of course, other stakeholders may be added, or represented stakeholders clustered differently.

One may wonder why the general public isn’t represented. This is due to the discussion around Open Access being an academic discussion. It’s hermetically tied to the scholarly communication environment and even many researchers don’t actively participate. This makes the argument of research publications being a public good a difficult one. Even if it were one and the publishing environment would indeed open all publications, the direct societal implications would rather be minor than major. There will certainly be indirect implications, for instance, improved science communication as a transmitter between academia and society, or the heavily positive impact of the improved research environment en large. The public benefits, yes; but mostly indirectly.

Others without representation in this map are university presses, except for the library-driven university presses which are located in the dynamic librarians group. The beauty of the university press landscape is that UPs represent a diversity of approaches that can hardly be broken down into these clusters. University presses are experimenting with Open Access for various reasons; some simply because of external motivators (i.e. policy-driven), others because they see Open Access as a way of fostering new scholarly communication approaches for which OA gives them new options (for instance, Booluck, 2018). It's hard to assess whether these are essentially driven for economic benefit or research advancement. Problematic is Open Access for University Presses only when they become too heavily reliant on intermediaries, which may in the future create yet unknown power struggles.

One could also differentiate the funding bodies. Especially governmental funders are probably less focussed on research advancement than on the positive impact of Open Access on the national economy. This is where the binary nature of the map becomes inconsistent because the economic interest of governmental Open Access policies has—also in the long-run—a positive impact on academia, which cannot be said of the economic interest of capitalist entrepreneurs. However, the latter are benefitting from the first in that the Open Access requirement of funders innately funded the uptake of high APC payments. But this may change again with funders revisiting their initial policies. They may have realised that there is more than *one* Open Access.

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* Most quotations are representative or paraphrases of ongoing discussions. See references for more.