Platform Power and Libraries

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Jordan S. Sly and Joseph A. Koivisto

Introduction

In this chapter, we will identify some of the potential implications of the increasingly closed-loop and metrics-based models of academic publishing, student learning platforms, integrated library systems, and personnel management software packages being developed and sold by an increasingly small number of academic solutions companies. We aim to understand the potential danger stemming from the tight connections between the scholarship that is produced under these conditions, the perceived value of this scholarship in the market, and impacts on future research funding, student development, faculty positions, and more. We are uneasy, as we will discuss, by the ways in which this constricting pipeline and increasingly closed-loop pipeline may endanger our shared values of academic freedom, access, and a scholarly environment

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1 This chapter is a modified and updated version of a paper we presented at the Charleston Conference in 2022. Our presentation copy was made available in the Charleston Conference Proceedings from that year, 2022, edited by Beth Bernhardt, Leah Hinds, and Lars Meyer, https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.14369519. We are very appreciative to the editors who have given their permission for us to present our work in this present volume.

free from commercial influence in libraries and in higher education more broadly.[2] To our original assessment of these concerns, we have also added an analysis based on Nielsen and Ganter's *The Power of Platforms*—as others in this volume have done—and are using aspects of their framework to further address concerns we highlighted previously.[3] Additionally, we are working with Nielsen and Ganter's notion of an "information asymmetry" to wrestle with some of the complexities and similarities relating to the power of academic enterprise platforms as well as the media landscape and the power dynamics of new media described in their work.

For this chapter, the notion of an information asymmetry relates to the dynamic created and fostered by these companies, their increasingly opaque data practices which confound external inquiry and critique, and the reliance the higher education industry has on their products for multiple aspects of the research, funding, and administrative functions that we again define as a closed-loop pipeline with this asymmetry at its core. It is no mystery that large academic solutions companies like Clarivate/ProQuest, Elsevier, and others have the sole mission of profit. This fact is not controversial, but the question arises, to what extent does this mission undermine well-established objectives of higher education administration, teaching, and library services? As we will discuss below, there is some indication that these platforms are seeking the data-as-product models familiar in "Big Tech," but ignoring, or at least uncritically sidestepping the lessons learned through

2 For more on the ethical dilemmas of librarians in this framework see Andrew Weiss, "Libraries, Privacy, and Surveillance Capitalism: The Looming Trouble with Academia and Invasive Information Technologies," in Sarah Hartman-Caverly and Alexandria Chisholm (eds), *Practicing Privacy Literacy in Academic Libraries: Theories, Methods, and Cases*, (Chicago, IL: Association of College & Research Libraries, 2023).

3 Rasmus Kleis Nielsen and Sarah Anne Ganter, *The Power of Platforms: Shaping Media and Society. Oxford Studies in Digital Politics*. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

the major actors in that space. What is meant by this? If we think of large social media companies like Meta (owner of Facebook, Instagram, Threads, Whatsapp, and more) and X (formally Twitter), it is a now well-known Faustian bargain that in exchange for platforms we can use to connect to people we have given these companies our data which is then used for both market capture and penetration, advertisement placement pricing, and direct sales methods. By collecting, collating, and reselling our data, these companies found a lucrative new business model. There is some indication that academic enterprise platforms are following this path as we will show below.

Central to our concerns are a series of questions that are vital to consider in the coming years as these platforms continue to evolve and consolidate. First, we ask if the publications-as-data model of large publishing and educational technology platforms has created a closed-loop pipeline that endangers library values and university goals through the narrowing of impact-ratio focused research and the development of a surveillance publishing model that could dramatically impact the future of academic freedom for students, faculty, and libraries. To clarify, we are looking at the potential attenuation and narrowing of research areas based on the citation matrix and high-impact model for publisher reputation, vendor pricing, and library acquisitions and the lasting impact this may have on the research enterprise and student outcomes in which researchers (and perhaps more importantly university administrators) value publisher quantification and metrics over the traditional values of original scholarly output and a culture of iterative scholarly communications.

Second, if it can be said that universities have become both the data source and the consumer, whose hand is on the wheel determining what data is to be collected and sold and how it is used? Can the emphasis placed on return on investment (ROI) and research investments tip the scales to the point where

there is a tangible narrowing of the research enterprise? Our second question looks at the notions of the data focus on publications and how this is being packaged and sold to universities. This is not just in the form of research databases, but also in the form of metrics counting for promotions and other human statistical purposes such as retention, recruitment, and research funding within the university. The question is threefold: 1) does the privileging of the citation information favor specific disciplines; 2) does this impact the research direction of the university, and whose hand is on the wheel with this privilege; and 3) are there customers outside of the university apparatus who benefit from this direction?

Third, what is the future of surveillance technology for controlling student and faculty behavior? As institutions—through their procurement decisions and in pursuit of systematic efficiency—integrate more and more vendor solutions into every stage of higher education administration and the research lifecycle, the data collection stream for major platform vendors and publishers further establishes a profit motive to participate in surveillance activities. What might possible outcomes be for our institutions, our researchers, and our students when commercial entities not only drive researcher behavior through metrics-based representation of scholarly import but also extract capital from the very audiences under the direct influence of their evaluative ideologies?

Fourth, are libraries forced to abandon ethical obligations due to the condensed marketplace for scholarly works? To what extent do the acquisitions and acceptance of these models clash with our professional ethics? Are we maintaining our goals as a profession or are we inadvertently helping to steer the direction of research to align with the needs of industries that may work against our collective ethics?

Finally, to what extent have we in higher education broadly, but also academic libraries more specifically, done this to

ourselves? By volunteering our work into this quantified system and allowing, (to paraphrase Theodore Porter) metrics and assessment to make decisions without the imposition of needing to decide, in other words, to trust in the purity and objectivity of numbers, does this equate to ignoring the whole of the snake while it devours itself?[4]

The Problem for Higher Education

While there are political and ideological debates present in the external critiques of modern higher education, internally it has been discussed in opinion pieces in publications like T*he Chronicle of Higher Education* (CHE), the *Times Higher Education* (THE), and within domain scholarly journals that one of the biggest risks to the longevity of higher education is the hyper-neoliberalization, commercialization, and quantification of the industry.[5] Authors arrive at this conclusion through

4 Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 8.

5 For a few examples of this in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* please see Amna Khalid, "How Students are Furthering Academe's Corporatization by Insisting on Bureaucratic Solutions to Diversity Problems, they are Empowering Administrations at the Expense of the Faculty", CHE, May 4, 2021. ; Ryan Boyd, "The Syllabus Reads you: Our Pedagogies Cannot be Divorced from our Working Conditions", CHE, September 24, 2020. ; Daniel Bessner and Michael Brenes, "A Moral Stain on the Profession: As the Humanities Collapse, it is Time to Name and Shame the Culprits", CHE, April 26, 2019. ; Andrew Piper and Chad Wellmon, "How the Academic Elite Reproduces Itself", CHE, October 8, 2017. For some examples in the *Times Higher Education* please see, Jonathan R. Goodman, "Citation Counting is Killing Academic Dissent", THE, November 25, 2019.; Rebecca Natow and Kevin Dougherty, "Neoliberalism is not Always Negative, THE, March 21, 2019.; Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Neoliberalism Denounced", THE, September 18, 2014. For a small selection of the scholarly literature please see Beth Mintz, "Neoliberalism and the Crisis in Higher Education: The Cost of Ideology", *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 80 (1), 2021.; Kevin J. Dougherty and Rebecca S. Natow, "Performance-Based Funding for Higher Education: How well does Neoliberal Theory Capture Neoliberal Practice?", *Higher Education*, 80, 2020. For additional books in this area see Stefan Collini, *What are Universities for?* (London: Penguin, 2012); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2016); Lawrence Busch, *Knowledge for Sale: The Neoliberal Takeover of Higher Education* (London: Penguin, 2017); Penny Jane Burke, "Gender, Neoliberalism, and Corporatized Higher Education," in Nancy S. Niemi and Marcus B. Weaver-Hightower, *The Wiley Handbook of Gender Equity in Higher Education* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2020); Mark Olssen, "Neoliberal Competition in Higher Education Today", in *A Normative Foucauldian* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

various observations within their own subfields, but often extrapolate outwards towards the wider university community. A recent example of the critique of the focus on the numerical output or quantification of the research enterprise are the authors Elizabeth Chatterjee and Christopher Newfield who, in their respective chapters of *Limits of the Numerical,* outline the ways in which the recent focus on quantification has changed the ways we run our universities for the worse, especially as it pertains to the development and fostering of subject expertise.[6] As universities seek to find efficiencies to maximize entrepreneurial outputs and profit, education enterprise companies are more than willing to provide all the tools necessary for each stage of the academic pipeline, from personnel recruitment, development, and advancement to research creation, publication, and use.

To many, quantification is a way of measuring prestige as it determines selectivity both in the hiring of professors and the selection of students and creates an elite university setting. As Pierre Bourdieu showed in his ethnographic study *Homo Academicus*, however, this is not an evenly distributed sentiment as the hierarchies of academic power are not distributed to all areas of the university equally.[7] Central to Bourdieu's work is the notion of power, prestige, and privilege within the universities he studied. The book itself is highly contextualized by its time and location, but Bourdieu's insight into the constricting influence of academic power is relevant. Bourdieu notes that

6 Elizabeth Chatterjee, "Numbers without Experts: The Populist Politics of Quantification," in *Limits of the Numerical: The Abuses and Uses of Quantification*, ed. Christopher Newfield, Anna Alexandrova, and Stephen John, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 23-46; Christopher Newfield "The Role of the Numerical in the Decline of Expertise,"in *Limits of the Numerical: The Abuses and Uses of Quantification*, ed. Christopher Newfield, Anna Alexandrova, and Stephen John, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 47-67.

7 Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*. Translated by Peter Collier, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984).

the power of certain academics—by discipline, by impact, by status—has something of a stultifying effect on the development of research as the burden of this prestige hinders alternate work. Extrapolating this to today we can think about the use of tools like Web of Science which allow researchers to focus only on the most highly cited literature relevant to their field (despite valuable efforts to correct this pattern through targeted equity-focused literature and systematic reviews), which of course is a self-repeating cycle that privileges certain researchers, academic disciplines, universities, journals, and publishers more than others.[8]

What is significant here is the monetization of what can be paraphrased as a prestige-power cycle of the *Homo Academicus* both internally to the universities and to the external enterprise vendors. For a more current accounting of the concerns over quantification, Stefan Collini's work addresses the history and values of universities from the perspective of the internal industry concerns.[9] Importantly, Collini, like Bourdieu, looks at the cultures and structures of higher education and the threat of quantification on the scholarly apparatus. Collini picks up on Bourdieu's general notion of elite academic power, but further discusses the economic impact and incentive of universities to quantify and focus on the impact of particular disciplines over others. While the work ranges in its scope, it discusses the ways in which the business incentives of the modern university find purchase in the corporate sponsors on both ends of the prestige-power cycle discussed above.[10] This has impacts on both graduate job placement on the one end and research derived innovations on the other—sponsored and supported by interests outside of the university

8 Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*.

9 Stefan Collini, *Speaking of Universities* (London: Verso, 2017).

10 Collini, *Speaking of Universities*.

itself. As Sun-Ha Hong discusses, the reliance on extracted data is self-consuming, cyclical, and reflects the input model on which the developing data cycle.[11] In other words, it creates and reinforces the world it reflects. Hong specifically discusses behavioral and punitive technology, but we argue that the same ideas of a reflective reliance model can be applied in the canonizing of academic work within the models being discussed by enterprise vendors. This model has the potential to create and foster disciplinary hegemonic parameters thereby hindering innovative research due to the reliance on a cyclical model for grant awards, citation, publications, graduate student thesis development, and much more. What we see is a shift in the nature of innovation along the lines of what Friedrich Engels feared, noting that "If society has a technical need, it serves as a greater spur to the progress of science than do ten universities...."[12] What Engels is developing is a progressive sense of innovation in which the needs of society both determine the nature and direction of innovation and create solutions outside of the realm of the expert or the genius. What we have witnessed through the development of these closed-loop systems, however, is an isolated and potentially artificial society of innovation separated from both the pure academic milieu and that of the more populous need.

This shift matters greatly in the world of higher education because quantification furthers the internal stratification of academic prestige, increases the reliance on large enterprise companies who can leverage this prestige, and furthers the interests of stakeholders outside of the industry. This situation is made potentially more dire with the innovations

11 Sun-Ha Hong, "Prediction as Extraction of Discretion," ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, June 2022. https://doi.org/10.1145/3531146.3533155.

12 Friedrich Engels, "Engels' Letter to Hans Starkenburg London, January 25, 1894," in *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx: A Revolutionary Interpretation*, by Sidney Hook, 279–81, (New York: John Day Co., 1933).

in generative artificial intelligence (AI) and the discussions around AI-generated academic content pulling from this set of enshrined data and content we are describing. The shifts in the broader technology world, both in terms of advances in the social and semantic web and the increasingly dense interconnections with our everyday environments, demonstrate the speed and dominance these innovations hold over our existence in nearly every facet of our lives to both harmful and helpful ends. The substantial point in confronting this issue is to critique the accretion and the *de facto* nature of these shifts which privilege some groups over others by the inbuilt biases of the creators of this technology implicitly or explicitly.[13] The implications of data-driven societal engineering are not solely confined to the world of consumer technology, however. Critical literature exists inside of higher education technology literature, too, as Björn Brembs has written about algorithmic employment decisions in academia and the nature of the academic enterprise in the near-term and long-term futures. Most importantly, Brembs discusses the ways that the academic publisher Elsevier has shifted their business model away from publishing and towards data collection and analysis, thereby creating a market of internal and cyclical referential and quantified metrics creating the standards of success and throttling access to the means of attaining it.[14] Hiring is based on a set of determined metrics, in this model, and these metrics set the standard for impactful research, the quantification of productivity, and the return on investment both at an institutional level (in terms of hires and graduate projects) and at the funding level, when grant funding is involved.

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13 Much of the framing of this section is a reflection of the work of Shoshana Zuboff and her work *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. Additionally, Safiya Umoja Noble's work *Algorithms of Oppression* is a critical introduction into the notions of implicit bias in the software and information systems development.

14 Björn Brembs, "Algorithmic Employment Decisions In Academia?" *björn.brembs.blog* (blog), September 23, 2021, https://bjoern.brembs.net/2021/09/algorithmic-employment-decisions-in-academia/.

This reliance on data creates a problem for higher education institutions who are competing for students, faculty, and research prestige, and companies like Clarivate or Elsevier can easily sell solutions to this problem. Increasingly, too, the competitiveness of a university within its own constricting marketplace due to the general global decline in the perception of universities as a worthwhile enterprise depends on these precise metrics being facilitated internally, yet levered externally.[15] As noted above, university administrators can turn to statistics and assessment metrics as a way of making decisions with a sense of rationality, despite the inbuilt biases of these numbers. It is critical to think about the automatic use of numbers as a deciding factor in any aspect of the research enterprise. As discussed above, the funding cycles for research vary based on the perceived importance of the research, often favoring the sciences, especially health sciences far more than other disciplines. Additionally, there is the nature of the research itself to contend with. Publication across academic areas, too, is vastly different and difficult if not impossible to compare directly. Therefore, *prima facie*, there is an inherent problem in the quantification of research. Additionally, as Chris Haufe has recently discussed, these disciples are put into false comparative modes which elide or erase the academic foundations and commonalities inherently based on shared philosophical and epistemological grounding.[16]

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15 Collini, *Speaking of Universities*. Especially chapter 2 titled "Measuring Up: Universities and 'Accountability'" pp. 36-60.

16 Chris Haufe, in *Do the Humanities Create Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), investigates the philosophical origins of all human sciences and vital connective tissue that binds these studies. Valuable to recognize, of course, are the central ideas at the heart of a university and the foundations of a liberal education or artes liberales that fostered aspects of medieval scholasticism and the development of the European University as discussed in Charles H. Haskins' *The Rise of Universities*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1957).

For universities, the harnessing of numbers allows for a clear expression of values through what or who is emphasized in the collected and assessed data. This is a general sociological trend, indicative of a value-set, an "ethics of numbers," focused on the "correctness" of data, as in its accuracy and the ways in which the data demonstrates a return on a specific investment or initiative as opposed to a desire to investigate its construction.[17] This affects both the institution's sense of its purpose and the researchers'; the numbers and the way they are assessed determine their value. For example, recent studies have found that the impact factor and prestige of a particular journal outweighed the value of the scholar themselves within a sample set of papers that they tracked.[18] This is important because, as Collini and others have shown, the rise in metrics and quantification has benefitted the publishing industry in an outsized way. The favoring of the journal as a method of citation analysis demonstrates that control over the publication, and availability of these journals is a way to ensure demand and profitability. From a university perspective, the striving for faculty to perform within these journals then becomes a metrics cycle of outlay, talent development, and research material procurement. Another outcome of the use of metrics is the gamification of the promotions and tenure processes and the process of applying for research funds and grants by emphasizing the role of bibliometrics as a pragmatic way of demonstrating researcher value above the noise of the academic publishing morass. As a result, however, researchers have found that the journal prestige and impact was

17 Wendy Nelson Espeland and Michael Sauder, "Rankings and Reactivity: How Public Measures Recreate Social Worlds," *American Journal of Sociology* 113, no. 1 (2007): 1–10.; Porter, *Trust in Numbers*.

18 Michael Callaham, Robert L. Wears, and Ellen Weber, "Journal Prestige, Publication Bias, and Other Characteristics Associated with Citation of Published Studies in Peer-Reviewed Journals," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 287, no. 21 (2002): 2847–50.

more valuable than the reputation of the researcher themselves in the overall citation index score.[19] There have even been studies to indicate that this citation emphasis on specific journals deemed high impact through Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) aggregation implies some evidence of citational bias; that by following the high impact citations scholars were unintentionally promulgating a strain of academic ideology that favored specific disciplinary interpretations and not others.[20] Again, this demonstrates some of the dangers in the winnowing out of research avenues in favor of prestige citation metrics and the appearance of academic favoritism. In a recent book, Sarah Lamdan has discussed the shared prestige games that are carried out in this metrics cycle and the ways in which this quantification shapes the research outlay as she notes the "monopolist" practices of certain publishers have facilitated a cycle wherein the journal becomes "...more important than the substance of their [the researchers'] work," adding that "in some cases, scholars feel obliged to tailor their work to journals that will raise their 'scholarly impact' numbers."[21] Put into short form, the values of a university reflect the revenue stream, and the metrics work towards a positive reaffirmation of this focus. In other words, the quantification of university values allows an abstraction that works to justify a particular set of needs of the university apparatus through the guise of routine assessment and rankings and enforces

19 Christopher R. Carpenter, David C. Cone, and Cathy C. Sarli, "Using Publication Metrics to Highlight Academic Productivity and Research Impact," *Academic Emergency Medicine* 2, no. 10 (2014): 1160–72.

20 Daniel B. Klein and Eric Chiang, "The Social Science Citation Index: A Black Box—with an Ideological Bias?" *Economics Journal Watch* 1, no. 1 (2004): 134–65.

21 Sarah Lamdan, *Data Cartels: The Companies That Control and Monopolize Our Information* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2022), 65. Lamdan's critique of these publishers and her description of them as monopolistic and "rent-seeking" can be found on p. 54.

a potentially stultifying hegemony and standardization that continues the funnel of academic power and prestige.

To many academic institutions and libraries, open access appears to be a valuable way of circumventing issues inherent in the quantification cycle. Open access scholars like Peter Suber have long discussed the issues of the monopolistic scholarly publishing industry and the publication conundrum of prestige, citation tracking, and impact, noting this as a significant obstacle blocking equitable publishing landscapes.[22] Increasingly, the inequalities and problems plaguing university research models have become more globally understood with research across disciplines demonstrating solidarity against arbitrary quantification and the extraordinarily high costs of research material. Additionally, as Posada and Chen discuss, the move to open access by many universities has caused the big publishers to seek additional sources of revenue and consolidate control and market share through mergers and acquisitions and by developing tools to ensure that customers are driven towards these products. Crucially, they also found that university strategies and research funding followed the metrics of high impact research provided and supported by these companies.[23] As Grossmann and Brembs discuss, the cost creep incurred by libraries reflects this pivot. Increasingly, the enterprise companies spend huge amounts on lobbying, technology, and direct-to-consumer initiatives, and additional contracts (government research, private research organizations, etc.) as well as researching and implementing differentiated costing models to ensure profit through off-set models

22 Much of this work, which can be found across many publications, is summarized in his 2012 Open Access.

23 Alejandro Posada and George Chen, *Inequality in Knowledge Production: The Integration of Academic Infrastructure by Big Publishers* (Toronto: HAL Open Science ELPUB, 2018).

that shift payments from the back-end to the front-end of the research cycle.[24]

The Problem for Academic Libraries

These companies understand the shifting nature of the academic landscape and the emphasis for an increased use of dynamic metrics. It is perhaps due to this increasing awareness that larger publishers are seeking new models. For example, Elsevier has established a more direct-to-consumer model connected to its Mendeley citation management platform. In fact, in her 2019 plenary presentation to the attendees of the Charleston Conference, Elsevier CEO Kumsal Bayazit discussed the importance of this method to facilitate cutting-edge research as universities and libraries sought negotiations, such as the successful negotiations of the California State University system, to increase access and publishing opportunities with Elsevier.[25] Additionally, the acquisition of ProQuest by Clarivate diversifies the reach of university enterprise needs, and platforms, like EBSCO's Panorama, provide active use metrics and impact data in conjunction with traditional research; furthermore, these factors along with companies like ProctorU control the educational experience of students, all combine to facilitate the full-scale quantification of higher education from students, to teaching, to research, to publication, and to hiring within a closed and metered loop.

The power of these academic enterprise management systems to control both the visibility of published material through metrics-derived and proprietary algorithmic weighting and

24 Alexander Grossmann and Björn Brembs, "Current Market Rates for Scholarly Publishing Services," *F1000 Research* 10, no. 20 (2021): 1–25.

25 Kumsal Bayazit and Cris Ferguson, "Collaborating to Support the Research Community, the Next Chapter," in *The Proceedings of the Charleston Conference*. Charleston, SC: Perdue, 2019. https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/charleston/2019/plenarysessions/1/.

to derive, store, and sell the back-end data associated with the creation and use of these materials creates an complementary (but not fully analogous) form of "information asymmetry" described by Rasmus Kleis Nielsen and Sarah Anne Ganter in their work *The Power of Platforms,* much discussed in this volume. As Nielsen and Ganter describe it, an information asymmetry is an expression of power of the platform over the user due to is ability to determine the rules and "...operate as opaque black boxes where outsiders only see input and output on the basis of limited and biased data; only the platforms are privy to how the processes work and have access to much more detailed data."[26] Within the context of this chapter, we are isolating for this chapter, the enterprise platforms in question can meter access to the data on which the higher education industry has become reliant on, creating an asymmetrical power dynamic. In Nielsen and Ganter, they investigate these power dynamics within the context of traditional media and social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, but we argue that much of the same asymmetries exist in the academic context. Nielsen and Ganter's framework of what constitutes the power that a platform can exert by its instantiated and asserted presence can be paraphrased and simplified into the following basic ideas: platforms set the standards by which other operate, have the ability to make or break connections, automate action at scale, foster information asymmetries, and can operate across domains.[27] Data in the form of scholarship and scholar metrics (e.g. citation counts, grant information, and co-author networks) has been understood within a Foucauldian framework, to be a power over others as a form of dominion. The power to utilize this information

26 Nielsen and Ganter, *Power*, 21.

27 Nielsen and Ganter, *Power*, 21.; Rasmus Kleis Nielsen and Sarah Anne Ganter, "Dealing with Digital Intermediaries: A Case Study of the Relations Between Publishers and Platforms," *New Media & Society* 20, no. 4 (2017): 157-158.

hegemony fosters a closed-loop academic information economy with a central asymmetry akin to that described by Neilsen and Ganter in their definition of platforms and their power in the wider information economy. What is most concerning is the seemingly practiced naivety in these moves ignoring the lessons learned from social media sectors about the negative effects of this form of data usage and looking only at the revenue potential in reselling user data either externally or back to the end consumer.

Where do we, as libraries and librarians, find ourselves in this evolving environment of scholarly datafication and the production/consumption cycle of data-driven impact? Consider Jeff Pooley's 2022 article: in light of ProQuest's acquisition by Clarivate, Pooley presents surveillance publishing as a descriptor for companies that derive revenue by peddling predictive solutions to research questions based on aggregation and analysis of researcher behaviors. Be it searching for and accessing publications, research creation and publication, or citation, surveillance publishers are incentivized to bring insights to market that have been derived through user behavior tracking, distant machine-driven reading of the scholarly corpus, and impact metrics, all of which are aggregated and churned through the alchemical cauldron of trade-secret-protected analytical processes and algorithms. Or as Pooley puts it, "minting money from behavioral by-products."[28]

This methodology brings with it the numerous attendant issues of ceding control of scholarly communications and material evaluation to black box systems. Inherent bias and algorithmic racism, sexism, etc. enter a self-amplifying feedback cycle in which corporate-sourced assessments infect every corner of scholarly practice: hiring, promotion & tenure, grants,

28 Jefferson Pooley, "Surveillance Publishing," *Elephant in the Lab*, March 25, 2022, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6384605.

citation, and ultimately publication. Such datafication and the insights made thereof are not objective measures despite our collective habit of reflexively viewing quantitative and algorithm-based methods beyond the messiness of subjective, human insights. Sarah Lamdan observes that the "score-powered" system dependent on vendor-sourced metrics does little to repair racist and misogynistic legacies in the academy but rather turns them into data points, all the while establishing a scholarly environment the incentivizes greater accumulation of the academic literature in the pursuit of high-impact journal publication.[29] Furthermore, Dougherty, Nguyen, and Illingworth conclude that the relationships between scholarly quality of scientific journal articles and citation counts is inconsistent at best and, at worst, biased and misleading.[30] When we buy into these evaluative and infrastructural systems, we become complicit in the creation of an academic world in which up-and-coming researchers are incentivized to perform in ways that align with the corporate algorithmic interpretive lens rather than with the traditional academic values of scholarly rigor and societal impact. Throughout this process, we help to perpetuate this cycle by pumping the system full of more and more of its vital life sources: products to datafy and peddle (in the form of publications) and finance (in the form of subscription and license fees). We, the academy, have become the product *and* the consumer, all in one.

With the acquisition of ProQuest, Clarivate not only acquired a considerable cache of content, but they also obtained the corporate keys to library infrastructure through Ex Libris, one of the major producers of integrated library software. Now

29 Lamdan, *Data Cartels*, 63-65.

30 Michael R. Dougherty, Rosalind Nguyen, and David Illingworth, "A Memory-Theoretic Account of Citation Propagation," *PsyArXiv*, September 16, 2019, https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/zst69.

under the Clarivate corporate tent, library systems represent yet another data point to be fed into the scholarly insights machine. Additionally, and perhaps more alarmingly, libraries, at least through their software, have now become an additional module of monolithic corporate offerings for higher education software solutions. Through centralization and integration of libraries into a single suite of tools offering full coverage for university needs—enterprise management, library services, faculty performance tracking, tuition and fees management—claims of efficiency and seamless integration can be realized. But what for us would appear to be a seamless user experience is, for Clarivate, a seamless data collection activity.

Jamie Taylor addresses this notion in her piece "Mergers, Acquisitions, and My Tinfoil Hat," where she explains that while anxiety about these mergers may seem like the hand wringing of skeptics and contrarians, there is simply too much money to be made. Library systems themselves do not represent a growth market, and publishers have essentially pushed library collection budgets past the breaking point with subscription fees. Now, with the inclusion of libraries in the corporate holdings of academic insight firms, there appears to be yet another piece of the carcass to be used.[31]

Of course, this represents an ethical concern regarding patron privacy and extractive capitalist approaches towards user data. Because we already know library vendors collect, aggregate, reuse, and sell our data and data-derived insights, this is not a fanciful hypothetical. Now, we are faced with a reality in which data extraction and capitalization are not only lucrative, but also convenient. The convenience is only furthered by the almost universal transition of library software

31 Jamie Taylor, "Mergers, Acquisitions, and My Tinfoil Hat," *Librarian Shipwreck* (blog), 2021, https://librarianshipwreck.wordpress.com/2021/08/16/mergers-acquisitions-and-my-tinfoil-hat/.

to vendor-hosted software as a service (SaaS) models in which libraries use systems on servers that are beyond our control and scrutiny. Aside from vendor disclosures and assurances, we will not know what data they are collecting and how. But we will know that the collection process will be one step less complicated as the data already lives on their machines.

In fact, a 2022 disclosure from EBSCO to customers of the EBSCO Discovery platform revealed that a certain subset of user data was being collected unbeknownst to the users and their libraries. Collected data included search data and user clicks, which do not represent shocking data collection practices on the face of it. However, one affected institution took umbrage with the fact that EBSCO did not appear to realize that the data were being collected and that the institution had been given "dangerously incorrect information from them about what kind of data they currently collect".[32] Assurances were made that this data was not used for marketing purposes or supplied to law enforcement agencies. Rather, what is most illustrative about this incident is not that the data were collected, but the ease with which the collection occurred: seamlessly, without notification of institution or user, and seemingly by accident.

With the high likelihood of library data entering the academic counting machine, we are faced with the probability that our data will help to further the metrics-driven amplification cycle we have discussed. This is not a new prospect for libraries as bibliometrics and citation counts are frequently touted as objective levels of scholarly value. However, this new methodology is a sleeker, more efficient machine that integrates our data without us even lifting a finger.

And while we have harped heavily on Clarivate, they do not stand alone in this new environment. In 2022, Elsevier closed

32 The institution has asked to not be identified in this chapter.

their acquisition of Interfolio, a company that sells a variety of products that cover faculty searches and hires, promotion and tenure dossiers, faculty activity reporting, and more. Lamdan notes that Elsevier has made such extensive inroads into all functions of the academy—from recruitment to publication to promotion and tenure—"that it would be hard to separate universities from Elsevier's products and contracts".[33] Roger Schonfeld observes Elsevier's move is in direct competition with Clarivate, evincing a tit-for-tat corporate arms race whose measures of escalation will be who has the bigger data sets to analyze.[34] There is too much money to be made for companies not to explore every possible revenue stream.

Schonfeld also notes resistance to these types of mergers, stating that this must lead us to consider the implications of buying into one-stop-shop research infrastructure that bundles all of our data handling into a single pair of corporate hands.[35] This, in turn, raises the concern of vendor lock-in or, as Hamilton, Daniels, Smith, and Eaton prefer, "university captivity".[36] As more and more key institutional infrastructures are coupled into a monolithic service provider, the barrier to transition to an off-suite platform coerces libraries into making decisions based on the inertial pull of the metaphorical company store rather than our organizational needs and professional ethics. This captivity does not limit its negative impacts just to the coercive forces exerted on libraries; it creates

33 Lamdan, *Data Cartels*, 66.

34 Roger Schonfeld, "Elsevier Acquiring Interfolio," *The Scholarly Kitchen* (blog), April 25, 2022, https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2022/04/25/elsevier-acquire-interfolio/.

35 Roger Schonfeld, "Clarivate to Acquire Proquest," *The Scholarly Kitchen* (blog), May 18, 2021, https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2021/05/18/clarivate-to-acquire-proquest/.

36 Laura T. Hamilton, Heather Daniels, Christian Michael Smith, and Charlie Eaton, "The Private Side of Public Universities: Third-Party Providers and Platform Capitalism," UC Berkeley Center for Studies in *Higher Education Research & Occasional Papers Series* 3 (2022): 1–35.

a precedent for obscured data practices as the norm for university-vendor relationships. Expanding on Frank Pasquale's work in *Black Box Societies*, Tressie McMillan Cottom cautions that such vertically integrated SaaS approaches to service provision, especially in the academy, create a norm of administrative opacity that enables private data worlds that can evade democratic inquiry while ratcheting up extractive practices.[37] Our institutions underwrite this extraction in the name of cost-savings and efficiency. And we are fed the by-products of the system that we cannot evaluate, or likely escape, which then drive researcher and library behavior as well as profits.

Recent advances in AI only further complicate the matter as Clarivate, Elsevier, and others of their kind are well-positioned to benefit doubly from the inclusion of AI methodologies in their workflows and evaluative frameworks as they can streamline their workflows and feed user data into their models. In late 2023, Elsevier announced that they are offering datasets—including full-text articles, author profiles, citations, biomedical records, and chemical patents across 24 disciplines—as a product to train AI-enabled methodologies at the "vanguard of data science".[38] In light of the well-established pattern of material accumulation and hoarding, the winnowing of the vendor ecosystem, and the integration of vendor platforms into all functional areas of academia, the advent of AI-empowered research and evaluative methodologies creates yet another revenue stream for these corporations as long as they can find willing participants to supply them with

37 Tressie McMillan Cottom, "Where Platform Capitalism and Racial Capitalism Meet: The Sociology of Race and Racism in the Digital Society," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 6, no. 4 (2020): 441–449.

38 Elsevier, "Elsevier Introduces Authoritative Scientific Datasets to Fuel Innovation and Business-Critical Decisions in Life Sciences, Chemicals and Other Research-Intensive Industries," Commercial website, elsevier.com, August 11, 2023. https://www.elsevier.com/about/press-releases/elsevier-introduces-authoritative-scientific-datasets-to-fuel-innovation-and.

data and revenue.[39] Institutions, it seems, are ready, willing, and able to welcome these new vendor offerings as a means of accelerating research production and automating away the repetitive, difficult aspects of administering academic enterprises. We have already seen calls for the integration of AI into student recruitment and admissions, peer review, and library operations.[40] While the prospect of outsourcing challenging and resource-intensive activities to these AI-enabled automation tools may seem attractive, it is incumbent on those of us in academia—administrators, instructors, researchers, librarians, and beyond—to think critically about what is sacrificed in the name of efficiency and expediency. The datafication necessary to enable these large AI models may further codify the entrenched biases present in scholarly practice while doing so at a speed and scale that was previously unimaginable and with the protective guise of objectivity assumed in "human-free" computational frameworks. Furthermore, support of these tools through both data and dollars only serves to increase vendor entanglement, making it increasingly impossible to separate our data and decisions from the omnipresent vendor profit motive.

In her 2021 book *A City is Not a Computer: Other Urban Intelligences*, Shannon Mattern reminds us that "Procurement is

39 See for example, Todd A. Carpenter, "AI Will Lead Us to Need More Garbage-Subtraction," *The Scholarly Kitchen* (blog), February 11, 2023, https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2023/11/02/we-need-more-garbage-subtraction-because-of-ai/.

40 See Rick Clark, "The End of 'Reading Season': AI Will Free the Admissions Staff from the Drudgery of Poring over Applications," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 25, 2023, online edition, sec. The Review|Forum. https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-will-artificial-intelligence-change-higher-ed.; Haseeb Irfanullah, "Ending Human-Dependent Peer Review," *The Scholarly Kitchen* (blog), October 29, 2023, https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2023/09/29/ending-human-dependent-peer-review/.;, Hannah Herrlich, "The Future of Libraries: AI and Machine Learning," *Fordham Library News* (blog), May 23, 2023. https://librarynews.blog.fordham.edu/2023/05/23/the-future-of-libraries-ai-and-machine-learning/.

political—both in the police department and the library."[41] As every aspect of higher education, from the library to faculty activity tracking to promotion and tenure to research to impact assessment, becomes the target of techno-solutionist ideals of data connectedness and efficiency, we must consider the ethical and political implications of the technologies that we underwrite through our data and our dollars (in the case of public universities, public tax dollars). Our dollars and data no longer exist within a silo of library-centric needs and uses, but rather help to feed the larger insight machine that can have deleterious effects on scholarly behavior. As institutional data is conveniently and efficiently collected through vendor surveillance and fed back to the institution, at a hefty premium, we as librarians, through our procurement decisions, are implicated for our contributions. These metrics and insights shape behavior and demand, leading us to acquire journals because of impact, because they get cited the most, because they have the most impactful articles, because they court the most prestigious research, because their insights indicate what are the most impactful areas of scholarship, because we bought the most impactful journals, and so on and so on. As the trend towards vertical integration of ILS vendors, publishers, activity trackers, and enterprise management solutions, the impulse to chase visibility within these vendor-supplied models becomes less of a pursuit of efficiency and more of an echo chamber whose reach is comprehensive within the academic landscape, one that we are subsidizing with our data and our money.

41 Shannon Mattern, *A City Is Not a Computer: Other Urban Intelligences*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 84.

Conclusions

What can we make of this ever-evolving issue? On the one-hand, from the perspective of libraries, we must refrain from conspiratorial thinking. It is not surprising or controversial that for-profit enterprise, database, and academic platform companies are seeking to turn a profit. We should remain vigilant, however, of our, that is academia's, willingness to find the easy and convenient solution uncritically or without considering the longer-term effects of what they are selling. As we have illustrated here, there are many lessons to be learned from the tech world as they have dealt with many of these issues, and technologists and philosophers have spilled much ink thinking through the near-term and long-term ramifications of these issues. We can look internally, too, at our own recent history in academia to forecast the imminent impacts of an industry whose sole purpose is to profit from our output by repackaging and reselling our own products. We've seen in academia the increasing blind reliance on data and quantified metrics to inform all aspects of the university enterprise from research to personnel management to hiring—all of which is reliant on a feedback loop pre-determined by expectations set and reinforced through the products chosen to make these elements easier to assess. In a recent industry platform webinar we attended, academic enterprise representatives discussed the "alchemy" of user-derived data and their ability to repackage and sell this data, with consent, to software development companies with their key takeaway being a driver towards increased revenue. More to the point, they had learned the lessons of the tech industry, and more specifically the social media companies in understanding the data we generate can be used to target us, to sell to us, and to use us for further development. They discussed the ways in which the use of this data would become, like social media, intelligent and drive user behavior, further cinching the knot on the closed-loop as

algorithmically-based suggestions further limit and constrain research and reinforce a status-quo enabled and enfranchised by profit motive in the guise of engagement, use, and reuse. Our collective buy-in to these platforms demonstrates our complacency towards these ideas—that, for sake of ease and assessment we in academia are willing to create and utilize a closed-loop system in which our research, our personnel management, our funding opportunities, our university strategic goals and initiatives, and more are constrained and contained—or trapped—within.

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