E-Journals and Digital Humanities

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Introduction

Being exclusively online brings journals added advantages. The most significant is exposure, namely dissemination. With millions of Internet users worldwide, e-journals reach a large and diversified readership. Restricted by its limited financial resources, print journals in the Humanities are targeted to a very small and exclusive readership, even if they employ commercial data aggregators like Project Muse or JSTOR. With the present-day flourishing of mass media and the affordability of the Internet as a viable tool for the dissemination of scholarship, paperbound thinking is rapidly loosing ground, and the “cultivated faith in the printed word” is dissipating. “The argument against electronic publication…that it cannot employ the same safeguards and guarantee the supposedly high, reliable standards that have been the hallmark of the print publications of Academe” is being challenged by the appearance and sustainability of high-quality e-journals.

This paper examines the role e-journals play in the vast and often debatable sector of digital humanities. It addresses the concerns of academics regarding publishing their work electronically; in addition, it answers a few questions that are still relevant: Why go solely online? What is changed in the process of publishing? How do e-journals compare to print journals? Is the digital publishing route advisable for capturing and attracting younger audiences? It also touches very briefly upon the economics of this model (an e-journal in the Humanities) as distinct from print journals.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the status of Digital Humanities [DH]. The second part discusses the role played by e-journals in the digital...
age and the last part deals with WIJ journal – its reach and audience. 

Digital Humanities [DH]

In “This is Why We fight,” Lisa Spiro argues that the digital humanities community needs to formulate a statement of values. Her proposed values, derived from the DH manifestos and her own analysis are: 1) openness; 2) collaboration; 3) collegiality and connectedness; 4) diversity; and 5) experimentation. In this author’s opinion, formulating and adopting a statement of values will not solve problems of academic phobias concerning open access, copyright issues, collaborating democratically and sharing data online. It will just complicate the situation. It seems that the reality of these academic phobias has not changed in the last twenty-one years since Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary e-Journal [WIJ] started publishing. Naturally, scholars who publish their and others writings digitally already share the same values even though at times it appears as if they operate against each other. 

In today’s global and diverse marketplace, regulating is not always feasible. One might ask: who is going to implement the statement of values, and how? Is the community of digital practitioners going to discipline those who do not abide by the rules, and how? 

Spiro goes on to suggest a Wiki page devoted to this enterprise where digital humanists review and contribute their insight on the subject. She compares the proposed statement of values of Digital Humanities to the Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct adopted by American Historical Association. She also mentions the MLA and ALA as embracing a core set of values. However, in the case of Digital Humanities, most practitioners already belong to academic associations and follow their mission statements. So why duplicate? Furthermore, as Spiro correctly states, unlike the print culture, Digital Humanities flows and changes like the Internet.

In recent years, there were at least two attempts to compose a manifesto for the field in Europe and in the USA. Both recognized the uniqueness of the situation and its fluidity. The DHIP’s manifesto wisely asserts that “The widening gap between flourishing digital practices and their institutional acknowledgment represent a threat for the
academic community as a whole and for young scholars in particular, since it casts uncertainty on their future as research professionals.”

In her paper, “Too much ‘digital,’ too little ‘humanities’? An attempt to explain why many humanities scholars are reluctant converts to Digital Humanities,” Helle Porsdam discusses the relationship between the natural sciences and the Humanities when it comes to online presence. She concludes:

“The tendency toward emphasizing process in much current DH literature is fine – and understandable as a counterweight to longstanding traditions of only valuing products that would be published by a few, elitist university presses. But I find it somewhat problematic when it carries with it a wish to blur distinctions – first of all that between teaching, research and other activities, and second, that between the work done by each individual researcher and his/her team, or the digital community.” (38)

In a study out of Cornell University’s Society for Humanities, one of the participants observed that “scientists had been far better than humanists had been at making their scholarship accessible to the public.” (Reiger, 123)

In conclusion, Porsdam and another proponent of DH Kathleen Fitzpatrick warn appropriately: “If humanities scholars do nothing, our disciplines will simply cease to be relevant.” (Ibid., 38)

E-Journals

This section reviews the unique differences between traditional print journals and the present breed of e-journals and their monumental impact on academic publishing in general and on scholarly print journals in particular. Publishing in peer-reviewed, tightly controlled publications is a requirement for promotion and tenure for university scholars. Electronic journals quicken traditional peer-review processes and if extended to involve more reviewers per article and readers' commentaries, they may reduce potential partisanship, bias, and intrigue. A number of e-journals implement peer review on the Internet, which includes pre- and post-publication review systems like the open-discussion model and the staged-discussion model. These types of peer review methods, more popular with scientific and technical journals, [yet, could as well be implemented in other fields] employ the active participation of their readers in reviewing articles before or after they are published. Some e-journals' preferred method is a combination of traditional and wired reviews. Referees are provided with a...
review form, allowing them to communicate with the editor electronically or through regular mail.

In recent surveys of print-journals three important tenets came forward: The globalization of scholarship is of utmost importance; scholarly publication is in a dire financial situation; and a feasible economic solution to its predicament lies in the implementation of electronic and digital media for academic publication. Creating affordable access and containing expenses become crucial to the sustenance of academic journals. As production expenses are reduced in shifting to the electronic medium, subscription fees can be reduced or eliminated entirely. In addition, production, advertising, circulation, and distribution costs can be either purged or minimized, as well as the salaries incurred for these traditional print activities. In the electronic medium, one Webmaster can handle all the Web coding involved in preparing an issue for publication. In Canada, many e-journals are affiliated with the Open Journal System [OJS], which requires minimal coding from the editors.

The freedom, globalization, and affordability associated with the Web offer scholars a chance at voicing their opinions devoid of any intervention. As new generations of scholars become more proficient with electronic technology, they will find the Web an added (or even the sole) outlet for their expression. Moreover, the Web's potential of transforming human existence in general is articulated by the following statement of Dale Spender: "That the print-culture world is going is abundantly clear. With it go many of the conventions that we have cherished about who we are, what we know, and how we make sense of our universe. Cyber-society will be as dramatically different to us as print culture was to those of the manuscript era. New truths are in the making."

Open Access Journals Data [2010-2018]

According to a report from March 2018 entitled, "The Public Knowledge Project: Reflections and Directions After Two Decades," the creators and computer scientists at the Open Journal System [OJS] at the Simon Fraser University in Vancouver claim that “there are over 10,000 journals actively using OJS (publishing at least at least 10 articles
a year, and an average of 46 articles per year).” (8)\textsuperscript{10} The report does not specify or disclose the geographical, subject matter or demographic distribution of the data. However, an earlier report (by the same organization) from 2014 shows that there were 7021 e-journals, using the OJS. The following is the analysis by global areas:

East Asia & Pacific: 1160
Europe & Central Asia: 1318
Latin America & Caribbean: 1939
Middle East & North Africa: 110
North America: 731
South Asia: 208
Sub-Saharan Africa: 257
Unknown: 1298

These numbers suggest that the North American usage of OJS was just 10.4% in 2014.\textsuperscript{11}

A further in-depth analysis of the usage of OJS is available in a survey that was published in the *Scholarly and Research Communication*, Vol. 1, No 2 (2010) by Brian D. Edgar & John Willinsky.\textsuperscript{12} Edgar and Willinsky claim that in 2009 there were over 5k journals that used the OJS. Yet, only 998 e-journals participated in the survey. 40% of the e-journals published research in the sciences, technology, and medicine; 30% published in the social sciences; 19% were multidisciplinary; and only 11% were in the Humanities.

Most editors (77%) reported working without compensation from the journal, with only 16% reporting some form of remuneration.

Among these open access journals, 20% continue to offer print editions by subscription. A further 8% of the total number of journals provides a form of embargoed access, with their content being made available free several months after publication. OJS includes a subscription module within the software that can restrict access to subscribers and
subscribing institutions. 11% of the surveyed journals required subscriptions for both online and print access.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{The Journal [WIJ]}

The journal celebrated its twentieth anniversary in April 2017. The inception, evolution, and growth of the journal were described in detail in other publications.\textsuperscript{14} Registered in Ontario, Canada as a non-profit organization, the journal is a labor of love and the entire editorial and consulting board members are volunteers.

The following journal’s statistics are provided by Google Analytics, which are known to have some marked limitations.\textsuperscript{15} But for the purpose of this paper, they should suffice and offer a glimpse to the journal’s international audience.

Google Analytics’ web traffic reflects the period from May 1, 2017 – May 5, 2018:

\textit{Demographics and Interest Reports}

\textit{Gender}

45.85\% - Female users

54.15\% - Male users

\textit{Age}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{18-24} – 27.5\%
  \item \textbf{25-34} – 33.5\%
  \item 35-44 – 15.5\%
  \item 45-54 – 12.5\%
  \item 55-64 – 5.5\%
  \item 65+ - 5.5\%
\end{itemize}

\textbf{More than half of users/visitors are in the 18-34 age bracket!!!}

\textit{Other Pertinent Data:}

76.4\% of users are English speaking Americans. New visitors comprise of 81.8\% and returning visitors comprise of 18.2\%. Almost half of the users utilize the Chrome browser, followed by Safari and Firefox. Only 12.6\% of users use Internet Explorer. Users from many countries around the globe visit the journal, but the majority of users are from the USA.
Epilogue

As the founder and editor-in-chief of *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, I believe that by creating ‘a paradigm shift’ within the field of Jewish Studies, we can reintroduce new and inclusive findings to what is considered now the ‘mainstream’ or “male stream” study of Judaism. WIJ was established as a forum for scholarly debate on gender-related issues in Judaism. It is specifically intended to discuss and bring to the forefront gender inequalities within the Jewish religion, culture, and society, both ancient and modern. Since its inception, the journal has gained a large international readership and is listed in dozens of directories and indexes. In addition to publishing prominent scholars, the journal promotes young and emerging scholars and makes it a priority to give a voice to materials that most likely would have never been published by the “male stream” Jewish periodicals. The journal welcomes a diversity of points of view, conflicting or harmonizing, in order to develop a genuine dialogue.

On a more personal level, I feel fulfilled every time a new issue comes out. I feel that years of contemplation, introspection, and ideological formation stand behind every published word. By reaching out to Jewish and non-Jewish women and men alike, I know that we are and were able to bring on a change.

This is the spirit of change and diversity we wish to impart to our ever-growing younger audience. And through the various and distinct voices of our contributing authors, we hope that their stories shall prevail.

And final words to the many editors, peer reviewers, and scholars from around the world, who continuously supported the journal and me in immeasurable ways — thank you so much!

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1 A similar version of this paper was first presented at the 2015 Northeast Modern Language Association, Toronto, Ontario. All emphases were added by the author.
3 Ibid., 123.
On their website, PKP explains their chosen criteria: “To get closer to an answer to the original question, PKP decided to apply the somewhat arbitrary criteria that an OJS journal must have at least 10 articles published in a single year to be officially included in the count of OJS journals. By this measure, we have been able to identify 8,286 journals using OJS for the management and/or publishing of their content for 2014. This is a very impressive figure when placed in the context of some of the world’s largest commercial providers of journals who typically have between two and three thousand journals in their portfolio…There are approximately 3.24 million items that have been published in all known OJS journals, with 2.8 million of these coming from journals that meet the 10 articles per year filtering criteria.” See https://pkp.sfu.ca/ojs/ojs-usage/ojs-stats/

The survey also discusses the business and economic aspects of the e-journal. But this is beyond the scope of this paper.


A Google search on the limitation of Google Analytics yields over 2 millions results. The following is a good analysis of the tool: https://www.softwareadvice.com/resources/using-google-analytics-for-marketing/