



# The Current State of Academic E-Book Business Models

Access Strategies and Budgeting Realities

Tracy Bergstrom  
Makala Skinner

August 13, 2025



ITHAKA S+R

Ithaka S+R provides research and strategic guidance to help the academic and cultural communities serve the public good and navigate economic, demographic, and technological change.

Ithaka S+R is part of ITHAKA, a nonprofit with a mission to improve access to knowledge and education for people around the world. We believe education is key to the wellbeing of individuals and society, and we work to make it more effective and affordable.

Copyright 2025 ITHAKA. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of the license, please see <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.



# Executive summary

This study examines academic monograph publishing in the humanities and social sciences across the United States and Europe to understand how current business models are functioning for their consumer base, namely libraries and authors. Through desk research and interviews with librarians, content aggregators, publishers, and authors, we gathered data on a variety of business models (including hybrid, digital, and print models, and those driven by open access imperatives), the needs of academic libraries, and the priorities of authors.

To guide this research we considered:

1. How academic libraries, authors, and readers are being served by the e-books market
2. The current and future role of print
3. The impact of variant business and acquisitions models on both cost and service

Between October 2024 and January 2025, Ithaka S+R gathered data through research and semi-structured interviews to better understand the e-book market with a focus on understanding what is working well and the most critical pain points for academic libraries, publishers, and authors. This report shares findings from our qualitative analysis of 17 interviews with stakeholders as well as themes and trends discovered through our desk research. The resulting analysis is driven by the stakeholders interviewed for this study, contextualized by our own understanding of the contemporary environment at large and its continual evolution. As most of our original interviews took place before Clarivate's announcement in February 2025 that it will pivot e-monograph sales to a subscription model, we conducted additional interviews after this date to assess the impact and reactions to this shift.

Here we highlight the most striking key findings from our research:

- **There are enormous disconnects between the library and publisher communities on academic monograph publishing.** While the two have come together on a variety of important open access initiatives, beyond this there are very different conceptualizations of a shared reality. For example, while university presses and other

academic book publishers are experiencing an enormous squeeze in the transition to digital production and distribution, libraries are concerned that digital distribution is resulting in acquisition models that are unsustainable or unreliable to manage.

- **Many libraries procure e-book content through a mix of acquisition methods that meet their local demands for content, budgeting and staffing needs.** Faculty and researcher demand remains paramount for institutions, and libraries remain committed to ensuring both perpetual access and preservation.
- **The majority of librarian interviewees believe that evidence-based acquisition models provide an especially efficient way to allocate money.** Several libraries reported that they have moved away from demand-driven acquisition models due to the significant maintenance required for libraries to engage with these programs. Traditional item selection as facilitated by subject liaisons, however, still accounts for a significant volume of monographic acquisitions at some institutions.
- **Some libraries identified that a major challenge to acquiring e-monographs was the lack of experienced staff who understand how to navigate the complexities of acquisitions across publishers and aggregators.** Standardization across publisher contracts and licenses would help streamline the acquisitions processes and reduce the amount of staff capacity required to facilitate acquisitions. A few librarians said that since e-books are being licensed so differently and under so many different models to present, they have defaulted to print. Libraries have not invested in talent development for monograph strategy to the same extent they have for journals under the banner of scholarly communication.
- **Publishers and librarians see value in open monographs initiatives.** Several publishers spoke about the importance of these initiatives, including Direct to Open, Fund to Mission, Opening the Future, Path to Open, and University Press Library Open, although at present they have not yet been able to scale to cover all academic book production. Librarians see real promise in these models to increase access to open scholarship, support small and university

presses, acquire diverse content, open content to broader readership, and promote responsible financial models.

- **Moving towards more open content is a strategic priority for some institutions.** While libraries generally indicate that higher portions of their budgets are being spent on purchased content at present, several participate in one or more flip to open programs. As it remains difficult to acquire and to ascertain quality of open monographs outside of these programs, however, institutions are not always able to fulfil this strategic goal in practice.
- **Consortia are viewed as increasingly critical by publishers in equalizing opportunities for readership and publication.** Several publishers mentioned the importance of working with consortia, especially those that represent a range of institutions including community colleges, to ensure broad access to publications. Publishers are also pursuing closer collaborations with library consortia to implement read and publish-style agreements for monographs.
- **Across our interviews, perspectives were mixed on whether authors place value on their e-monographs being openly available.** While a number of interviewees say that increasing numbers of authors are prioritizing publishing open access and want to reduce barriers to readership, particularly to researchers located in other parts of the world, author opinions on open access are often field- or discipline-specific. Some believe that open access content is lower in quality.
- **Introducing new models and advocating for adoption requires significant time investment on the part of publishers.** Publishers reported that new business models require concerted and cyclical efforts to bring awareness and adoption to the library market. In addition, balancing financially sustainable operations while making e-books available to a wide range of libraries with variable staffing and budgetary configurations is difficult.
- **New business models introduce new challenges—both pragmatic and ideological—for publishers and libraries.** Over the course of this research, Clarivate announced that it was moving away from transactional sales and towards a bundled subscription model for e-book sales. It is clear that the business models for how books will

be distributed going forward will have an enormous effect on the sustainability of scholarly publishers and their ability to continue producing monographs of the type that this report examines.

- **Interviewees believe that generative AI will likely have a large, but as of yet unknown, impact on electronic monographs in the future.** While interviewees did not speculate on what this impact would look like, there was a sense that it would be transformative and affect how readers engage with long-form electronic content.

## Introduction

The primary goal of this research study is to analyze the market fit of variant models within the academic e-book sector to understand how they are functioning for their consumer base, including what aspects meet user needs and where changes would be beneficial. A variety of business models comprise this volatile sector of the publishing industry, including hybrid digital and print models, as well as those driven by open access imperatives. The needs of academic libraries, as the primary group publishers conduct business with at universities and as a hub connecting authors and researchers, are foregrounded in our analysis.

The past decade in scholarly publishing has been one of continuous change. While print remains significant, technological advances, in combination with cultural and economic imperatives to produce more accessible and sustainable content, have driven publishers to develop a spectrum of business models for e-books. These models have been developed by publishers and intermediaries, working closely with libraries, on how best to package and provide books to meet market needs. They have also been developed in response to real competitive pressures and opportunities in a fast-growing market. The pandemic only accelerated these changes, creating new demand for e-books among increasingly remote, distributed, and hybrid research and learning environments, while exerting financial pressure on the already thin margins of publishers and distributors. The system, in other words, is dynamic and complex.

With flattening or decreasing budgets, academic libraries often struggle to determine where they should allocate their limited resources to meet the demands of their researchers while aligning strategic priorities with their parent institutions.

Understanding this landscape of existing business models for scholarly monograph publications and the extent to which it meets the needs of academic libraries and authors is critical in identifying how publishers can further evolve e-monograph business models. With flattening or decreasing budgets, academic libraries often struggle to determine where they should allocate their limited resources to meet the demands of their researchers while aligning strategic priorities with their parent institutions. The continuously evolving landscape of business models, which may include big deals or multiyear, comprehensive contracts, hybrid deals which bundle print and digital content, transformative agreements, and flip to open models, often leave overleveraged libraries trying to understand which models best align with their budgets.

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the following colleagues for participating in this research study and sharing their insights about e-book publishing and acquisition:

- Maria Bonn, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- Curtis Brundy, Iowa State University
- Paige Clunie, Princeton University Press
- Tara Tobin Cataldo, University of Florida
- Ranjodh Singh Dhaliwal, University of Basel
- Thomas Feeley, University at Buffalo
- Sarah Forzetting, Stanford University
- Matt Gallagher, Binghamton University
- David Givens, Brown University

- Tom Grady, COPIM/ University of London
- Phillip Jones, University of Arkansas
- John Lenahan, ITHAKA
- Jessica Morales, University of Arkansas
- Peter Potter, De Gruyter
- Mark Robison, University of Notre Dame
- Charles Watkinson, University of Michigan Press
- Kimberley Williams, Princeton University Press

This research study was generously funded by the Mellon Foundation. We thank Yi Feng, Mark McBride, Roger C. Schonfeld, Ellen Carroll, Kimberly Lutz, and Juni Ahari for their contributions to this study and its analysis.

## The current landscape

Academic monographs have experienced a much more gradual transition to e-formats than scholarly journals. This current study, as well as recent research by Ithaka S+R, confirms that academic libraries are still straddling acquisitions of monographic content in both print and e-books.<sup>1</sup> Within this context, publishers' increasing moves to bundle content to be sold as collections present both challenges and opportunities for academic libraries. On the one hand, purchasing monographic content as a collection allows many libraries access to a range of monographs by topic. On the other hand, most libraries interviewed within this research communicated the value of librarian-selected content as a way to be engaged with the evolving academic environment and research needs. Despite the acknowledgement of the high costs of this work, many libraries still see value in these efforts and appreciate the flexibility that title-by-title selection affords them in building collections that are responsive to local needs.

Clarivate's decision that it will pivot its e-book distribution model to subscription-based access while phasing out one-time perpetual purchases of digital collections and books for libraries, announced in

---

<sup>1</sup> See especially: Laura Brown, Maya Dayan, Brenna McLaughlin, Roger Schonfeld, John Sherer, and Erich van Rijn, "Print Revenue and Open Access Monographs: A University Press Study," *Ithaka S+R*, 19 September 2023, <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.319642>.



February 2025, exacerbates this tension between libraries' desire to acquire more content yet retain some control over individual title selection.<sup>2</sup> For some librarians, Clarivate's announcement underscored a concern that the company's primary business is now technology, with the provision of academic content becoming a distant, secondary consideration. Adding to this perception, within the past year Ex Libris technology products were increasingly merged within Clarivate, including those that progressively integrate generative AI functionality. Some librarians interviewed for this study called into question the future functionality of Rialto in particular; with no reason to interact with ProQuest Ebook Central titles as they will now only be offered for purchase en masse, Rialto's functionality potentially diminishes.

Additional Ithaka S+R research in this area has previously illuminated the tight pressures currently felt by university and small presses to compete in an increasingly consolidated marketplace. Small presses may lack foundational infrastructure that would allow them to pivot their business models akin to that of larger publishers, including within the realm of open access.<sup>3</sup> Within this present study, however, we universally heard about the value of university and smaller presses in publishing bibliodiverse materials that promote heterogeneity across topic areas and author perspectives. Some interviewees recognize that flip to open models, especially those that aggregate content across multiple presses, present an opportunity to stabilize and help smaller presses find new audiences for their content.

Flip to open models, especially those that aggregate content across multiple presses, may present an opportunity to stabilize and help smaller presses find new audiences for their content.

---

<sup>2</sup> See the Clarivate announcement: "Clarivate Unveils Transformative Subscription-Based Access Strategy for Academia," Clarivate, 18 February 2025, <https://clarivate.com/news/clarivate-unveils-transformative-subscription-based-access-strategy-for-academia/>.

<sup>3</sup> Tracy Bergstrom, Oya Y. Rieger, and Roger C. Schonfeld, "The Second Digital Transformation of Scholarly Publishing: Strategic Context and Shared Infrastructure," *Ithaka S+R*, 29 January 2024, <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.320210>.

In the wake of Clarivate's announcement, EBSCO released a statement that it reaffirmed its commitment to "supporting libraries with diverse acquisition needs, including perpetual access to e-books, print book fulfillment, and flexible acquisition models."<sup>4</sup> Prior to this, EBSCO had launched Mosaic by GOBI Library Solutions in October 2024, which modernizes and aggregates content selection on behalf of academic libraries. For the librarians we interviewed, this may address the difficulty of streamlining and simplifying ordering procedures for e- across providers, especially if the library is acquiring open access monographs on a title-by-title basis. This also echoes comments we heard in recent research on the challenges of collective collecting and the difficulty consortia and other groups face in building shared monographic collections given the lack of infrastructure to support collaborative purchasing.<sup>5</sup>

Over the past several years, Springer Nature has piloted a change in their sales of monographs. In 2022, Springer Nature sunsetted their Evidenced-Based Acquisitions Program, prompting libraries to purchase Springer Nature e-book subject packages outright on topics including chemistry, engineering, energy, and physics. All titles purchased by libraries as though these packages are owned by the library in perpetuity and not protected by Digital Rights Management, so library patrons can use them without restrictions. These considerations around flexibility of use and ownership emerged as important issues in our interviews for this study.

In conducting this research, interviewees revealed multiple points of view about what they consider to be ideal business and acquisition models. To best meet the needs of their local patron populations, libraries are still straddling a variety of simultaneous acquisition methods. Additionally, the differing needs of academic libraries based on user base, size, and budget, as well as the disparate offerings from publishers based on models, funding, and sustainability, means that a variety of solutions may be needed to serve the full market of academic libraries for some time.

---

<sup>4</sup> "EBSCO Information Services Maintains Commitment to Supporting Libraries' Book Acquisition Needs Amidst Industry Shifts," *EBSCO*, 18 February 2025, <https://www.ebsco.com/news-center/press-releases/ebsco-information-services-maintains-commitment-supporting-libraries>.

<sup>5</sup> Tracy Bergstrom, Oya Y. Rieger, and Roger Schonfeld, "Governance and Business Models for Collaborative Collection Development," *Ithaka S+R*, 1 August 2024, <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.321102>.

## Previous research on e-book publishing

The past decade in scholarly publishing has been one of continuous innovation. While print remains a significant source of revenue, technological advances, in combination with cultural and economic imperatives to produce more accessible and sustainable content, have driven publishers to develop a spectrum of business models. Yet little comparative analysis of the challenges and benefits of the emerging models that populate this landscape exists. Likewise, no large-scale study that considers the broader academic ecosystem in which publishing and distribution models are operating has been conducted to date.

Beginning in 2013, William Walters published a series of articles that examined the rise of e-books and their resulting impact on research libraries.<sup>6</sup> These articles probed the challenges libraries faced acquiring and managing e-books in particular, and the disparate practices across publishers and aggregators. Following Walters' publications, research by Paul Spence explored how digital or hybrid monographs might become more firmly established within the scholarly publishing landscape, especially within the humanities.<sup>7</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a powerful accelerant for long-standing trends toward digital content consumption in academic settings. In response to this transformation OverDrive Academic and Choice collaborated in 2022 on a study that offered an empirical snapshot of how e-books and audiobooks were gaining traction as components of academic library collections.<sup>8</sup> Research by Dominic Broadhurst et al. also explored e-book and textbook supply and provisioning within libraries and universities in the post-pandemic environment and included the

---

<sup>6</sup> William H. Walters, "E-books in Academic Libraries: Challenges for Acquisition and Collection Management," *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 13, no. 2 (April 2013): 187-211, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/pla.2013.0012>; William H. Walters, "E-books in Academic Libraries: Challenges for Discovery and Access," *Serials Review* 39, no. 2 (December 2013): 97-104, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00987913.2013.10765501>; William H. Walters, "E-books in Academic Libraries: Challenges for Sharing and Use," *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 46, no. 2 (January 2013): 85-95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000612470279>.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Spence, "The Academic Book and Its Digital Dilemmas," *Convergence* (London), 24, no. 5 (May 2018): 458-476, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856518772029>.

<sup>8</sup> "The State of Ebooks in Academic Libraries 2022: How Libraries Are Continuing the Pivot Toward a Growing Array of Digital Resources," *OverDrive Academic and Choice*, 2022, [https://static.od-cdn.com/Report\\_Download.pdf](https://static.od-cdn.com/Report_Download.pdf).

perspective of a range of stakeholders, including libraries, publishers, and content providers.<sup>9</sup> These studies contribute to a growing body of evidence highlighting both the momentum and the complexities surrounding digital course materials and library-licensed collections in the post-pandemic landscape. At the time of writing, a new e-book platform usability report, focusing on the interfaces of EBSCO and ProQuest, was published by the Ebook Usability Common Knowledge Group.<sup>10</sup>

The open access monographs landscape has been the focus of steady inquiry into the economic and operational models that might support long-term viability. Since the pioneering work of the TOME project, launched in 2018,<sup>11</sup> which provided a foundational intervention into the challenges of funding and dissemination, a series of research efforts have sought to advance our understanding of the sustainability of open monograph publishing. In particular, Izabella Penier et al's 2020 report *COPIM Revenue Models for Open Access Monographs* extensively covers the business models that facilitate the transition of monographs to open access.<sup>12</sup> The Mellon Foundation's "Developing a Data Trust for Open Access Ebook Usage" project additionally supported critical work on open access monographs and their usage, including research on the supply chain of monographs as distinct from journal content. This topic was explored to great detail in the 2021 Clarke and Ricci report *OA Books Supply Chain Mapping*.<sup>13</sup> Christina Drummond and Kevin Hawkins' extensive research on usage data and analytics for open access monographs was also supported by the Mellon Foundation.<sup>14</sup> This work continues to date through projects like that of Policy Alignment of Open Access Monographs in the European Research Area (PALOMERA), which

---

<sup>9</sup> Dominic Broadhurst, Ruth Dale, and Jason Harper, "Perspectives on E-books and Digital Textbooks and the Way Ahead," *UKSG Insights* 3, no. 19 (November 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.599>.

<sup>10</sup> Carla Arbagey et al., "Ebook Platform Usability Report: A Case Study of EBSCO and ProQuest," November 2024, <https://cdlib.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Aggregator-Report-for-Ebsco-and-ProQuest.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Toward an Open Monograph Ecosystem, <https://www.openmonographs.org>.

<sup>12</sup> Izabella Penier, Martin Paul Eve, and Tom Grady, "COPIM – Revenue models for Open Access Monographs 2020," *COPIM*, 7 September 2020, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4011836>.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Clarke and Laura Ricci, "OA Books Supply Chain Mapping Report," Clarke & Esposito, 9 April 2021, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4681725>.

<sup>14</sup> Christina Drummond and Kevin Hawkins, "OA eBook Usage Data Analytics and Reporting Use-cases by Stakeholder," *OAEBU Data Trust*, 20 January 2022, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5889141>.

seeks to investigate why so few open access funder policies include monographs.<sup>15</sup>

## Methodology

Within this project, we utilized the following definitions when thinking about the stakeholders within the ecosystem of this research:

- **Publisher:** the primary creators and distributors of monographic e-books. Within the project, we endeavored to be cognizant of the differing motivations and challenges of commercial, university, and small/ topical presses.
- **Aggregator:** aggregators function within this space as intermediaries between publishers and libraries/authors and widen the distribution of monographic content among these entities in important ways.
- **Academic Library:** the focus within the project was on the fit of various models for academic and research libraries. Public libraries were considered outside the scope of this research.
- **Author:** for the purposes of this research, we spoke with authors who have published academic monographs within the past five years.

Ithaka S+R gathered data through desk research and interviews with publishers, content aggregators, librarians, and authors to better understand the e-book market, what is working well, and the most critical pain points for academic libraries. Through qualitative analysis, this research study identifies trends in the e-monograph market as well as recommendations on how publishers can better meet the needs of academic libraries.

We asked interviewees a wide range of questions regarding the e-book sector, including questions on specific model structures and engagement, open access initiatives, financing and pricing, successes and challenges,

---

<sup>15</sup> Ursula Rabar, “PALOMERA: the case for open access academic books,” *Jisc Research: Improving research through technology innovation*, 23 May 2023, <https://research.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2023/05/23/palomera-the-cae-for-open-access-academic-books/>.

institutional priorities, and how they would like the monographic market to change in the coming years. For libraries, our questions revolved around the monograph acquisitions models that best fit their budgeting and acquisitions practices; for publishers and aggregators, we asked about the monograph business models they see as most valuable for meeting the needs of libraries and authors.

Additional information about this research methodology is included in Appendix A. Direct quotations from interviews have been lightly edited for clarity.

## Findings

The resulting analysis is driven by the stakeholders interviewed for this study, contextualized by our own understanding of the contemporary environment at large and its continual evolution. Across the corpus of interviews, we analyzed comments by topic, as opposed to by the role of interviewee, to be able to elucidate common themes.

### Acquisition models

As baseline questions for both librarians and publishers/aggregators, we asked about the effectiveness and strengths of the following acquisitions models:

- **Traditional item level selection**, a model in which a library selects books at the title level (or using tools that may profile which titles are recommended). This model allows for the most granular control of budget and selection but requires a higher level of staff engagement and may not meet user needs.
- **Demand-driven acquisition (DDA)**, a model in which users are able to browse and use a catalog of books in limited ways. Certain activities trigger the purchase of individual titles.<sup>16</sup> This model is

---

<sup>16</sup> “What is Demand-Driven Acquisition (DDA) in EBSCOhost Collection Manager?” *EBSCO Connect*, 8 June 2023, [https://connect.ebsco.com/s/article/What-is-Demand-Driven-Acquisition-in-EBSCOhost-Collection-Manager?language=en\\_US](https://connect.ebsco.com/s/article/What-is-Demand-Driven-Acquisition-in-EBSCOhost-Collection-Manager?language=en_US).

quite responsive to user needs but can be challenging from a budgetary perspective.

- **Evidence-based acquisition (EBA)**, a model in which a library pre-commits a certain amount of funds for purchase, gains access to a wider variety of materials for an interim period of time, and develops business intelligence during that period to determine how best to allocate the pre-committed resources for permanent purchases.<sup>17</sup>
- **Complete collections**, a model in which a library can purchase the complete output of a given publisher or a bundled cross-publisher collection by subject area, typically at a discount relative to item-level selection. This model can reduce some of the library staff time associated with selection.

From librarians, we heard primarily about the ability of EBA models to meet the needs of contemporary libraries. Fundamentally, EBA models are perceived as an efficient way to spend money, especially in an era of flatlining or dwindling budgets for libraries. In institutions that are calculating cost-per-use across platforms, EBAs provide some of the better cost outcomes and also save staff time. EBAs have several positive features including offering perpetual access,<sup>18</sup> a wide variety of content, the ability for libraries to curate their content selection to some degree, and usage data. As one librarian noted, “EBA is an efficient way to spend money; our budget is not getting larger so we look at how to stretch what we have.”

Clarivate’s decision in 2025 to pivot its e-book distribution model to a subscription-based access strategy caught many library stakeholders off guard. Several librarians in this study expressed surprise at the abruptness of the rollout and the absence of any consultation with the library community in advance of such a consequential shift. Amongst the most acute points of contention was the loss of perpetual access rights, a feature viewed as essential to libraries’ stewardship role. At the same time, some interviewees acknowledged that for institutions facing declining monographic budgets and staffing limitations, the move towards

---

<sup>17</sup> “Evidence Based Acquisition,” Oxford Academic, <https://academic.oup.com/pages/purchasing/institutional-books-products/evidence-based-acquisition>.

<sup>18</sup> As librarian interviews were conducted in January to early February 2025, they preceded Clarivate’s announcement of changes to its e-book strategy, including changes to perpetual access for libraries.



bundled subscriptions may offer operational efficiencies aligned with current resource constraints. Clarivate's model, in this respect, reflects broader tensions between access and ownership, transaction cost and curation, and the values of libraries versus publisher revenue imperatives.

Most libraries reported that their acquisitions spanned several if not all acquisition models, including purchasing significant materials as complete collections and traditional title-by-title selection. Faculty and researcher demand remains paramount for institutions, and libraries remain committed to ensuring perpetual access and the preservation of content.

While most libraries had employed DDA models in the past, interviewees were either moving away or had discontinued these plans. DDA models have receded because they involved significant maintenance, managing DDA settings and tracking purchases. Vendor DDA offerings have commensurately been pulled back as well.

Librarians consistently emphasized that while preferences vary across institutions, e-book acquisition strategies tend to be diversified. Most libraries employ a blend of approaches, including title-by-title selection, EBA models, frontlist publisher packages, and subscribe to open models. Although there is a growing inclination to reduce reliance on bespoke content selection by subject librarians—largely due to the significant time investment it requires—this pluralistic mix of acquisition methods reflects a pragmatic alignment with current budgetary constraints and staffing capacities.

From the perspective of publishers and aggregators, the surge in digital readership during COVID-19 has proven catalytic. Several interviewees noted that the temporary broadening of access early in the pandemic revealed the extent of untapped readership, prompting a reevaluation of longstanding access models. For publishers and aggregators, this has fueled initiatives to reach new readers and to expand geographically. Publisher interviewees confirmed that, from their perspective, EBA models at present well meet the needs of everyone. The model allows libraries ranging from Association of Research Library members to community colleges to build collections within their means. For publishers, the EBA model might also have the potential to promote front-list offerings to wider groups of international libraries.



## Open access

Perspectives on open access monographs were notably varied across stakeholder groups. While there was broad agreement on the importance of advancing open content among librarians, publishers, and aggregators, interviewees also underscored the persistent challenges associated with sustaining and acquiring open access monographs. Unlike journals—where open models are comparatively more mature—the monograph landscape continues to grapple with structural and economic complexities that inhibit broader adoption and long-term viability.

Several publishers spoke about the value of emerging open monographs initiatives, including Fund to Mission,<sup>19</sup> Path to Open,<sup>20</sup> Direct to Open,<sup>21</sup> University Press Library Open,<sup>22</sup> and Opening the Future.<sup>23</sup> Publishers and aggregators see these efforts as a way to offer more open content while simultaneously making it easy for libraries to subscribe within their acquisitions and budgeting processes. From a publisher perspective, sustainability is also a key objective of these programs. As one interviewee stated, “what we hope to do is build a program that embeds open access into the publishing of presses, many of which have never published open access before.” Another commented that “we were trying to provide low risk models to small and medium presses who don’t have the resources, and who wanted an off the shelf model [for open access publishing] they could run with.”

A number of interviewees emphasized the importance of bibliodiversity as a guiding principle for the scholarly publishing ecosystem, particularly in support of disciplinary breadth and the vitality of small and independent presses. While the term bibliodiversity originally referred to linguistic plurality in publishing, it has since evolved to encompass a broader array of concepts, including diversity of authorship, funding mechanisms, and

---

<sup>19</sup> “Fund to Mission Open Access Monograph Model,” University of Michigan Publishing, <https://www.publishing.umich.edu/features/fund-to-mission>.

<sup>20</sup> “Path to Open: High-Quality Titles with a High Impact,” JSTOR, <https://about.jstor.org/path-to-open/>.

<sup>21</sup> “Direct to Open: A Bold, Innovative Model for Open Access to Scholarship and Knowledge,” MIT Press Direct, <https://direct.mit.edu/books/pages/direct-to-open>.

<sup>22</sup> UPL Open, <https://uplopen.com>.

<sup>23</sup> Opening the Future: A Funding Model for Open Access Books, <https://openingthefuture.net/>.

publishing formats.<sup>24</sup> In this context, initiatives that strengthen the capacity of university presses and independent publishers to produce open access monographs—whether immediately or through phased approaches—are viewed as essential in protecting these presses' capacities to publish alternative voices. As such, these open monograph efforts underpin the sustainability of these publishers and also safeguard their ability to curate and disseminate specialized and underrepresented areas of scholarship to a wide range of readers.

Key to each of these flip to open models is that they contain a mixture of open and paywalled content, with the closed content paying to some extent for the open content. As one publisher described, the aim is to transition “from acquiring to enabling content.” Some interviewees referenced the lessons learned from the TOME project: in particular, while open access monograph publishing may not be immediately sustainable on its own, there are entities including within universities who will support efforts in this area. For several projects that involve university presses, coordination and advocacy at the level of university administration have been necessary to give them the traction and funding to get started.

Several librarians we interviewed subscribe to one or more emerging acquisition models. From a library's point of view, the models function similarly to traditional acquisition workflows, making them easy to adopt while increasing the amount of open access content supported by the library. While most libraries' subscription money is still going towards closed or paywalled content at present, over time our interviewees would like to see these funds gradually shift to support open content. Two indicated that this area represents a strategic priority for their institution, with one interviewee explaining, “we don't see the value in paying top dollar for content that will not be opened up.” One shared, however, that since many e-book acquisition models do not lead to open content and that publishers have been slow to adopt open models, it has been challenging for the library to support this strategic direction in practice.

Additional considerations for libraries about these emerging models include their impact on not-for-profit presses, in that they help keep presses sustainable, in business, and out of commercial control. Others

---

<sup>24</sup> Janneke Adema, Lucy Barnes, Joe Deville, Judith Fathallah, Rupert Gatti, Tom Grady, Kira Hopkins, Anna Kughes, Claire McGann, Kevin Sanders, and Toby Steiner, “The Copim Perspective on Bibliodiversity,” *Copim*, 19 December 2024, <https://doi.org/10.21428/785a6451.86a892a7>.

cited that, since transformative agreements have taken root within academic libraries for journal publishing, the strategy of paying for paywalled content to provide broad access to open materials is understood to have value within the library. One librarian stated that the value was that “the library views it more as a subscription model plus supporting open access as opposed to providing open access support alone.” Another librarian said that “these models have a lot of promise to become whatever the monograph equivalent of a transformative agreement is.” At present, therefore, these models show promise for libraries in that they represent an intersection between meeting content demand, pivoting the institution to greater support of open content, and promoting responsible financial models.

These emerging models have value in several regards including that, outside of acquisition through these models, several librarians described difficulties in locating and accessioning open e-books. As one interviewee explained, because there is no vetting process for open access monographs in the same way as for open journals, extensive local staff time is expended in assessing the quality of individual titles. While several library interviewees wish that GOBI and other aggregators would profile and make available open access monographs, it is unclear the degree to which content aggregators will do so in the future.

Librarians also described how often there are no cataloging records available for individual titles from which to duplicate a title’s metadata, so the library is starting from scratch to make the record discoverable. With the small numbers of open titles that libraries are acquiring each year—one library estimated approximately 25 titles annually as identified by selectors—is not efficient to vet and catalog content on a title-by-title basis. These bespoke efforts are simply not sustainable for individual libraries to manage individually.

Publishers, aggregators, librarians, and authors themselves offered mixed perspectives on whether authors want their works to be open access. Some interviewees believe there is strong author interest, some think they are ambivalent, and others feel that authors are still hesitant or even against publishing open access. More interviewees, however, did say that a shift has occurred and that increasing numbers of authors are prioritizing publishing open access.

This evolving orientation surfaced across multiple stakeholder groups. One publisher noted an increase in author interest in open access and

acknowledged that the press risks losing titles if such models are not available. Another publisher stated that libraries have conveyed that authors are seeking open access pathways but often lack access to presses equipped to support this model. One library shared that they have anecdotally seen a shift from authors on open content, “from needing a certain stamp of approval to wanting to be read, wanting to have an impact” and that authors do not want to introduce barriers to people in other parts of the world participating in scholarly research. Two of the authors we spoke with stressed the importance of their publisher being willing to offer an open access version of their monograph. One shared, “I would not have said yes to this book if it wasn’t open access [...] in nine out of 10 cases, I want to publish open access.” The author went on to share that they feel this is a social responsibility and that they would only make an exception if they would be able to work with one particularly prestigious publisher.

At the same time, not all stakeholders observed a clear or uniform preference for open access among authors. One university press reported findings from a recent survey indicating author ambivalence towards open access, with respondents placing greater emphasis on factors such as citations. Similarly, a library noted that author preferences vary considerably; while some value open access for its utility in sharing work with research participants or broader communities, others favor traditional print formats for similar reasons. These divergent perspectives appear to be influenced, at least in part, by disciplinary norms. One author we spoke with said, “Open access is a proxy for low quality in my field, so unless it is endorsed by a major association, it doesn’t count toward promotion. In my field, so many journals are open access that it does not look prestigious.”

## **Purchasing and pricing considerations**

Libraries at present are facing constrained or flatlined collections budgets and, at the time of writing, bracing for additional budget stringencies based on the current fiscal climate. Against this backdrop, interviewees from libraries spoke frequently of ways in which acquisitions can see the best return on investment. In one instance, a library stated that approximately 30 percent of their monographic budget is spent on traditional selection, 30 percent front list purchases and 30 percent EBAs, with the remaining 10 percent spent on DDAs and other models. In this instance they have tracked cost per usage by category and are aware that

librarian selection has a very high cost per use compared with other acquisition models and that they may need to transition to more bulk acquisition to reduce a la carte subject librarian work.

The cost of e-monographs, which is often significantly higher than purchasing the same title in print, is also a difficult issue for libraries. One librarian shared that a single-user license may be three times the price of a cloth-bound book. This raises questions around stewardship of resources as well as sustainability, with some librarians questioning the wisdom of investing too heavily in e-books. Coupled with the additional labor of managing e-books plus limitations on the lending of e-books as specified in the recent *Hachette v. Internet Archive* case, multiple librarians commented on how they are seeing no commensurate benefits for the additional cost of managing e-book collections.<sup>25</sup> And while in the digital environment cataloging and access costs may be borne by the provider, libraries are looking for more value-added features within their e-books to address this price discrepancy.<sup>26</sup> One library that we spoke with is even considering returning to a print-preferred acquisition method in light of the cumulative costs of managing e-books.

With these constraints in mind, publishers are thinking about how to best meet the needs of a range of libraries. Several publishers mentioned the importance of working with consortia, especially those that represent a range of institutions including community colleges, to ensure broad access to publications. From content aggregators, we heard about the importance of ensuring that content is available for readers to discover, and that presses that have built proprietary discovery and access platforms may not be able to scale to meet this need.

Publishers are striving to find ways to make their own operations financially sustainable while also making monographs accessible to as wide a range of libraries as possible. For newer models, there may be initial interest and early adopters, but it often drops off over time. There are only so many libraries that reliably fund newer models, which leads to

---

<sup>25</sup> “Hachette Book Group, Inc. v. Internet Archive,” Stanford Libraries, 4 September 2024, <https://fairuse.stanford.edu/case/hachette-book-group-inc-v-internet-archive/>.

<sup>26</sup> See the discussion around digital-first models and their benefits in the blog post by Roger C. Schonfeld, “The Second Digital Transformation for Scholarly Monographs?” *The Scholarly Kitchen*, 19 March 2025, [https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2025/03/19/second-digital-transformation-scholarly-monographs/?informz=1&nbd=&nbd\\_source=informz](https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2025/03/19/second-digital-transformation-scholarly-monographs/?informz=1&nbd=&nbd_source=informz).

competition between publishers: “We’re all vying for the same library attention and pots of cash.” In addition, the high cost of producing monographs means that only a limited number of institutions are able to access them. Presses are trying to find cost effective ways to open up books to as many libraries as possible, but they continue to run into challenges. For example, some individual presses have their own platforms, which have high costs and limited discovery. One interviewee shared, “The biggest challenge [for us] is being able to scale pricing for medium or small institutions to make this not cost prohibitive.”

Most publishers we spoke with stressed ways in which they are thinking critically about whether open access models can be financially sustainable. Publishers and aggregators are cognizant that “there is no real business model for open access unless someone is willing to come forward and pay for it, as it’s not sustainable on its own.” Several individuals involved in flip to open models spoke to us about the path they are on to financial sustainability and, while their programs in large part are still being sustained by seed money at present, they believe they will break even in the near future.

Publishers are also pursuing better collaborations with library consortia to implement read-and-publish-style agreements for monographs. In this scenario, consortia are seen as playing a more active role in underwriting open access publishing, with some demonstrating a willingness to allocate additional resources to support both the production of open monographs and faculty participation in open access publishing. One publisher is currently exploring “deals where a consortium would give us money and, for that, any faculty member in the system that is part of one of the libraries could then publish with any of the presses represented in the project” to equalize opportunities across the consortial members. This approach not only holds promise for expanding access but may also incentivize institutions to align and consolidate currently fragmented funding streams—often spread across departments—into more coordinated support for open access infrastructure.

Because of the newness of flip to open models, it is unclear if libraries will continue to subscribe once they have provisioned the content they are most interested in on behalf of their users.

Library renewals are key to the financial sustainability of flip to open initiatives. Because of the newness of these models, it is unclear if libraries will continue to subscribe once they have provisioned the content they are most interested in on behalf of their users. Libraries described their participation in these projects as “easy and natural to support,” with another describing that they are “easy to adopt since they can go right through our regular acquisitions workflow.” One individual characterized their participation as “viewed as more of a subscription plus open access support, as opposed to purely open access support” with another stating that “so far the models have been young enough and few enough that they are easy to support when they knock on the door.” Sustainability, and particularly scalability, will be key to watch amongst these new models in coming years.

## Print

For libraries, the value of e-books is in part dependent on specific departments or disciplines. For example, we heard from some of our interviewees that special collections have maintained a preference for print publications and the importance of having non-circulating print copies. Another example is in sourcing materials for disciplines that utilize resources written in languages other than English. Purchasing e-books from other countries comes with an additional host of challenges including the risk of content disappearing with no recourse for the library to recuperate their investment. Additionally, accessibility standards and purchasing models vary by nation. Due to this, content written in non-English languages is often still purchased in print.

Other librarians we spoke with said that since e-books are being licensed so differently and under so many different models, they have defaulted to print because it is more streamlined.

Different libraries are navigating various challenges in disparate ways. For example, some librarians shared that the answer to e-book challenges is not as simple as reverting to print books, as print monographs require space, staff labor for shelving, and can be less convenient for users



searching for resources online. Other librarians we spoke with said that since e-books are being licensed so differently and under so many different models, they have defaulted to print because it is more streamlined.

## Staff time and expertise

A major challenge to acquiring e-monographs for libraries is having experienced staff who understand how to navigate the complexities of acquisitions. Not only does the library need experienced staff, it also needs to have the capacity to effectively train and supervise newer staff in this area. Communicating with colleagues outside of the library, such as with procurement and legal, is especially challenging since they are more removed from the nuanced details on a day-to-day basis.

Further, e-books are difficult to maintain and require significant staff time and investment to follow up on broken links. Librarians expressed that even links to newer titles will regularly stop working, with no clear way for the library to know when access stops being viable. Discovery challenges further hamper access to e-books, as it can be difficult for users to search for and find relevant e-monographs because of inconsistent metadata as supplied by a range of publishers.

The labor challenge for publishers and aggregators is, in some respects, similar to that of librarians. In terms of staff resources, for example, one interviewee shared that creating contracts with authors for individual publication is the hardest piece because of the meticulous attention and expertise it requires. A press shared, “We have some complexities around if we’re producing a hardcover and paperback edition at the same time. The hardback used to be the library edition, but is it now? We’ve moved to print on demand and are trying to catch up with massive sea changes in print strategies [alongside of e-monographs].”

“The single most challenging thing is the time and effort of explaining [a model] and keeping it in people’s minds—getting libraries to trust [the model], go along with it, and invest actual money into it.”



Likewise, introducing newer models and advocating for their adoption requires significant time investments on the part of publishers. One interviewee said, “The single most challenging thing is the time and effort of explaining [a model] and keeping it in people’s minds—getting libraries to trust [the model], go along with it, and invest actual money into it.” The interviewee went on to share that to maintain momentum of newer models, the value lies not in the mechanism of the model itself, but in the networking and advocacy that takes place around it.

## **Author perspectives**

The authors we spoke with had all published at least one e-monograph in recent years. In some cases, the e-book was open access or was paired with a print on demand option. When considering which publishers to work with, authors had a range of criteria. This includes the reputation of the press, what their institution values in the promotion and tenure process, whether the press offers an open access option, the quality of the final product, and their relationship with the editor.

Authors interviewed for this study generally reported positive experiences with publishing their monographs in digital formats. One author highlighted a supportive editorial experience, while another appreciated the press’s restraint in shaping the direction of the work, allowing for greater authorial autonomy. Reflecting on the practical benefits of digital publication, one noted, “My monograph was only published as an e-book because print is too much money and online has the advantages of speed and expediency. There’s also very little market for print books in my field right now.”

Authors also noted challenges around the e-book publishing process. Some were dissatisfied with design elements and the promotion and adoption of the title. One author was dissatisfied by the pricing and shared that they felt the press had overpriced their publication. Another author noted that, looking to the future, it would be helpful to have “better tools for helping authors think about the electronic promise of e-books and what the potential is.”

## All the authors we spoke with emphasized the importance of keeping costs to readers relatively low or free.

All the authors we spoke with emphasized the importance of keeping costs to readers relatively low or free. One author shared an experience where they were not informed of a lag between the print publication of the monograph and the open access launch. The author ultimately decided to delay promotion of the book because they did not feel comfortable marketing it until the open access version was available as well. Even with an open access copy available, the print version of their monograph sold consistently well, and the copies were priced low enough that the author felt comfortable. Another author said, “It is a strict personal priority not to make money off of students—there needs to be a version available through the library. I’m sensitive to being a poor undergrad, especially when they are already paying tuition.” Two of the authors did not keep their earnings, with one donating it to a charity and another foregoing title royalties; “in order to support [the organization] for supporting us, we signed the royalties back to them.”

Authors’ readership goals were often closely tied to the specific aims and content of their monographs. In one instance, for example, the goal was to reach students taking an entry level course in their field, and in another it was to reach a wide geographic audience—in this case the monograph was distributed on both sides of the Atlantic. In some cases, readership goals were directly tied with the choice of press with which to ultimately publish.

## Pandemic influence

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically disrupted the book market in 2020. Due to shutdowns, remote learning and work, and generally finding ways to distance from each other, demand for e-resources skyrocketed while demand for print dropped. Interviewees shared that this shift in the market dramatically increased the costs of print monographs and, approximately five years later, those costs have not truly gone back down. Some presses have opted to absorb these extra costs because, as one interviewee shared, “[We] can’t add that [increase] into pricing because people wouldn’t buy the books.” Likely due to these types of market shifts,

one interviewee noted that there has been a reduction in publishers committed to the print market. This is a concern for libraries as it may make the physical book market more fragile and less resilient.

An unexpected silver lining of the pandemic was that usage statistics of e-monographs during that time helped some presses demonstrate their value to libraries. An interviewee shared, “Free access made available during the pandemic opened a lot of library eyes to how highly used our content was, and it opened our eyes as well. It was a reminder of value [and we’re seeing] years down the line that books still have high usage across the list.” One press also mentioned their current efforts to survey readers of their content, providing data that allows the press to understand areas in which additional content is desired.

It may be that this trend towards e-books is starting to reverse, however. One interviewee noted, “I had some recent conversations with folks who said, this year we’re noticing that some libraries are returning to print. Print had died significantly during the pandemic and not recovered, but just here in the last little bit, folks are starting to question the wisdom of going so all in on e-books.” Another interviewee observed that younger people seem to be expressing more interest in print recently, and another shared that their library is not fully sold on all e-materials all of the time because specific materials are still best in print and often easier to source in print as well. And yet another interviewee discussed the emotional relationship to print, saying, “[Librarian and publishing students] have a deep, deep affection for the library filled with books and print volumes. It doesn’t mean they don’t want the convenience of e-volumes, but they don’t want to see the print books go away.”

## **Looking towards the future**

We asked librarians to reflect on how it would be helpful for the monographic market to shift in the coming three to five years. A common answer was to make e-books more dynamic and to take advantage of electronic features, evolving the monograph beyond simply a digital copy of a print book. Librarians suggested a host of features that could be added, including incorporating videos, having the monograph be more richly illustrated than would be affordable in print, and linking to relevant

resources.<sup>27</sup> Some librarians shared that this would help justify the higher price of e-monographs. Conversely, one interviewee felt the opposite, saying that “[users] do not need lots of features or AI, they just need to be able to read it.” These types of varying opinions speak to the different needs of individual libraries.

Interviewees also shared several ways that publisher-library contracts could better meet the needs of libraries. This included the suggestion that some level of standardization across publishers would be helpful and that having a way to get license data into library systems in a more formalized way would streamline the process. “[License] functionality is still a lot of manual processes—including adding information and permissions, etc—[and] is very labor intensive,” one interviewee shared. Another interviewee suggested that extending contract times from two years on average to possibly five would allow a longer period of evidence gathering before buying e-books. And yet another person said it would be helpful to be able to purchase electronic monographs in a manner similar to that of print, where the e-book is purchased and used under fair use until it breaks rather than negotiating complicated use terms.

The idea of streamlining was, to some extent, expressed on the publishers’ side as well. One interviewee shared that it would be helpful to see more collaboration across publishers and aggregators. “There’s not enough money to go around, but we all have different strengths. If we can figure out our lanes where one [publisher or aggregator] is better than the other, I think there’s a real potential there,” said one interviewee. They shared that this would be particularly beneficial for smaller presses as they do not have the capital to spend energy and resources on everything and focusing in particular areas would be more efficient. In this vein, one press also mentioned increased reliance on common infrastructure, such as ORCID and Hypothesis, that positively enables common functionality across platforms and reduces the creation of redundant technologies.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> For related recent research on this topic, see Rice Majors, Lin Li, and Anne Marie Piper, “Project LEND User Research Findings,” *University of California, Irvine*, April 2025, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6gd6g0jf>.

<sup>28</sup> See the recent Ithaka S+R report on this topic: Tracy Bergstrom, Oya Y. Rieger, and Roger Schonfeld, “The Second Digital Transformation of Scholarly Publishing: Strategic Context and Shared Infrastructure,” *Ithaka S+R*, 29 January 2024, <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.320210>.

“What keeps you up at night [is generative AI]. We’re at an acceleration point with AI and generative summaries, with clicking through to our content. How will students engage with long form content in the coming years?”

When looking towards the future of e-books, a couple of people we spoke with brought up generative AI. This was often regarded as likely having a large, but, as of yet, unknown impact on electronic monographs. One interviewee shared, “What keeps you up at night [is generative AI]. We’re at an acceleration point with AI and generative summaries, with clicking through to our content. How will students engage with long form content in the coming years?” In other words, the question is not if, but rather how, generative AI will change fundamental readership and scholarship habits in the coming years.

## Recommendations

Based on the evidence and insights gathered through this study, we offer the following set of recommendations for publishers as they seek to ensure that the e-monograph business models they develop meet the needs of academic libraries and authors.

- Academic libraries are often paying higher prices for e-books compared with their print counterparts, costs that libraries say are difficult to justify considering the current financial environment, the required labor of managing e-book collections, and the limitations on e-book lending. We recommend that publishers better integrate electronic features into e-books as a way to offer value more commensurate with the price; this may include digital illustrations that would not be affordable in print, video or audio clips, or links to relevant resources.
- Several interviewees observed a recent uptick in interest in print, with some libraries considering investing more heavily in print acquisition due to cost, staff capacity considerations, as well as reader preference. We recommend that publishers continue to

meet print needs even as they further develop e-book business models to ensure market resiliency.

- License negotiation requires extensive time and expertise from library staff, and managing multiple bespoke license requirements adds additional strain to staff capacity. We recommend that publishers identify where they can provide consistency across licensing language to reduce the amount of time required in contract negotiations for both libraries and publishers.
- Maintaining e-book collections presents ongoing challenges for libraries, particularly due to the staff time required to identify and resolve broken links—even for relatively recent titles. Compounding this issue is the lack of a systematic mechanism for libraries to be notified when access to a title has lapsed or a link is no longer functional. These issues introduce inefficiencies and hinder both the library and the user experience. We recommend that publishers take a more deliberate approach to ensuring the long-term stability and integrity of their digital content, thereby mitigating the resource burden placed on libraries and improving overall service continuity.
- Moving towards more open content is a strategic priority for some academic institutions, and though most libraries currently allocate a higher proportion of their budget to paywalled content, several are seeking ways to continue to support open resource adoption. We recommend that publishers continue to align open content business models with existing library acquisitions mechanisms and processes to reduce barriers to adoption.
- The authors we spoke with value keeping monograph costs to readers relatively low or free and they factor this into their decision making about which press to publish. To this end, providing multiple avenues by which authors can help subsidize costs of publications, including through research funds or campus funding toward open access publications, advances sustainability of the publishing process.
- Presently, evidence-based acquisition models are best meeting the diverse needs of the libraries we spoke with, and demand-driven acquisition models are least meeting these needs. We recommend

publishers focus energy on solidifying EBA models and reduce time spent on evolving DDA models.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to assess the different business and acquisitions models currently utilized in the monograph sector and the extent to which they meet the needs of academic libraries and authors. This study captured both disparate and common considerations between presses and aggregators, libraries, and authors. The monograph market has rapidly evolved over the past several years. Driven by technological innovation and the evolving way in which readers engage with monographs, as well as the meteoric shift to online and virtual environments due to the pandemic, e-books gained tremendous traction and popularity. Publishers developed new business models to meet these needs, and libraries sought to acquire them to in turn meet the needs of their researchers.

Now, at its current juncture, e-book business models have become extremely complex, requiring significant time on both the publisher and librarian side to negotiate licensing agreements, as well as expensive, with libraries in a resource-constrained environment struggling to justify the higher cost of electronic monographs compared to their print counterparts. Libraries would like to see more streamlined processes in contract negotiation, including more consistent licensing language to reduce the number of staff hours required to acquire e-monographs. In addition, many would like to see e-monographs evolve into something beyond a digital copy of a print book, and to see publishers provide additional value to readers by taking advantage of electronic options for e-books that are not available in print.

Simultaneously, publishers are operating under already thin margins and are working to develop models that provide more content to more libraries, including more open content in several cases, to be able to increase readership and access. Strains on their own operations, including relying on seed funding, make financial sustainability a critical challenge to business models that flip paywalled content to open. While the authors we spoke with offered polarized views on the value of open access, largely dependent on the field they publish within, they are aligned that providing

readers with low-cost or free versions of their monographs is a high priority.

Notably, within the 17 interviews we conducted, the views shared were sometimes in conflict with one another, indicating that even solutions with wider applicability are likely to meet with resistance in some corridors. A desire for greater collaboration across the sector was voiced across stakeholders as a way to streamline processes, reduce duplicative effort, and use financial and staff resources more efficiently. As publishers, aggregators, librarians, and authors look towards the future of monograph publishing, some see a movement away from the electronic market towards print, and others reflect on how the electronic market may continue to evolve through technological innovations such as generative AI. It will be crucial for stakeholders to have open and transparent discussions on these topics as the landscape continues to evolve.



# Appendix A: Research methodology

## Desk research

Ithaka S+R initially conducted desk research to identify publications and research to date on the research questions explored within this study. Initial research was conducted in the summer of 2024 via publisher websites and secondary literature to identify variant business models currently in use for the publication and distribution of academic monographs. This research allowed us to compile a typology of models as currently employed across publishers and aggregators of academic content. Additionally, we read recent white papers and formal academic literature on a variety of topics including the evolution of publishing business models, user experience studies on e-book readership, and libraries' challenges in managing e-content. Ithaka S+R staff distilled data from this combined research into relevant themes that allowed us to explore the primary research questions of the study.

From this research, we then developed distinct interview guides for publishers/aggregators, librarians, and authors. Our goal was to ensure that the same broad themes were explored in all three series of interviews but with questions appropriate for each audience.

## Interviews

Ithaka S+R conducted interviews with 17 individuals between September 2024 and February 2025. Interview participants included publishers, librarians, content aggregators, and authors. The primary goal of the interviews was to gather data on the market fit of variant models within the academic e-book sector to understand how they are functioning for key stakeholders. Interviewees were asked to share their thoughts on a variety of topics regarding e-book publishing and acquisition, including the specific e-book models they have engaged with, the benefits and challenges of those models, how it would be helpful for the monographic market to shift in the coming years, and e-book models driven by open

access imperatives. Interviewees from different stakeholder groups were asked questions tailored to their role.

Interviews were approximately 45 minutes in length and took place virtually over a video platform. Ithaka S+R staff took detailed notes during the interviews. Following the interviews, Ithaka S+R staff categorized responses into themes and patterns based on frequency and relevancy of answers. Direct quotes have been lightly edited for clarity and length.