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Black Open Access

Shadow Libraries and Text Piracy

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Academic dissertation

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the dynamics of Black Open Access, a pirate-driven phenomenon, addressing inequities in academic publishing through shadow libraries and text piracy. Through a methodological patchwork combining netnography, computational methods, and text analysis, this dissertation investigates how these phenomena operate at the intersection of formal and informal media economies. The results show how shadow libraries like Sci-Hub, Library Genesis, and Z-library are more than simple piracy platforms, and should be viewed as robust ecosystems with their own technical infrastructure, community norms, and justificatory frameworks. The findings demonstrate that Black Open Access solutions persist through "Pirate LOCKSS". A decentralized preservation strategy utilizing multiple domain copies and established internet platforms as intermediaries. These communities develop complex legitimization mechanisms, from gamified user engagement systems to quasi-legal frameworks that mimic traditional academic institutions. Users justify their participation through multifaceted moral arguments about knowledge democratization and academic freedom, balanced with practical necessities driven by institutional constraints.

The dissertation shows that rather than operating in mere opposition to formal academic publishing, shadow libraries function as parallel systems that both challenge and complement traditional knowledge distribution. This creates a paradox of legitimacy wherein Black Open Access initiatives simultaneously reject copyright frameworks while reproducing many norms and practices of the formal academic system. By analyzing these dynamics, this dissertation contributes to understanding how informal media economies function in academic contexts and demonstrates how shadow libraries have become embedded in scholarly workflows, creating an alternative infrastructure for knowledge dissemination that responds to structural failures in academic publishing while raising important questions about the future of scholarly communication.

Keywords: Black Open Access, Text Piracy, Shadow Libraries, Media Economies, Academic Publishing, Decentralized Digital Preservation

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