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Abstract

The model of scholarly publishing can be reduced, in economic terms, to a Tragedy of the Commons, whereby the individual interests of publishers, libraries and scholars are in conflict with what is in the best interest of the public good. Serials inflation, price discrimination, and site-license pricing are all manifestations of this dysfunctional economic model. Moral arguments to change human behavior are not effective because they do not provide individual incentives. Technology alone is also not a viable solution since it fails to change the underlying human behavior that is driving the economic model. Abandoning the current system of publishing is both risky and costly. This paper argues for a reintermediation of the library as governor of the public scholarly commons, but illustrates that these solutions are in conflict with the mission of the library profession. Copyright © 2003 by The Johns Hopkins University Press.

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