



**Diversifying Readership Through Open Access
Interview with
Christina Emery, Springer Nature**

**For podcast release
Monday, September 21, 2020**

KENNEALLY: Scholars and their publishers have in common the search for readers. In an information ecosystem inundated by books, journals, and social media, readers, too, are always on the hunt for relevant and accessible publications. A recent study finds that open access books brings these parties together in greater numbers and across a wider range of countries.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. Earlier this year, Springer Nature, a long-time publisher of open access books, turned to Collaborative Open Access Research and Development to learn better where OA books are read and how patterns of usage between OA and non-OA books differed between countries and regions.

Christina Emery, marketing manager for Springer Nature's open access books program, joins me today from London with the recently published results of this global inquiry. Welcome to Beyond the Book, Christina.

EMERY: Hi, Chris. Thanks for inviting me on today.

KENNEALLY: Well, we're looking forward to chatting with you about this survey. Springer Nature began a first pilot for OA publications as far back as 2011. And in 2020, you published the house's 1,000th open access book and have reached 100 million chapter downloads across a wide range of disciplines in science, technology, medicine, as well as the humanities and social sciences. And an important question, I understand, for Springer Nature and the COARD researchers was whether OA book publication indeed led to increased readership, especially in countries that are traditionally underrepresented in the production and use of scholarly research. So tell us – what did your survey discover?

EMERY: Yeah, that's right. So we assumed that open access books would reach more countries, but it hasn't really been proven to this extent before, and we didn't really have a clear picture of the geographic diversity of that reach, either. So we wanted to better understand how open access benefits scholarly books. What we found out – the main headlines are that open access books do show a higher diversity of



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geographical usage. In fact, they reach 61% more countries. And they have a greater proportion of usage in a wider range of countries. But importantly, open access books are increasing access and usage for low-income and lower-middle-income countries, including a high number of countries in Africa. Looking at usage specifically, open access books have 10 times more downloads and 2.4 times more citations than non-OA books on average.

KENNEALLY: Those are dramatic differences, and I suppose it's important to understand how you came to this analysis and where the data came from. Why did Springer Nature choose to work with COARD on this data analysis?

EMERY: Yeah, so I'm guessing that not too many people are familiar with COARD. As you said, COARD stands for Collaborative Open Access Research and Development. They were actually previously known as KU Research, which originated from Knowledge Unlatched CIC. COARD is made up of Cameron Neylon, Lucy Montgomery, and Alkim Ozaygem. They're based in Australia and the UK. So they do have this background and a wealth of experience and expertise focusing on the impact of open access books. They also previously worked together with both UCL Press and JSTOR analyzing OA book usage. Cameron and Lucy are, of course, very familiar names. They're very prominent in the OA books world, both being involved in various other projects.

So based on this experience, they seemed like the ideal partner for our analysis. And when we discussed this with COARD, they decided to work together with us, because they're concerned about how scholarly knowledge in books can reach new audiences, and they felt that our large dataset was a good opportunity for them to provide more robust answers.

KENNEALLY: So what are some of the key findings? You've already referred to the higher diversity of geographical usage and the importance there is in seeing more access and usage in lower-income and lower-middle-income countries. Tell us a little bit more about that. And I understand that there is even an important effect when it comes to the title of books.

EMERY: Yeah, that's right. So we looked in a little bit more depth on that topic, and we found that books that contained the names of countries and regions in their title generally show enhanced usage in that country or region. This effect was most apparent for Latin America and Africa. We actually included a case study at the end of the white paper which focuses on a book called *Digital Kenya*. This is Palgrave's most-downloaded open access book. And we looked at this question, so that was quite interesting to explore in detail.



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We also looked at downloads of open access books on SpringerLink which were both anonymous and logged. By that, we mean downloads from the open web and downloads from institutional network points. And we found that, actually, downloads from the open web were generally double those from institutional network points, which means that not everyone is logging in via their institution in order to download open access books. But we can't directly describe anonymous usage as the general public or non-academic usage, because a proportion of this will be off campus or on personal devices by scholars.

KENNEALLY: Well, certainly that would be true, especially now during the global pandemic. All of us are off-site. But when it comes to OA books, the numbers are dramatic. OA books have 10 times more downloads than non-OA books, as you mentioned earlier, and 2.4 times more citations. This is true across every discipline. It does seem to really be a characteristic of OA books regardless of the subject or the title.

EMERY: Yes. So we did provide quite a large dataset to COARD of almost 4,000 books, and when they looked at the effect, they did see positive effects across all groups for all types of books. We looked at monographs, contributed volumes, briefs, and as well for all disciplines, for all three years of publication, and for every single month after publication as well. So that provides us quite confidently that the effects of OA are quite credible.

KENNEALLY: Indeed. And why is it important to look at usage geographically? You focused on Latin America in one respect and Africa in another. Why is this important, and what did you expect to see, and what did you find?

EMERY: Yeah, it's important to us, and we know it's important to our authors. So we did expand our investigation to explore the geographical diversity of readers, and in particular how it changes readership in low-income and lower-middle-income countries, because there was a white paper which we published in 2019, I think it was, "The Future of OA Books," where we found out from a survey of more than 2,500 authors that reaching these regions was of particular importance for some authors. And we expect OA books to reach more countries, but we didn't really know how or where, so we wanted to look at this in detail.

We found that downloads for open access books were identified in a wide range of countries that recorded zero usage of the non-open access books in the dataset. And of those countries where only OA books recorded downloads, more than 20 were in Africa, and others were mostly in the Middle East and southeast Asia. So low-income countries and low-middle-income countries are significantly represented in this group.



KENNEALLY: Well, the study is a pretty rigorous one, and clearly with that last point, the emphasis there is on access. Can we say with confidence that the difference you're seeing between open access books and their non-OA counterparts because of the open access element?

EMERY: There are some limitations to our report. Obviously, the dataset is just from us, from one single publisher, so it would be interesting to see if other publishers found the same effects. But also, we didn't control for any affiliation or prestige or fame of the authors themselves. So there is some risk that there's a correlation between the wealth of an institution and, therefore, its ability to fund open access books, and the prestige and reach of authors and, therefore, the downloads and citations of books. But as I mentioned before, the nature of this stratified sample and the consistency of positive effects across all groups for all periods really does show quite confident results.

KENNEALLY: And as you say, this is limited to Springer Nature books, but you've published 1,000 open access books over nearly a decade, so that's a pretty good sample to work with. But what do you think other publishers should take away from this report? What outcomes would you expect to see from other publishers as well?

EMERY: Yeah, we have actually seen other publishers sharing and tweeting this report, which is really great. But we think that further work is needed to explore the effects of open access on books across a wider range of publishers as well as taking into account downloads from third-party platforms and aggregators, because our white paper just focused on our own publishing platform, which is SpringerLink.

There is, however, a project based on the work of the Exploring Open Access Ebook Usage project where they want to develop a pilot data trust. That's quite an important first step in this direction. We're part of this project, and several other publishers are part of it as well.

KENNEALLY: We have spoken with your colleague Ros Pyne about Springer Nature's open access books program several times here on the program. I guess we'll hope to talk with you again in the future. So the last question for you, Christina, is what's next for OA books at Springer Nature?

EMERY: Yeah, we're very busy at the moment. Obviously, in talking about this white paper, we actually have an event coming up on the 6th of October. This is hosted by the newly launched Open Access Books Network. They are holding a live Q&A with Ros Pyne and Cameron Neylon.



Projects-wise, there is a new resource for researchers which we're launching on the 30th of September together with OAPEN. That's the OAPEN Open Access Books Toolkit. This is a free new resource which will have just over 30 articles about all different aspects of open access book publishing, from how does it work? Why should I publish open access? How can I choose a publisher? There's also a myth-busting and FAQ section. So we're really looking forward to seeing the feedback about that, because I think it'll be very useful for researchers around the world.

We're also part of this OA Ebook Usage data trust project which I mentioned. And we'd also like to hold more events for researchers. These have been quite popular in the past, where we've had author panels and guest speakers talking about different topics that we know researchers are interested in, like copyright and licensing and how open access book authors promote their work and what experiences they've seen as well – their perspective of open access book publishing.

KENNEALLY: It seems to me that particularly with open access books, researchers have more of a say in the publishing process than ever.

EMERY: (laughter) Well, we're always open to feedback. We're constantly exploring new business models as well. We try to roll out new publishing options for different types of books for open access. So yeah, we'd like to definitely keep in touch with the research community to find out what would be helpful to them as well.

KENNEALLY: Christina Emery, marketing manager for Springer Nature's open access books program, thanks so much for joining me today on Beyond the Book.

EMERY: Thanks, Chris. And if I may, I'd like to give a quick shout-out to our Twitter account. So if you are on Twitter, and you want to follow us, we can be found at @SN_OABooks. Thank you.

KENNEALLY: Absolutely. Well, we're glad you could join us today, Christina.

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