


## Chapter 32

# Business Models of Sustainable Open Educational Resources (OER)

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### ABSTRACT

*This article conceptualizes four business models for sustainable open education resources (OER) at four levels: the social level, the education institutional level, the OER community level, and the individual faculty member level. The business model at each of the four levels has its application realm. At the social level, social benefits of OER are the central motivation of the OER movement. At the institutional level, education institutions are facing challenges of student enrollment increase. At the OER community operational level, communities of practice must be established. At the individual faculty member level, the key players of OER must take effective actions for OER. Sustainable OER can be achieved only when the stakeholders at the four levels collaborate towards the common objective of sustainable value creation. The comprehensive set of business models can be used for all parties involved in OER to define and implement strategies for sustainable OER. The article also provides recommendations for future research into tests of the conceptualized business models for sustainable OER.*

### INTRODUCTION

Open educational resources (OER) have been initiated longer than a decade ago (Goodin-Smith & Rader, 2015; MIT OpenCourseWare, 2019; William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2010). OER represents the innovative idea to make educational resources available to all learners and educators for free. However, recently, textbook prices are continuing to rise (Filler-Corn & Toscano, 2018). The challenges of OER in the higher education sector are more severe than that in the K-12 education sector or community colleges due to many factors. For example, the selections of textbooks in higher education are not centralized by the administrations. Typically, individual instructors or small groups of faculty members make

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-5345-9.ch032

the decisions to choose the textbooks for their courses. Qualified OER textbooks in higher education are not always available, especially in special or new disciplines, because higher education institutions promote research and offer little incentive for professors to write textbooks. Furthermore, there are few consistent codes of ethics related to the issues of textbooks in the higher education sector (Robie et al., 2003), and the social and political visions of the educators in higher education are highly diversified. In fact, commercial textbook publishers are still control the educational materials market especially in the higher education sector (Wang & Wang, 2016).

There has been no shortage of discussions of barriers to OER adoption (Andrade et al., 2011; Pirkkalainen & Pawlowski, 2013). However, the business models related to sustainable OER have not been fully investigated in the literature. The objective of this paper is to conceptualize the business models behind the strategies of sustainable OER based on a literature review. The study examines the business models of sustainable OER at four levels: social level, education institutional level, OER community level, and individual faculty member level. At the social level, the sustainable OER business model asserts that affordable education would have positive impacts on social surplus which would in turn to support OER development. At the institutional level, the business model for educational institutions explicates the challenges for the institutions to increase enrollments as the key result of OER adoption and development. At the OER community level, the backbone of the business model for the OER operations is the communities of practice (CoP) model. At the individual faculty member level, the business model defines the drives of the key OER players for actions. The set of the business models provides a holistic perspective of sustainable OER for educational administrations, OER communities, and faculty members in implementing sustainable and productive OER. Based on the examination, the paper provides recommendations for future research.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section is a literature review of business models and stakeholder analysis in the OER context. The subsequent four sections discuss and present the business models at the four levels. They are followed by a recommendation section and a discussion section. The final section concludes the study.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW: BUSINESS MODELS AND STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS IN THE OER CONTEXT**

### **Business Models Related to OER**

Business model is a broad term used in the business community to describe the strategy, the design of the organizational structure, the utilization of resource, and the value creation chain of a business organization (Zott & Amit, 2008; George & Bock, 2011; Fielt, 2013; Lambert, 2015; Groth & Nielsen, 2015). The value creation chain of a business model describes value discovery, value creation, and value realization in the organization (Ng, 2014). A business model can describe the organization from three perspectives: economic, operational, and strategic (Morris et al., 2005). The economic perspective focuses on revenue and profit generation. The operational perspective presents internal business processes and infrastructural design for value creation. The strategic perspective projects how the organization develops competitive advantages for sustainable growth. A complete business model of the organization represents a comprehensive framework and can be composed of elementary business models at economic, operational, and strategic levels (Slywotzky, 1996; Mayo & Brown, 1999). For example, a

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