Charting the Landscape of Open Access Journals in Library and Information Science

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Abstract

Open access journals (OAJs) represent a significant portion of the literature in library and information science (LIS). This study contributes to current efforts to raise awareness of the LIS OA literature by focusing on the characteristics of journals publishing under an open access gold model. To understand the characteristics of LIS OAJs, 65 English language LIS journals were analyzed via descriptive statistical analysis and summative qualitative content analysis. Along these lines, the study updates and extends previous efforts to describe these journals and their practices. Findings suggest there are several key publication characteristics and commonly represented subject areas in the landscape of active LIS OAJs. Implications for practice include the recognition of the growing diversity of subjects and target audiences, the central role of double-blind peer review in LIS OA, and the acknowledgement that consistency and interoperability among OAJs remains a challenge that may undermine goals for dissemination.

Keywords

Open access; Scholarly communication; Publishing; Journals; Library and Information Science

Introduction

This article raises awareness of open access (OA) research and gold OA journals (OAJ) in library and information science via descriptive statistical and qualitative content analysis. Björk *et al* (2014) define OA as "free, unrestricted access to electronic versions of scholarly publications." These researchers go further to define two routes to OA: "For peer-reviewed journal articles, there are two main routes to OA: publishing in OAJ (gold OA) or archiving of article copies or manuscripts at other web locations (green OA)" (Björk, 2014, p. 237).

Gold OAJ publishing represents an area of growth in Library and Information Science. The growth in OAJ suggests the importance of information professionals developing an understanding of the open-access industry so that they may effectively navigate research practices with their patrons. Regardless of context (e.g. public, academic, special libraries, etc.), when information professionals know how to connect learners with research in the OA domain, they are able to more effectively provide access and address goals for inclusion.

In addition to helping information connect users with information, the relevance of OAJ for scholarly communication represents an area of opportunity. Higher citation rates for articles published OA versus those published in traditional journals were noted by several researchers across many different fields (Atchison & Bull, 2015; Hajjem, Harnad, & Gingras, 2006; Harnad & Brody, 2004; Kurtz et al., 2005). Joseph (2015) suggests that once researchers familiarize themselves with using OA materials, they embrace it as an accessible, scholarly resource

(Joseph, 2015). Despite the benefits of raising awareness of OA communication and publication practices, few studies chart the trajectories and characteristics of LIS OAJ. Many studies rely on a limited or restricted array of available OAJ available for study via bibliometric and citation impact analyses (see Satpathy, Maharana & Das, 2013, and Thavamani, 2013). Much work needs may be done to extend previous quantitative work via qualitative methods, particularly analyses of the subject content that emerging LIS OAJ publish.

Research questions

With these goals in mind, this study aggregated a grouping of LIS journals from the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and the Open Access Journal Search Engine (OAJSE) for analyses via descriptive statistical analysis and summative qualitative content analysis. Data were collected directly from each OAJ's website relating to its subjects of interest, nation of publication, journal organization, duration of publication, article type, peer review type, and citation style. Via these methods, this article poses and attempts to answer two core research questions:

1. What are the publication characteristics of active LIS OAJ?
2. What are the most commonly represented subject areas of LIS in OAJ?

Literature Review

The rise of OA publishing throws into sharp relief the rapid changes appearing in the publishing industry. Many researchers and practitioners refer to these profound disruptions as a serials "crisis." Das (2015) argues that there are four main causes of the serials crisis (p. 47):

- Exponential price hikes of for-profit journals.
- Library budget reductions.
- Inflation and recession.
- Fluctuations in currency conversion.

The serials crisis may be described as leading to several outcomes (also noted by Das in the 2015 UNESCO publication on p. 47). The cited outcomes of the serials crisis include:

- Establishment of Library Consortia.
- Digitization of back volumes & offering reduced prices.
- Non-profit publishers offering OA to back volumes.
- Strengthening Inter-Library Loan (ILL) services.
- Open Access Movement - Green OA and Gold OA.

The Rise of Open Access

The OA publishing movement emerged to address the very real and present access barriers (financial, technical, legal) to academic research. In 2001, the Budapest Open Access Initiative

formally recognized these issues and proposed a solution that would ensure OA to research as a public good (Joseph, 2015). OA publication and scholarly communication make research "digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions" (Suber, 2012, p. 4). Publications are immediately freely available, retain the strengths of traditional publishing such as peer review, and can be used as long as they are properly attributed to the author(s).

The number of journals and repositories to which researchers can submit their work is steadily increasing. There are now systems that facilitate the publishing and access of OA research such as the Open Access Initiative, Public Library of Science, the Database of Open Access Journals, and the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition. There are also platforms such as Open Journal Systems (OJS) that provide the digital infrastructure necessary to host and publish OA research literature. OJS emerged as a product of the Public Knowledge Project and Digital Commons (Simon Fraser University Library, 2014), and the OA institutional repository created by bepress, formerly known as Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress, 2016).

OAJ are also beginning to change the existing publishing model by quickening the pace in which information is disseminated. Cirasella and Bowdoin (2013) compared OAJ that are published in discrete volumes (e.g., bi-annually, quarterly, or annually) versus those published on a "rolling basis," or publishing articles online as soon as they are accepted. They found that while more journals published in discrete volumes, the OAJ editors reported higher satisfaction with the rolling publication model compared to those using a discrete-issue model. This may indicate an even greater change from a traditional model to one that makes information more readily available to users in the coming years. In addition to being made publicly available, OA articles are quickly becoming cited more often than non-OA articles, as OA promotes more visibility and a larger audience who may cite the research. This phenomenon is known as the Open Access Citation Effect (Suber, 2012).

Previous research has investigated the nature of LIS OAJ with a quantitative lens. Satpathy et al. (2013) examined the top 10 OAJ in LIS of 2011 as listed by Scopus (a subscription bibliographic database created by Elsevier) to see how OAJ fared in prestige, credibility, and impact using statistical tools applied in previous bibliometric studies of paid access journals. They found that these OAJ primarily include articles published by single authors and offer a good quantity of citations per paper published, indicating a healthy citation impact for LIS OAJ. Thavamani (2013) conducted a bibliometric analysis of 151 journal titles listed in the DOAJ from 2003 to 2013 with the subject heading Library and Information Science. He found that most OAJ publish in English, originate in the United States, and notes the interdisciplinary nature of many of these journals in relation to the disciplines of Computer Science and Medicine. Thavamani (2013) also observed a proliferation of OAJ startups between 2004 and 2006, which then decreased in 2011 to 2013.

Research strategy

This project extends Thavamani's (2013) LIS OAJ bibliometric analysis by studying datasets collected from the OAJ websites, rather than relying on the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) metadata. The DOAJ is a growing, "community-curated" inventory of globally peer-reviewed OAJ supported by Lund University Libraries in Sweden (Directory of Open Access Journals, 2016). OAJ listed in the DOAJ must implement peer review or editorial quality control, publish at regular intervals, and report original research or other relevant writings (Thavamani, 2013). Cheby (2016) found that the journal metadata of five OAJ the content was expressed inconsistently in ways that were not interoperable across journal aggregators. These challenges can undermine a journal's findability and ultimately its citation impact. We chose methods that attempt to address these issues outlined above by collecting a dataset originating in text-based content from the websites of open access journals. We also moved toward a descriptive statistical and a qualitative approach to data analysis. In this way, we hoped to address some of the issues of incomplete DOAJ metadata and answer slightly different questions than those posed in prior research (e.g., Thavamani, 2013; Satpathy et al., 2013).

Materials and Methods

To understand the characteristics of LIS OAJ, 65 English language LIS journals were analyzed via descriptive statistical analysis and summative (qualitative) content analysis. Journals were selected from the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and the Open Access Journal Search Engine (OAJSE). Datasets included information related to the journals' subjects of interest, nation of publication, journal organization, duration of publication, article type, peer review type, and citation style.

Data Collection

A total of 65 LIS OAJ were included in this study from the Open Access Journals Search Engine (OAJSE; Barman, 2012) and DOAJ. The DOAJ and OAJSE were selected because they are well-known databases of OAJ. The DOAJ dataset of 57 journals was acquired using the following search filters: subject index of Bibliography-Library Science-Information Resources, Journals only, and Full Text Language "English". The OAJSE maintains a list of relevant OAJ on its Library and Information Science subject page, which features 56 journals and was included as a check to journals that are OA but not included in DOAJ. After compiling this initial list of 113 journals, the following criteria were applied to determine journal relevance to the study: English as the primary language, LIS focus, reachable via links provided by the OAJSE or DOAJ, not representing a blog or institutional repository, and representing unique entries. Applying these criteria reduced our candidate list from 113 entries to 65.

Analyses

Journal data were collected by researchers during the month of October 2016 and placed in a Google Sheets™ document to provide a platform for descriptive statistical analysis and summative content analysis. They were examined using both descriptive statistical analysis and summative content analysis to determine what topics are covered by LIS OAJ and the common publication characteristics of active journals.

The process of summative content analysis begins with identification of certain keywords before and during data analysis in order to understand the use of those words in their respective context (Hsiu-Fang & Shannon, 2005). This can be done by generating word frequency counts followed by an exploration and interpretation of their usage, which can be summarized into categories or themes. In the present study, information gathered from each journal's website included the following categories: Journal Title, Subject of Interest, Nation of Publication, Organization which Maintains the Journal, Years of Publication, Article Types: Original Research, Commentary, Editorial, Book/Product review, Other; Review Type: Double Blind, Single Blind, None, Editor/Editorial Committee/Review Board, Unclear; Publication Style, and Review Timeframe. After the initial data gathering stage, it was determined that it was necessary to further refine the categories to facilitate statistical analysis of the publication characteristics of the journals. Thus, the following categories were added to clarify the data: United States vs. International, Organization Type (University or Other), Start Year, Years Active, and Active vs. Inactive. Please see our spreadsheet of supplemental materials for the full list of surveyed active journals and associated information.

The field "Subjects of Interest" containing data derived from the journal's "Focus and Scope" or similar content pages, is the unfiltered data for summative content analysis. It was determined that there were over 150 unique terms in this field, which diluted the initial analysis. A first draft of a controlled vocabulary of terms in the "Subject of Interest" field was generated by grouping logically similar topics under less specific terms, narrowing the list to 70 terms. For example, "digital curation profiles" and "digital curation" were grouped under the term "digital curation" because digital curation profiles are created as a part of digital curation. These 70 controlled vocabulary terms were then applied to the journals in a new field, "Subject of Interest: Controlled Vocab." Descriptive statistics were generated using Microsoft® Excel and one researcher conducted the content analyses independent of the other researchers who generated the controlled vocabulary.

Results

Research Question #1: What are the publication characteristics of active LIS OAJ?

Of the 65 OAJs surveyed, ten journals (15%) are inactive. The oldest journal, *College and Research Libraries*, began publication in 1939; their journal website includes digitized back issues. The most recently created journal, *Weave: Journal of Library User Experience*, was established in 2014. The majority of these journals started between 1995 and 2014 (90.76%), with the largest increase consisting of six new journals happening in both 1999 and 2006. Active journals average 13.5 years of publication (Mdn = 18.91, SD = 19.16) while inactive journals have similarly lasted an average of 13.55 years (Mdn = 13, SD = 5.88). Of the active journals, 31 have international origins (56.36%), 23 are hosted in the United States (41.82%), and one was deemed unclear due to a lack of information available. Canada and the United Kingdom are the most prolific international nations of origin with five OAJ each. Table 1 shows the list of the nations of publication of active journals. Also, of the active journals, 24 are published by university organizations (43.64%), compared to 31 that are published by organizations that are not university affiliated (56.36%).

Table 1. Nations and their number of active OAJs in LIS

Austria	1	South Korea	1
Brazil	1	Spain	1
Canada	5	Sweden	2
Croatia	2	Switzerland	1
France	1	Taiwan	1
India	1	the Netherlands	2
Iran	1	Turkey	1
Italy	2	United Kingdom	5
Romania	1	Unclear	1
South Africa	2	United States	23

Publishing characteristics vary across LIS OAJ. All active LIS OAJ call for original research and offer other features such as commentaries (41.82%), editorials (43.63%), book or product reviews (56.36%), and other features unique to individual journals (60%). For example, the journal *Issues in Science & Technology Librarianship* features webliographies of "freely available web sites and online tools in specific subject areas in science, technology, and related fields… of interest to science and technology librarians" ("Instructions for Authors of Webliographies," 2016). The citation style and formatting requirements utilized by these journals predominantly follow either the *American Psychological Association Publication Manual*, 6th ed., used by 21 journals (38.18%), or *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed., used by 10 journals (18.18%). Other styles used include Council of Science Editors (two journals, 3.64%), Harvard (four journals, 7.27%), Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (two journals, 3.64%),

Modern Language Association (MLA, two journals, 3.64%), and Vancouver (three journals, 5.45%). One journal accepts either MLA or Chicago. Ten of the studied journals were deemed unclear due to the journal website not clearly designating a preferred style (18.18%).

Multiple review processes are used in the LIS OAJ studied. Forty journals utilize double blind peer review (72.73%), two use single blind (3.64%), and twenty use an editor or editorial review board (36.36%). Three journals were deemed unclear (5.45%) regarding their review policies due to the lack of information on their websites. Thirteen of the journals that utilize double blind peer review for their original research article submissions also use an editorial board to review the other categories of articles published by their journal (20%).

Research Question #2: What are the most commonly represented subject areas of LIS in OAJ?

By developing and applying a controlled vocabulary based on the "Focus and Scope" or "Aims and Scope" posted on each OAJ' website, it was determined that the following topics were the most common subjects represented in LIS OAJ, with each covered in more than 10% of the OAJ surveyed: Research (21.82%; broadly speaking, as stated on OAJ websites), Information Systems & Technology (18.18%), Information Science (16.36%), Information Literacy (14.55%), Academic Librarianship & Libraries (12.73%), and Local Librarianship (10.91%). Table 2 shows the breakdown of the occurrence of these six terms in OAJ by nation of publication and organization type.

Table 2. Subject content of open access journals by nation and organization type

Journal Information		Nation of Publication			Organization Type	
Subject Content Terms	**No. of Journals**	**United States**	**International**	**Unclear**	**University**	**Other**
Research	12	7	5	0	5	7
Information Systems & Technology	10	5	5	0	4	6
Information Science	9	2	6	1	6	3
Information Literacy	8	5	3	0	4	4
Academic Librarianship & Libraries	7	5	2	0	4	3
Local Librarianship	6	4	2	0	2	4

Table 3 presents the complete list of occurrences of subject based on the controlled vocabulary. From these simple descriptive statistics, the 55 active LIS OAJs surveyed can loosely be described as being either broad or specialized in scope.

Table 3. Subject Content of Active LIS OAJs

Subject Content	No. of Journals	Percentage	Subject Content	No. of Journals	Percentage
Research	12	21.82%	Digital Humanities	2	3.64%
Information Systems & Technology	10	18.18%	Digital Libraries	2	3.64%
Information Science	9	16.36%	Digitization	2	3.64%
Information Literacy	8	14.55%	Education	2	3.64%
Academic Librarianship & Libraries	7	12.73%	Indigenous Knowledge Systems	2	3.64%
Local Librarianship	6	10.91%	Instructional Technologies	2	3.64%
Cataloging	5	9.09%	Library Administration	2	3.64%
Collaboration	5	9.09%	Metadata	2	3.64%
Library Science	5	9.09%	Organizational Science	2	3.64%
Medical Librarianship & Libraries	5	9.09%	Public Librarianship & Libraries	2	3.64%
Open Access	5	9.09%	Records Management	2	3.64%
Publishing	5	9.09%	Resource Sharing	2	3.64%
Special Librarianship	5	9.09%	Student & Faculty Work	2	3.64%
Big Data	4	7.27%	Adult Learners	1	1.82%
Communication Science & Technology	4	7.27%	Corporate Librarianship & Libraries	1	1.82%
Information Management	4	7.27%	Digital Collections	1	1.82%
Library and Information Science Theory	4	7.27%	Digital Media	1	1.82%
Professional Development	4	7.27%	Digital Scholarship	1	1.82%
Research Librarianship & Libraries	4	7.27%	Diversity	1	1.82%
Web 2.0	4	7.27%	E-Science	1	1.82%
Archives & Archival Science	3	5.45%	Evidence Based Library and Information Practice	1	1.82%
Information Economies	3	5.45%	Genealogy	1	1.82%
Intellectual Freedom	3	5.45%	Health Literacy	1	1.82%
Librarianship & Libraries	3	5.45%	Institutional Repositories	1	1.82%
Library Instruction	3	5.45%	Library Design	1	1.82%
User Behavior & Experience	3	5.45%	Museology	1	1.82%
Bibliography	2	3.64%	Open Data	1	1.82%
Collection Management	2	3.64%	Policy	1	1.82%
Competitive Intelligence	2	3.64%	Reference	1	1.82%
Computer Science	2	3.64%	Scientometrics	1	1.82%
Conservation & Preservation	2	3.64%	Social Science	1	1.82%
Cultural Heritage Organizations	2	3.64%			

Some of the LIS OAJ offer a broad scope of interdisciplinary interests and/or a breadth of subject matter. For example, the journal *Scholarly and Research Communication* focuses on how the communication of research leads to knowledge, its production, dissemination, usage, and representation, while also discussing the technical and interpersonal aspects of research. The *Journal of Data Mining & Digital Humanities* publishes interdisciplinary writings that merge the digital humanities and computer science, working with Big Data analytics, visualizations, machine learning, and other technological tools. *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* accepts a wide range of topics, such as diversity issues, information literacy, OA, and professional development. There are also journals that focus on the location of librarianship, such as the journal *Pennsylvania Libraries: Research & Practice*, which takes articles on a wide range of research relating to librarians and libraries in Pennsylvania.

Other LIS OAJ surveyed specialize by publishing content pertaining to specific groups or specific concepts. The target audience of *Practical Academic Librarianship* includes academic and special librarians and also discusses several topics with a higher education focus, such as collections management, information literacy, and institutional repositories. The *Journal of the European Association for Health Information and Libraries* is an international journal relating to medical librarianship research and professional development. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* publishes research relating to decision making in the work of information professionals and presents the applications of evidence-based librarianship through writings such as "evidence summaries" that review previously published research. *Webology* is an international journal dedicated to the World Wide Web in relation to information dissemination and communication processes, as well as the new and upcoming information technologies that integrate the Web with information. The *Journal of Information Literacy* investigates information literacy across diverse communities "beyond the educational setting and examine this phenomenon as a continuum between those involved in its development and delivery and those benefiting from its provision" ("Editorial Policies," n.d.).

Discussion

This study attempts to expand the field's understanding of OA in LIS publishing and add to the small body of literature (e.g., Thavamani, 2013; Satpathy et al., 2013) charting the landscape of LIS OAJ. The descriptive statistics presented here analyze information collected from LIS OAJ websites, rather than from secondary bibliometric sources and metadata, which can lack critical information, preventing resources from being accessible or discoverable (Cheby, 2016). The highlights of various OAJ "Focus and Scope" statements suggest that LIS OAJ either offer a very broad scope or focus on a highly specific set of conditions and subject matter. LIS OAJ serve various needs across the spectrum of LIS ranging from emerging roles in librarianship to niche groups or concepts.

OAJ are taking advantage of online platforms and dialogue surrounding new technologies in ways that go beyond previously understood notions of the role of libraries and librarians in relation to information. In our view, they do so in novel and innovative ways. For example, *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* was once considered a peer-reviewed blog, but it changed its status to a peer reviewed journal in 2012 while still retaining high quality peer review and a blog-driven presentation of published works. This journal format however is the exception and not the rule, standing in stark contrast to journals with a more formal format such as *Information Technology and Libraries*. Referencing practices vary as well: although APA remains the dominant citation style used by LIS OAJ, there are some that use arguably uncommon citation styles in LIS (e.g. Council of Science Editors and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers). Yet this may also imply how non-university organizations are developing interests in LIS topics in an interdisciplinary manner.

Our team found that LIS OAJ maintain high standards of intellectual quality by ensuring that original research is peer reviewed prior to publication. This contradicts the notion that OA research is not peer reviewed and therefore of low quality (Suber, 2012; Gaines, 2015). LIS OAJ continue to discuss concepts that are at the core of the LIS field, while developing and promoting discussion of newer, interdisciplinary concepts (e.g., data science, information literacy, embedded librarianship). Non-university organizations are increasingly supportive and call for OA research and facilitation of its peer review. Additionally, editorial boards play a strong role in facilitating the review process for articles that do not represent original research (e.g., manuscripts describing professional practice, webliographies, evidence summaries, and data curation profiles). The OAJ produced in the LIS field make visible the technologies available to support online publishing, reveal new models of research dissemination, and demonstrate the potential for rigorous intellectual conversations in OA research.

Conclusions and Implications for Practice

This study investigated LIS OAJ appearing in the OAJSE and DOAJ. Through summative content and descriptive statistical analyses, the researchers identified Research, Information Systems & Technology, Information Science, Information Literacy, Academic Librarianship & Libraries, and Local Librarianship as the six most commonly covered subjects in LIS OAJ. In the context of nations and organizations of publication, it was observed that organizations outside of universities are also showing a commitment to OA research by publishing their own journals. Additionally, LIS OAJ are publishing unique forms of writing beyond original research articles, such as webliographies, evidence summaries, and data curation profiles. The range and scope of LIS OAJ are influenced by the location and type of publisher, as well as by the target audience.

Our efforts shed light on the landscape of LIS OAJ today, yet we acknowledge challenges associated with methodological limitations and observations. For example, as this is an extant

data project, the authors could only work with what was posted on LIS OAJ websites. Due to language competency constraints on the team, non-English OAJs were not included in this study; this issue could be addressed in future studies. Also, OAJ not indexed in the DOAJ and OAJSE were not included, such as the *International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion,* and *First Monday*, an OAJ dedicated to Internet research and applications of available Internet tools. Members of our research team noticed that journals using the Open Journal Systems platform (Simon Fraser University Library, 2014) presented pertinent information consistently, via pages such as author guidelines, when compared to those using blog or custom website platforms. As a result, this may have impacted how our team understood and gathered the information for analysis. OAJ can improve their adoption path by facilitating interoperability among content aggregators and more consistent presentation of relevant information for researchers and prospective authors. DOAJ does well as a search engine for OA materials, but greater clarity from OAJ websites themselves would benefit OA as a whole.

Limitations associated with consistency and interoperability also demonstrate the importance of transparency within the method of publication in order to maintain the intellectual rigor of the research dissemination process. Although a majority of LIS OAJ are peer reviewed, researchers and potential authors must still remain vigilant in ensuring that the articles that they encounter are verifiable and credible. Yet, from the present study, our findings suggest that by and large LIS OAJ maintain high scholarly standards while simultaneously adhering to OA principles: ensuring that original research is free, accessible, and peer reviewed.

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