



Evidence Summary

Editors View the Continuous Publication Model as a Satisfactory Alternative for Open Access LIS Journals

A Review of:

Cirasella, J., & Bowdoin, S. (2013). Just roll with it? Rolling volumes vs. discrete issues in open access library and information science journals. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, 1(4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.1086>

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Abstract

Objective – To understand the prevalence of, motivations for, and satisfaction with using a rolling-volume publishing model, as opposed to publishing discrete issues, across open access academic journals in library and information science.

Design – A 12 question survey questionnaire.

Setting – English-language, open access library and information science (LIS) journals published in the United States of America.

Subjects – A total of 21 open access LIS journals identified via the Directory of Open Access Journals that were actively publishing,

and that also met the authors' standard of scholarliness, which they established by identifying a journal's peer-review process or other evidence of rigorous review. Based on responses, 12 journals published using discrete issues, while 9 published as rolling volumes or as rolling volumes with some discrete issues.

Methods – In late 2011, the study's authors invited lead editors or primary journal contacts to complete the survey. Survey participants were asked to identify whether their journal published in discrete issues, rolling volumes, or rolling volumes with occasional discrete issues, with the latter two categories combined as one for ease of results analysis. Survey logic split respondents into two groups, either discrete-issue or rolling-volume. Respondents

in both categories were posed similar sets of questions, with the key difference being that the questions directed at each category accounted for the publication model the journals themselves identified as using. Editors from both groups were asked about the reasons for using the publication model they identified for their journal: within the survey tool, authors provided 16 potential reasons for using a discrete-issue model, and 13 potential reasons for using a rolling-volume model. Respondents from both groups were asked to mark all reasons that applied for their respective journals. The survey also included questions about whether the journal had ever used the alternate publishing model, the editor's satisfaction with their current model, and the likelihood of the journal switching to the alternate publishing model in the foreseeable future.

Main Results – The authors collected complete responses from 21 of the original 29 journals invited to participate in the study, a response rate of 72%. For the 12 journals that identified as using discrete issues, ease of production workflow (91.7%), clear production deadlines (75.0%), and journal publicity and promotion (75.0%) were the three most common reasons for using a discrete-issue model. For the nine journals using rolling volumes, improved production workflow (77.8%), decreased dependence on production deadlines (77.8%), and increased speed of research dissemination (66.7%) were the three most common reasons cited for using a rolling-volume model.

Findings show that overall satisfaction with a journal's particular publication model was a common factor regardless of publishing model in use, though only the rolling-volume editors unanimously reported being very satisfied with their model. This high satisfaction rate is reflected in editors' positions that they were very unlikely to switch away from the rolling-volume method. While a majority of editors of discrete-issue journals also reported being very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their current model, the mixed responses to whether they would contemplate switching to the alternate model suggests that awareness of the

benefits of rolling-volume publishing is increasing.

Conclusion – Researchers discovered a greater incidence of rolling-volume model journals with open access LIS journals than anticipated, suggesting that this is an area where additional research is necessary. The relative newness of the rolling-volume model may be a contributing factor to the high satisfaction rate among editors of journals using this model, as journal editors are likely to be more deliberate in selecting this model over the traditional discrete-issue publishing model. Workflow and production practices were identified as key characteristics for selecting a publishing model regardless of the model selected, and therefore this is another area in need of further investigation.

Commentary

This study is timely, especially as open access, copyright, and intellectual property considerations all present new challenges to existing models of traditional academic publishing. The rolling-volume publication model, also known as continuous publication, is a relatively recent trend, but is very relevant within the modern context of electronic publishing and born digital scholarship. Various scholarly publications have adopted the rolling-volume model, including *PLOS ONE*, the *BMJ*, and all Royal Society publications, to name a few. However, there is very little scholarship studying the adoption of this model at disciplinary levels or across open access publishing as a whole, and what few publications do exist primarily take the form of editorials or rely upon anecdotal evidence whereby individuals present their own experience with using a continuous publication model (e.g., Duriez, 2013).

The authors of this study provide a concise explanation of the inclusion criteria, such as English-language LIS publications from the United States, and these criteria sufficiently limit the scope of the study to permit a thoughtful analysis. The authors readily admit that these limitations mean that readers should

not generalize these findings to other open access publications, so instead they suggest numerous opportunities for further research. There is no way for readers to identify specifically which journals were included in the study, nor whether the authors identified all journals meeting the inclusion criteria. However, since the study aimed to discover motivations and reasons for selecting a particular publishing model, thus ensuring that participants were able to respond confidentially, this ultimately provides for a more fulsome discussion of the topic under consideration.

It is worth noting that inviting individual editors to represent their journal as a whole does not necessarily provide an accurate picture of that journal's overall experience with a publication model. Instead, this information may only represent that editor's perspective of his or her journal at the time of data collection. For example, the question addressing satisfaction with the current publishing model asks for the editor's opinion, and the authors report these results as the individual editor's level of satisfaction, not the overall level of satisfaction as might be expressed by the entire journal editorial team. Some clarification of these questions would help increase the validity of the study (Glynn, 2006), as it is unclear whether an editor's survey responses represent his or her personal opinions or are the position held by the journal's full editorial team. The article could be strengthened by statistical analysis, rather than just comparison of raw results, as this would help clarify whether differences noted

by the authors are statistically significant. The survey instrument is included as an appendix.

Overall, this research is an important step in filling the gap in the literature regarding use of the rolling-volume publication model. The information reported will be beneficial to editorial teams and publishers who are considering adopting this model, whether for existing publications or for new startup journals. The evidence in favour of adopting one or the other model is particularly impactful, as workflow implications and production timelines are pressing considerations for all publications, no matter which publication model they currently use. Those interested in scholarly communication or who provide expertise and guidance for open access publishing endeavours at their respective institutions will also benefit from this research.

References

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