Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Evidence Summary

Vanished Open Access Journals; Why Preservation Is Needed

A Review of:
Laakso, M., Matthias, L., & Jahn, N. (2021). Open is not forever: A study of vanished open access journals. Journal of the Association for Information Science & Technology, 72(9), 1099–1112. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24460

Reviewed by:
Kathy Grams
Associate Professor of Pharmacy Practice
Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences
Boston, Massachusetts, United States of America
Email: kathy.grams@mcphs.edu

Received: 26 Feb. 2023 **Accepted:** 6 Apr. 2023

DOI: 10.18438/eblip30337

Abstract

Objective – To determine the number of open access journals that have vanished from the web and to summarize their publishing lifespan, geographical and disciplinary characteristics.

Design – A descriptive research study.

Setting – The internet and internet archive.

Subjects – Open access journals.

Methods – To identify vanished open access (OA) journals, *vanished* was defined by the authors as "a journal that published at least one volume as immediate OA after which production ceased, and the journal, together with the published full-text documents, disappeared from the web." If the journal content partially existed, it would be considered as vanished if <50% was available during 12 months of data collection which occurred September 2019–September 3, 2020. In 2020, the OA journal list was created by searching Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Ulrichsweb Global Serials Directory,

and Scopus title lists. The list was cross-referenced with database records from DOAJ from 2010–2012, 2012–2014, and 2014–2019; Ulrichsweb title lists from May 24, 2012, and July 3, 2018; and Scopus title lists from February 2014 and April 2018, to determine the missing titles. Previous research by the primary author and two peers, and previous publications, also contributed to the list of vanished journals. Data was collected manually, and duplicates were removed. Authors searched the Keepers Registry to be sure that the journal content was not preserved or accessible. Only titles with an ISSN number were kept in the final list. The authors then searched indexing databases and Google to find the vanished journal's website, then accessed the website through the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine to gather the information such as the year founded, last year of publication, last year available online, language, country, affiliation, and academic discipline.

Main Results – Authors identified 154 completely vanished journal titles and 20 partially vanished journal titles, to total 174 verified titles. Journals originated from 47 countries; the majority were published in English (n=137), and most were from North America, Europe and Central Asia (n=109). Social sciences and humanities domain represented 52.3% or 91 titles, and the last publication year of most titles occurred between 2010 and 2014 (n=110). The authors estimated the average time of the last published issue to the last available time on the internet to be within 1 year for 68 titles and within 5 years for 144 titles.

Conclusion – Although the results represent a small number of the available OA journals at the time of the study (1.2%), it reinforces the authors' theme that "open is not forever" and raises concern of the potential loss of scholarly work.

Commentary

The CAT generic critical appraisal tool created by Perryman & Rathbun-Grubb (2014) was used to assess the quality of this study.

Laasko et al. conducted a valuable literature review in addition to their exploratory study. Their methods were detailed, and their results were presented in a clear and understandable way. The only downgrade was the limitation of tracking something that is not there. The authors admit that this was a challenge.

Because there is no general agreement on the party or parties responsible for preserving scholarly OA articles and they are at risk of loss if they are discontinued, Laasko et al. set out to establish the number and characteristics of OA journals that have ceased to be published and have not been preserved. They stated that a data source that tracks the availability of journals over time does not exist. They used indexing and abstracting services to create a dataset of active records of journals and compared them to historical datasets from DOAJ and Ulrichsweb, the earliest set dated 2010–2012. This was not a small task as more than 14,000 OA journals were included on DOAJ in 2020. However, the DOAJ service started with a list of 300 OA journals in 2003 (DOAJ, 2023). It is unclear if all journals that ceased to be published between 2003 and 2010 would have been present on the dataset from 2010-2012. Previous research projects conducted by the authors and previous published studies were also consulted and resulted in identifying a small number (n=37) of vanished journal titles prior to 2010.

Authors mention that only titles that included an ISSN or E-ISSN number were kept and this number was used to determine if the journal was participating in digital preservation. The Keepers Registry only lists titles by ISSN number. The authors do not mention how many titles from their dataset did not have an ISSN number and could not be searched.

The limitations of searching for something that is not there did not prevent the authors from identifying 174 OA scholarly journals that have vanished from the web. They used reputable resources and valuable tools to classify journals in the social sciences, health sciences, life sciences, and physical

sciences; sciences that are still at risk of losing scholarly articles. In their research, Laasko et al. identified 900 journal titles that were inactive and not preserved, thus at risk for vanishing.

The authors do well in describing the need for a system of tracking active and inactive journals over time. They also emphasize that "open is not forever" and that there is a need to preserve scholarly OA journals before their content vanishes completely.

Academic libraries, already committed to preserving the content of purchased or subscription-based content, are in an ideal position to identify and include OA journals relevant to their institution for digital preservation. However, there are questions whether preservation is considered the function of the journal publisher. Protecting scholarly records is complex, requires time, finances, collaboration, and standards to govern and support the process, therefore it is important for both librarians and publishers to investigate methods to improve the lifecycle of OA scholarly journals that are not already archived using a preservation service.

References

DOAJ. (Directory of Open Access Journals). (2023, February 20). DOAJ at 20 – open, global, and trusted since 2003. *DOAJ News Service*. https://blog.doaj.org/2023/02/20/doaj20-open-global-and-trusted-since-2003/

Laakso, M., Matthias, L., & Jahn, N. (2021). Open is not forever: A study of vanished open access journals. *Journal of the Association for Information Science & Technology*, 72(9), 1099–1112. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24460

Perryman, C. & Rathbun-Grubb, S. (2014). *The CAT: A generic critical appraisal tool*. http://www.jotform.us/cp1757/TheCat