Quality open publishing: The role of libraries in supporting and sustaining new publications

Fiona Bradley
Research Services and Corporate, University Library, UNSW Sydney, Australia
E-mail address: f.bradley@unsw.edu.au

Abstract:

A growing number of libraries, particularly in academic libraries, are supporting the creation of new journals, and monographs as part of their commitment to open access and open research. But in an environment where researchers are also focused on research quality, what is the role for libraries in supporting start up publications that take some time to accrue quality measures? How do we provide support to editors on alternative measures of quality, alternative metrics, and dissemination and indexing strategies? And, how do these influence the level of support libraries are willing to provide to new publications? The presentation will include case studies from the UNSW Sydney Library, a major research-intensive public university, that supports publication of three journals and that also provides expert support to researchers on publishing strategy.

Keywords: open access, publishing, research, quality, metrics

Key issues and debates in defining research quality

Open access and research quality go hand in hand. However, it takes effort to ensure that open access journals, particularly new journals, are recognised as high-quality outlets. Most of the markers of quality are the same as those traditionally associated with quality print and electronic journals. These include appointing an international editorial board, adherence to COPE guidelines, and ensuring robust peer review (Testa, n.d.). However, the most important marker of quality is ensuring that published research is as robust and rigorous as possible.

The definition of research quality varies widely, there is no universally agreed definition (Mårtensson, Fors, Wallin, Zander, & Nilsson, 2016). Those definitions that do exist focus on defining quality in the context of how the research was undertaken. Definitions of publication quality also varies widely by discipline and country. Some disciplines such as science and medicine are largely evaluated based on citation and journal level metrics, and others on peer-review, such as creative practices and the humanities ("ERA evaluation," n.d.). Research

exercises which assess research publications at a national level, such as the Research Excellence Framework in the UK and Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) provide additional definitions that vary according to country contexts, and the prevailing policy environment for research.

The way research quality is defined and assessed is the subject of considerable debate among research communities as citation is not merely a technical process, but one that is also political and that has historically disadvantaged women, younger scholars, those working in the regions or in languages other than English, and emerging disciplines (Adler, Ewing, & Taylor, 2009; Bankovsky, 2019; Dion, Sumner, & Mitchell, 2018; Jensenius et al., 2018). Initiatives to address these issues are being addressed by researchers, for example strategies to make research visible in a broader range of languages (Dahler-Larsen, 2018; Federation Of Finnish Learned Societies, Information, Publishing, Universities Norway, & European Network For Research Evaluation In The Social Sciences And The Humanities, 2019). Other researcher-driven initiatives include the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Leiden Declaration, which seek to address concerns about research evlauation by asserting that researchers should be assessed based on their work, not on the journals in which they publish ("DORA – San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)," n.d.; "Leiden manifesto for research Metrics," n.d.).

Amid these debates and challenges, attracting traditional quality measures still matters, until a comprehensive alternative to measuring research quality can be agreed. Most open access journals prioritise gaining inclusion in the major citation tools, to facilitate discovery by researchers and so that citation data can accrue and be tracked. These tools include the major subscription-based services such as Scopus (Elsevier) and Web of Science (Clarivate Analytics). Dimensions (Digital Science) is an emerging citation source that integrates Altmetrics. Apart from Dimensions, which has a freely accessible version of the app, and selected journal ranking data from Scopus available through Scimago, these tools and data are not openly available. Many libraries and research institutions therefore do not have access to these tools, which creates a significant access barrier. Projects such as the Initiative for Open Citations seek to address the challenge of closed, proprietary citation tools by advocating to publishers to open up their citation data. Google Scholar is another widely used tool, providing citation statistics for individual articles that can be inclusive of more sources than propriety tools in some disciplines (Martín-Martín, Orduna-Malea, Thelwall, & Delgado López-Cózar, 2018). The development of alternative metrics, altmetrics, which capture attention around a work as well as formal citations is an example of attempts to provide a broader range of tools to assess research (Bakker, Chew, McBurney, Reed, & Aho, 2018). Altmetrics capture mentions of publications in patents, policy, and legal cases, thus going beyond citation counts.

Citation tools have a number of limitations, many of which impact open access journals. Citation indexes are selective and only a portion of titles are included in Scopus and Web of Science. Web of Science is deliberately not comprehensive, by design (Testa, n.d.). Elsevier also has a content policy and selection process for titles (Elsevier, n.d.). Spanish and Portuguese-language research is well-supported by national and regional open access platforms across Latin America and these titles are widely indexed by many libraries. However, many of these journal titles, though visible, are not well-indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, accounting for just 5% of the total titles indexed (Rodrigues & Abadal, 2014). As of 2015, there were approximately 13,200 peer review open access journals listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Scopus indexed 6,839 open access titles, and Web of Science a considerably smaller number, 3,253 (Rimmert, Bruns, Lenke, & Taubert, 2017).

Additionally, citation tools, including Google Scholar, have difficulties in capturing emerging disciplines and new experimental research because of the inherent, underlying social and political processes involved in citation practices (Jensenius et al., 2018). New or highly focused discipline areas with small academic communities generate fewer citations than more established and larger academic communities, resulting in them less likely to be included in commercial citation tools. This is relevant for open access journals, as they frequently focus on emerging fields of research.

Even after open access journals are included in citation indexes, editors and researches need to be aware that quality measures are lagging indicators, meaning it takes time to build quality metrics and reputation. Traditional measures of quality (such as Web of Science Journal Impact Factor) therefore tend to reward long-standing titles, rather than fostering innovation and new entrants. Researchers must also put their trust in titles and outlets beyond the established, 'accepted' titles in their field, and to publish with new open access journals. The reputation of the editor and standing of the editorial board is therefore essential in attracting quality submissions when establishing a new journal. While quality metrics are growing for many open access journals, some very large high-profile titles such as PLOS One have seen their metrics decline in recent years (Davis, 2013). Starting and sustaining an academic journal, and achieving and maintaining high-quality status, is therefore an intensive and ongoing endeavour.

Open access journals and quality

The Library Publishing Directory indicates that there are well over 100 libraries as publishers in 2019 (Library Publishing Coalition, n.d.). The total number of library publishers is likely to be much higher as the directory relies on self-reported responses and is in English only. The number of library publishers has grown steadily in recent years, for reasons including:

- Advantage of new opportunities afforded by digital technologies and distribution to launch journals, and in some cases monograph presses, at low cost
- To relaunch university presses as open presses, retaining university branding and reputation
- To meet niches in emerging or disciplines not well served by existing publishers, in the Australian context this is an issue particularly for local jurisdictional publications and indigenous research
- To address open access as a social justice imperative, levelling the playing field for researchers to have their work be more visible and recognised (Raju, 2017)

Although only a selection of open access journals are indexed in the major commercial citation tools, in a positive development all of these tools now incorporate Unpaywall data or other open access data, making it possible to identify open access journals and research outputs.

There are many different approaches to library publishing, but in general the editorial content and research direction of library-published journals and monographs are researcher-led. Libraries provide the underlying infrastructure, such as platform, hosting, preservation, DOI minting, and relationships with third-party organisations and indexing sources. Library

staff may typically be responsible for assisting with ensuring journals meet technical quality measures, with scholars responsible for all editorial functions and research quality.

Library staff have an important role in ensuring that new journals are visible, discoverable, and have the highest chance of being indexed. These can include strategies to maximise potential for reuse of outputs, and ability to track citations such as assigning persistent identifiers (such as DOIs for articles, encouraging the use of ORCiD for researchers), using open licensing (such as Creative Commons Attribution) and ensuring this is reflected in metadata usage statements, and submitting journals for harvesting by major open access search engines including BASE and CORE. Journals should also be listed in DOAJ. Additional strategies include support for a diverse range of outputs throughout the research lifecycle, such as preprints and providing access to underlying or supplementary data. Many journals, open and closed alike, are increasingly making available more outputs to support visibility of research and eventual replication of results. Assessing journals and platforms against the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) is emerging as an additional strategy.

Case study: Publishing and guidance to researchers at UNSW Sydney

UNSW Sydney is a public, research-intensive institution enrolling over 59,000 students. The University adopted an open access policy for its research outputs, including journal articles, conference papers, and theses in 2017. In 2019, UNSW achieved the highest result in a national evaluation of the engagement and impact of its research (Mavros, 2019). Like a growing number of libraries, the UNSW Sydney library publishes a small number of open access journals, editors must have a UNSW affiliation. Reflecting an institutional preference for cloud/hosted services the Library migrated to hosted journals on the Ubiquity Press platform, after formerly self-hosting journals using the Open Journal System (OJS) software. These journals are published 'diamond' open access – free to the reader and free to researchers, with no article processing fees.

Through a team of outreach librarians and subject matter experts, the Library provides services and expertise to researchers and Higher Degree by Research candidates (mostly PhD candidates) on their publishing strategy, taking into account the broader publishing landscape, the open access policy, and institutional context. These include masterclasses and guides on maximising research impact, developing a profile, understanding bibliometrics, and identifying publishing outlets. These roles are familiar to most research-intensive libraries, however providing expertise on publishing to journal editors is a newer role for library staff, and required consultation with colleagues at other institutions and learning to provide accurate advice to editors about infrastructure, DOIs, indexing, and other steps in quality publishing. There is a need for capacity building across the profession where libraries have taken on publishing activities (Skinner, Lippincott, Speer, & Walters, 2014).

The library role in supporting start up publications

As library publishing continues to grow, there will be hard questions about the relationship between openness and quality. The size of journal publishing continues to grow, with hundreds of new titles every year, not all new titles will be sustainable. As Plan-S and other open access strategies are implemented, strategies may change from publishing new titles, to flipping established titles to open access, or attracting titles away from established publishers to new platforms or open university presses. Library publishers are largely not-for-

profit, and many publications are free to both readers and authors, however they must still be accountable and sustainable to receive support from their parent institution, such as a university.

Freed of a profit motivation, the decisions that drive whether to start or continue a journal need to be made on the basis of what is most appropriate for the research. Discussions with editors need to include the time lag between starting a new title, accruing quality measures or being indexed in the major citation tools, and the need to attract and sustain a high level international editorial committee. Discussions also need to include strategies for promoting the new title to researchers, dissemination of published works including through social media, and alternative metrics. Library publishers need to carefully consider the new skills needed to take on these roles, and how messages about publishing line up with guidance given about publishing strategy to their broader research community.

Conclusion

A growing number of libraries are publishing open access journals, however there are a number of steps required to achieve markers of quality. Planning for sustainability will support new open access journals in achieving quality markers, as such a plan helps researchers submitting their work to trust the credentials of a new journal and acknowledges that metrics take time to accrue. Such a plan will also address issues such as what happens to a journal if institutional funding changes, new members of the editorial board need to be recruited, or the editor (if affiliated with the institution) moves to another institution.

Publishing is still a relatively new function for many libraries. To be able to effectively undertake these new roles, librarians should seek out training and learning from colleagues at other institutions to understand all aspects of publishing and research dissemination, including technical infrastructure, metadata, licensing, and indexing.

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