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The sustainability of Open Access journals: The situation regarding Open Access journals launched between 2000 and 2014

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INTRODUCTION

The number of Open Access (OA) journals has been increasing annually in recent years, rising to 10,963 in December 2015 (Morrison, 2015). When OA journals first emerged, they were mainly launched by researchers, universities, and societies (Laakso, 2011; Laakso & Björk, 2012). Traditional subscription publishers and OA publishers started to aggressively launch OA journals in the late 2000s (Solomon, 2013). Recently they are the main publishers of OA journals (Morrison, 2016). The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), which lists OA journals information, removed approximately 3,300 OA journals entries from its list on May 11, 2016 because of “failure to submit a valid reapplication before the communicated deadline” (DOAJ, 2016). This suggests that quite a number of OA journals were not published continuously. A few studies have investigated the sustainability of OA journals. 50% of 317 OA journals identified as active in 1998 were still active in 2002 (Gustafsson, 2002). 51% of 250 OA journals launched by independent scholars prior to 2002 were active in 2014 (Björk & Laakso, 2016).

The number of OA journals has risen rapidly since the late 2000s because many OA journals were launched by subscription publishers and OA publishers. However, the question remains: Can they continue to publish so many OA journals? This study intends to discover what the current status of OA journals’ sustainability is through an up-to-date and wide-ranging survey.

METHOD

The data on 18,541 scholarly journals launched between 2000 and 2014 was extracted from Ulrichsweb on March 14, 2016. The reason why 2014 was the final year of the period was that Ulrichsweb appeared not to have updated its data for 2015 as of the beginning of 2016. OA journals were identified according to three standards, as follows: (1) those which Ulrichsweb categorizes as OA journals, (2) those based on a list of 11,410 OA journals DOAJ listed on 14th March 2016, and (3) OA journal candidates that were estimated from their “Publisher name” and identified through accessing their web sites. As a result, 6,955 OA journals were determined, and the remaining 11,586 journals were counted as toll journals. They were analyzed by using Ulrichsweb information, such as “Publisher name,” “Status,” and “Start year.” Ulrichsweb does not

have data on “Publisher type,” so it was determined from the “Publisher name.” However, for approximately 2,000 OA journals, it was difficult to determine the publisher type only from the “Publisher name.” These were manually categorized according to “Publisher type” by accessing the OA journals’ web-sites.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The numbers for the various statuses of OA journals were as follows: “Active” (6,673), “Ceased” (260), “Merged/Incorporated” (18), “Suspended” (1), and “Researched/Unresolved” (3). In the case of toll journals, the numbers were “Active” (10,735), “Ceased” (720), “Merged/Incorporated” (57), “Suspended” (17), and “Researched/Unresolved” (57). They show that the “Ceased” percentage of OA journals (3.7%) was lower than that of toll journals (6.2%). This implies that OA journals are, as a total, not inferior to toll journals for sustainability. Figure 1 shows the percentage of the number of ceased journals’ accounts for the number of launched journals according to the launch year. The percentages of OA journals were lower than those of toll journals, excluding the years 2008, 2011, and 2012. The analysis of individual data made it clear that there were some special cases in these years. Bentham Open, which is Bentham Science Publishers’ open access branch, ceased its “The Open” series, launched in 2008: the number of journals whose title was prefaced by this phrase came to 22. Meanwhile, Hindawi, which is one of the largest OA publishers, ceased its “ISRN” series that had been launched between 2011 and 2012: the journal titles prefaced with “ISRN” numbered 119. They had a big effect on the OA journals’ ceased percentage figures in 2008, 2011, and 2012.

From an overall quantitative view, the breakdown for each publisher type of the “Ceased” 260 journals is as follows: “OA Publisher” (202), “Subscription Publisher” (23), “Unknown” (17), “University” (9), “Other” (5), “Society” (3), and “Research Institute” (1). Table 1 shows each ceased percentage figure. The ceased percentage for the OA publishers is overwhelmingly high. The ceased OA journals are dominated by OA journals that had been launched by OA Publishers. A total of 202 journals in the “OA Publisher” category ceased, and 91.6% of them (185 journals) had been launched by only three OA publishers. They were: Hindawi (129), Bentham Open (33), and

Biomed Central (23). It is clear that lack of sustainability was an important issue for specific OA publishers.

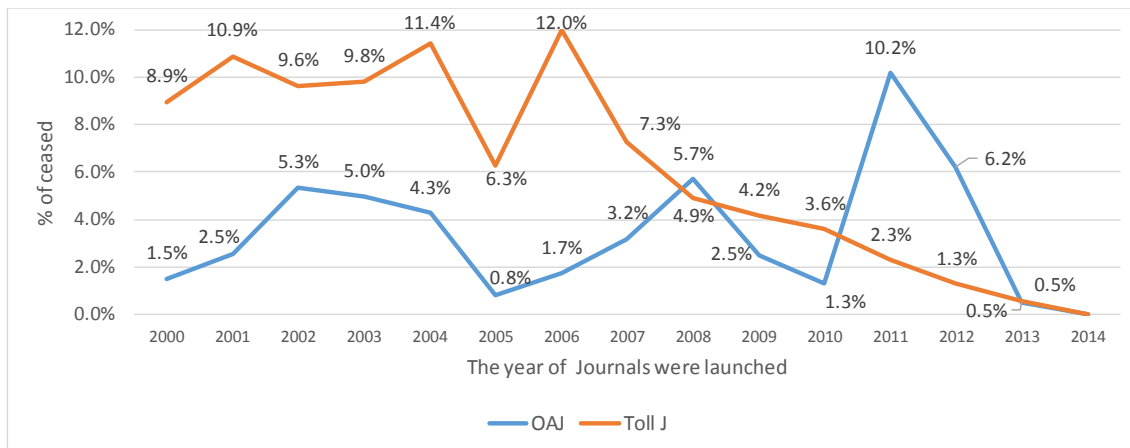
CONCLUSION

The quantitative study shows that OA journals are not inferior to toll journals for sustainability. However, the ceased percentage of OA journals launched in the late 2000s was higher than that of toll journals. This was mainly caused by two series of OA journals being launched by specific OA publishers. These results demonstrate that, in some circumstance, OA publishers that launched a number of OA journals in a short space of time could not continue to publish all of their publications.

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Launch year		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
OA J	Number of launched journals	199	197	206	201	234	255	288	408	543	523	628	886	867	1,028	492
	Number of ceased journals as of 2016	3	5	11	10	10	2	5	13	31	13	8	90	54	5	0
Toll J	Number of launched journals	694	662	675	683	804	747	827	909	874	891	1,005	878	784	743	410
	Number of ceased journals as of 2016	62	72	65	67	92	47	99	66	43	37	36	20	10	4	0

Figure.1 Ceased percentage of journals as of March 2016 by journals' launch year.

Table.1 Ceased percentage of OA journals by publisher type.

	OA Publisher	Subscription Publisher	Society	University	Research Institute	Other	Unknown	Total
Number of launched	2,762	1,333	457	1,597	178	403	225	6,955
Number of Ceased	202	23	3	9	1	5	17	260
% Cease	7.3%	1.7%	0.7%	0.6%	0.6%	1.2%	7.6%	3.7%