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The Current State of Scholarly Journal Publishing in Africa: A Snapshot of Survey Results

Susan Murray & Abby Clobridge

CODESRIA

Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop X Canal IV
BP 3304, CP 18524, Dakar, Senegal

Phone: (+221) 33 825 98 22 / (+221) 33 825 98 23

Fax: (+221) 33 824 12 89

<http://codesria.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/CODESRIA-181817969495/>

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Abstract: This article shares selected findings from a research project conducted in 2014 which examined the current state of scholarly journal publishing in Africa. Even though the African continent and its publishing scene are characterized by diversity and complexity, some useful patterns and items of interest emerged from the study related to African journal publishing and Open Access. Of particular interest is the continuation of printed journals, the factors influencing editors to change to Open Access models, the factors influencing editors to stay with subscription-based models, and continued concerns with the Journal Impact Factor. Our research identifies complexities in the publishing industry and provide a basis for further research, tool development, and capacity building.

Background

Over the past few years, the state of global scholarly publishing has dramatically changed. In various parts of the world, we have witnessed an explosion of new journals entering the market, a shift from print to online publishing, and newly-emerging financial models. At the same time, Open Access has gained a foothold in the publishing industry and is becoming an increasingly viable option for authors and publishers to make content free to access and free to re-use.

However, although readership of articles has become more global than ever, journal publishing practices and local demands on the publishing industry are not necessarily the same throughout the world. While several studies have been conducted over the past few years regarding trends in scholarly communication and Open Access, most of this research has focused on the Global North and no research has focused exclusively on these issues across the African continent.

In late 2013 and 2014, a small team of researchers¹ from African Journals OnLine (AJOL) and Clobridge Consulting, with funding provided in part by Carnegie Corporation of New York and Sida, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, gathered and analyzed data in order to examine the current state of scholarly journal publishing in Africa and to lay the foundation for potential future research, advocacy, and capacity building efforts. The team's hypothesis was that although there is a dynamic publishing scene in Africa, the issues, trends, and challenges facing journal editors and publishers are not entirely the same within the African context as in the Global North.

Thus, the project was designed to collect, analyze, and disseminate knowledge about how journal editors and publishers are dealing with issues such as Open Access, print vs. online distribution mechanisms, adoption of ICT tools for management of journals, implementation of various financial models, and encountering challenges related to so-called "predatory Open Access" in order to identify emerging trends, gain insights from editors about their successes and concerns, and shine a light on scholarly journal publishing in Africa.

Methodology

A mix of quantitative and qualitative data was gathered via a lengthy survey. The survey was administered via the open-source system LimeSurvey and was offered in both English and French. Additionally, provisions were made to collect surveys via email for individuals who wished to fill in the survey offline.

¹ The research team was led by Susan Murray from African Journals OnLine (AJOL) and Abby Clobridge (Clobridge Consulting, with additional support provided by Lara Proud, Kim Barker, and Lucienne Wilmé. More details about the project itself are available on the project's original website: <http://clobridgeconsulting.com/scholarly-publishing-in-Africa/>.

The survey was open to editors and publishers of "African-based journals." The research team assembled a working list of 1,012 known African-based journals excluding Hindawi publications. The working list was based on entries in Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, the SCImago Journal & Country Rank portal, Web of Knowledge, the South African DHET Accredited Journals list for 2013, ProQuest's International Bibliography of Social Sciences, a list of registered Open Journal systems (OJS) installations based out of African countries, and a list of AJOL journals. The list was then cleaned of duplicate entries and journals which have ceased operations.

Since there is no definitive source for this information, and much of the information that was collected was conflicting and incomplete, the decision was made to offer the survey as an open survey rather than limiting to a closed group of invitees. Furthermore, the research team hoped to uncover additional journals that were not on any of the directories or sources listed above. And indeed, representatives from several journals not included in the above-listed directories participated in the survey – roughly 5-10% of journals represented by respondents were not on the team's working list. Some journals were new, while other journals have changed their name or simply were not included in any of the referenced directories.

The survey received three hundred and thirty (330) validated responses, representing 32 African countries. However, nearly one third of the responses (105) were from South Africa and nearly one third of the responses were from Nigeria (99). The remaining 38% (126 responses) were from 30 other countries. Overall, the responses represented approximately 30% of identified actively-publishing African-based journals, excluding Hindawi titles. However, since no definitive list of all African-based journals exists, it is impossible to note exactly what percentage of journals were included in responses.

The final survey included over 80 questions with over 300 variables. The survey was designed to be as thorough as possible, with the team opting for comprehensiveness over brevity. As expected, not all of the participants made it to the end of the survey; several questions in various points of the survey had a very low response rate, likely due to a combination of factors such as "survey fatigue" and the nature of those specific questions.

As a result of the challenges in working with a fuzzy target audience and the inconsistent response rates to questions, it is important to look at patterns in the data, not exact numbers. Even so, many of the patterns which emerged are quite clear, while others are murky and deserve further attention in the future. The project team recommends using this data to shed light on the nature of the current publishing scene -- including its ambiguities -- and hope this research can serve as starting point for further research and analysis in the future.

Due to the length of the survey, this article offers just a glimpse into the results and shares a few key highlights, particularly those related to access models. The full report is available from the AJOL website at the following link: <http://www.ajol.info/public/Scholarly-Journal-Publishing-in-Africa-Report-Final-v04c.pdf>. Much of the data – that which can be anonymized – will be added to Figshare once full analysis is completed.

About the Journals

In terms of journals' coverage and subject matter, respondents were asked to indicate the primary subject area(s) of their journal. The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) list of subjects² was

² The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) list of subjects from July 2013 was used for the basis for answer options. Choices included: Agriculture and Food Sciences; Arts and Architecture; Biology and Life Sciences; Business and Economics; Chemistry; Earth and Environmental Sciences; Health Sciences; History and

used for the basis of response selections, with a space for additional areas to be included under “Other.” “Other” responses were then re-coded where responses clearly fit into a category. Figure 1 indicates the top subject areas represented, those with thirty (30) or more responses. Top selections include a great deal of overlap. Even so, the sciences – particularly health and medical sciences, agriculture and food sciences, and environmental sciences – were most heavily represented. Social sciences, as a broad category, was the second most-frequently selected standalone response.

Scholarly Journal Publishing in Africa: A Snapshot of Survey Results Figures & Tables

Part 1: Figures

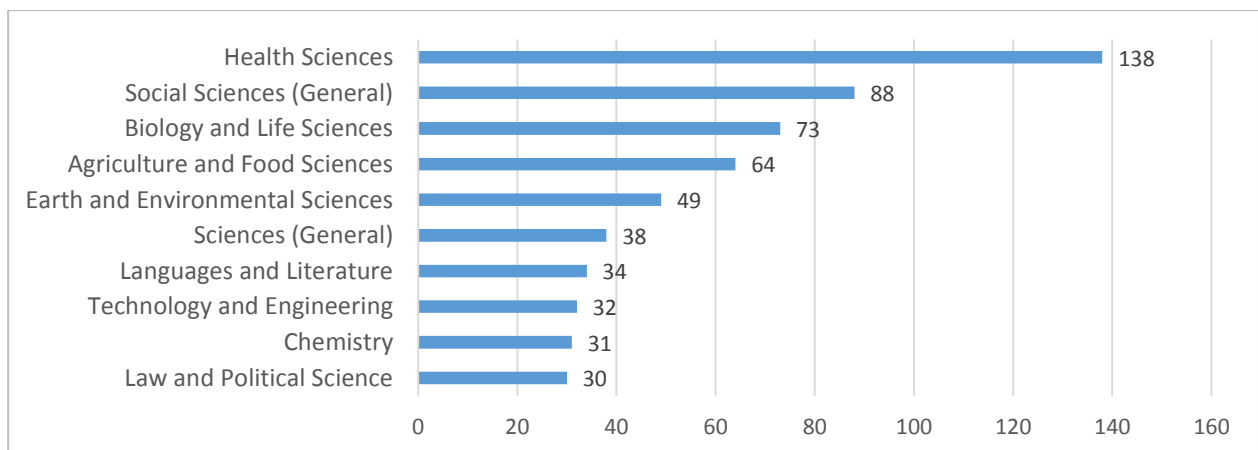


Figure 1: Subject Area of Journals

Typically, African-based journals are fairly young. The peak decade for founding these journals was during the early 2000s (2000 - 2009), with the 1990s and 1980s following. Results are presented in Figure 2.

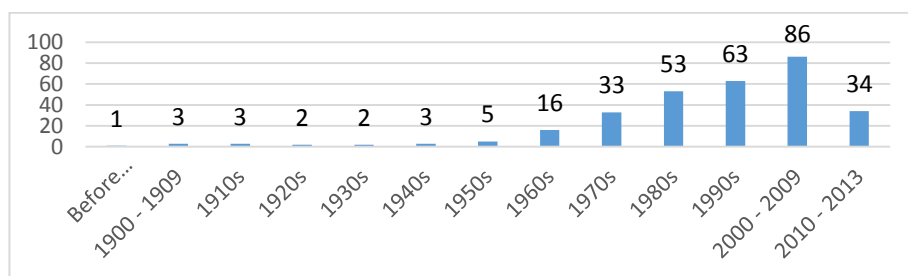


Figure 2: Founding Decade of Journals

When asked how many issues were published in 2012, most respondents (83%) indicated their journal published between one and four issues. Interesting, as noted in Figure 3, 19 individuals noted that their journals published in an “issue-less” environment, a recent trend that is beginning to gain steam around the world.

Archaeology; Languages and Literature; Law and Political Science; Mathematics and Statistics; Marine or Aquatic Science; Philosophy and Religion; Physics and Astronomy; Sciences (General); Social Sciences (General); Technology and Engineering; Other [please explain]. This list was available from <http://www.doaj.org>. However, between July and December of 2013, DOAJ changed how subjects are represented in their database.

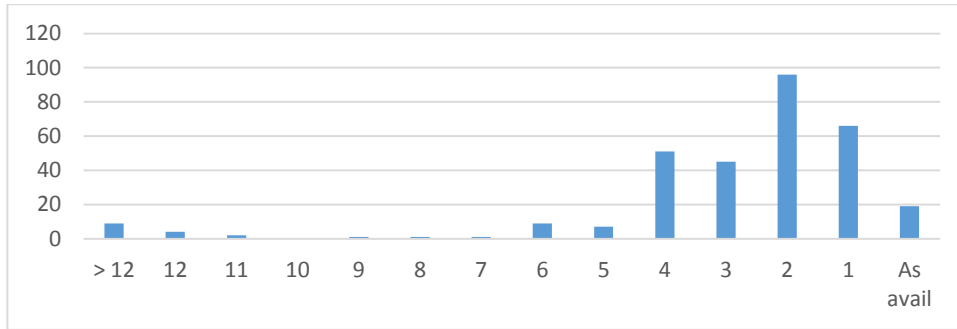


Figure 3: Frequency of Publication (2012)

When asked about the process for selecting articles, most respondents indicated some form of peer review was used to review manuscripts. However, responses also indicated that some journals accept all manuscripts (5) or all manuscripts within a particular subject area (29), without going through the peer review process.

Management of Journals

Based on the survey responses, it appears that a typical African journal is likely a “scholar journal” – a journal for which oversight is provided by career academics after hours and heavily rely on volunteer efforts from an Editor-in-Chief and editorial board members. Across all of Africa, most of the respondents to this question indicated that their journal was published from a university (31%) or by a scholarly society, professional society, or association (30%). Commercial publishers were the third most-selected response (19%). (See **Error! Reference source not found.**) Responses listed under “University” include university presses, university departments, research centers affiliated with universities, and all other types of university affiliates.

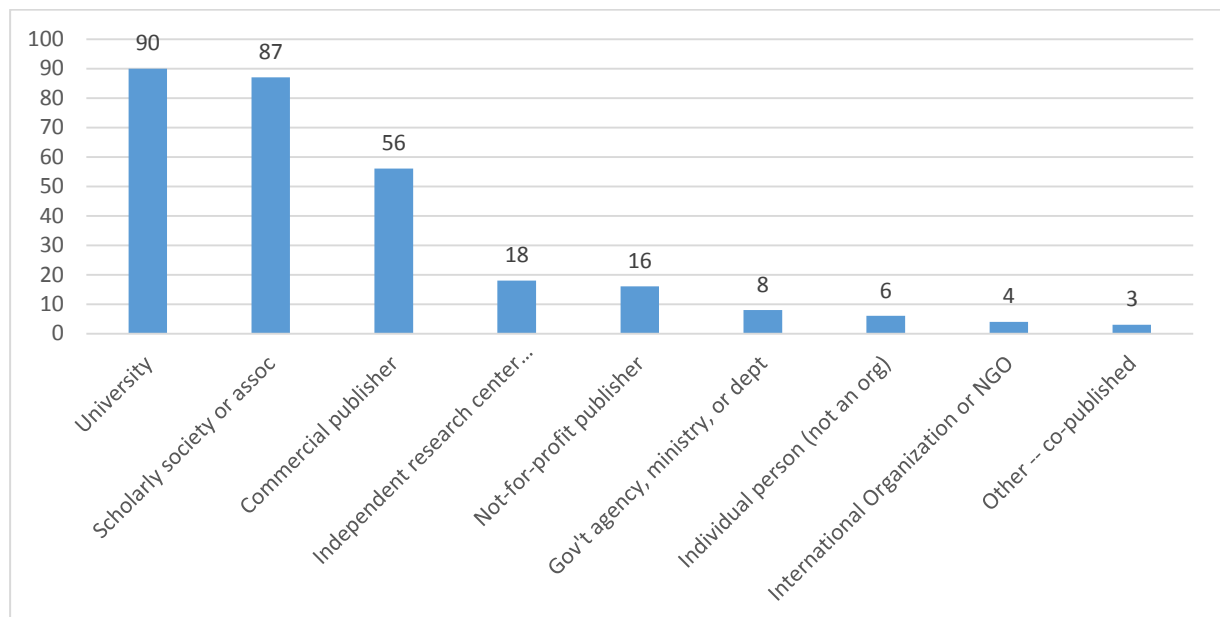


Figure 4: Types of Publishing Organization

However, when data was examined further by isolating South African and Nigeria responses, a different pattern emerged (Figure 5). Indeed, nearly 40% of responses from outside of South Africa indicated that their journal was published by or from a university, while this percentage was much lower in Nigeria (25%) and South Africa (23%). Likewise, commercial publishers were much more common selections from survey respondents representing South African-based journals (28%).

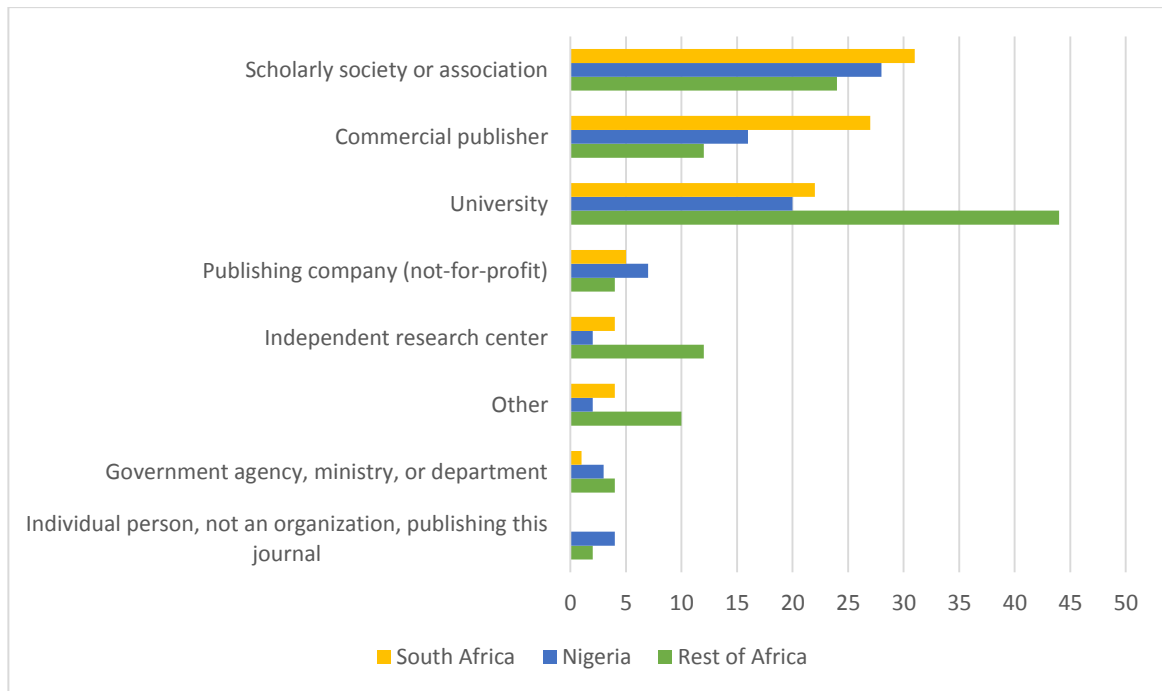


Figure 5: Types of Publishing Organization – Breakdowns for South Africa, Nigeria, Rest of Africa

Two questions were asked regarding operations and long-term responsibility. Management of daily operations is presented in Figure 6.

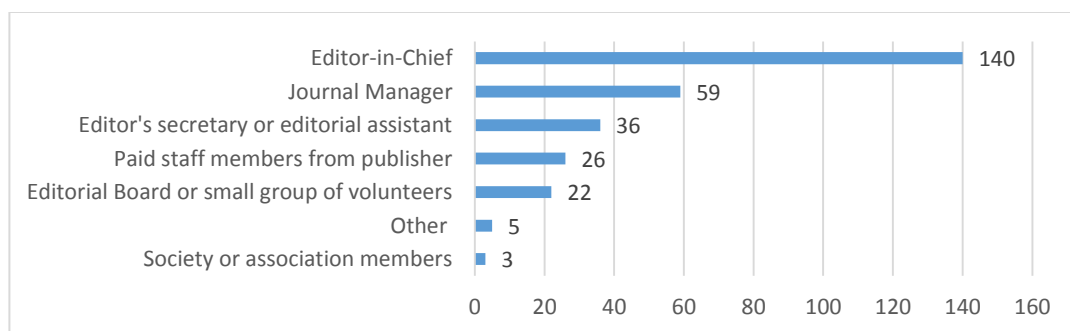


Figure 6: Who Handles Day-to-Day Operations?

Nearly half of respondents (48%) indicated that the Editor-in-Chief was responsible for daily operations. In terms of long-term responsibility, participants were asked: “Who is ultimately responsible for the continuation and future of this journal?” Results are presented in Figure 7. The top response to this question was “Scholarly society or association,” and was selected by 36% of

respondents – which was not surprising, considering the high number of African-based journals run by such organizations.

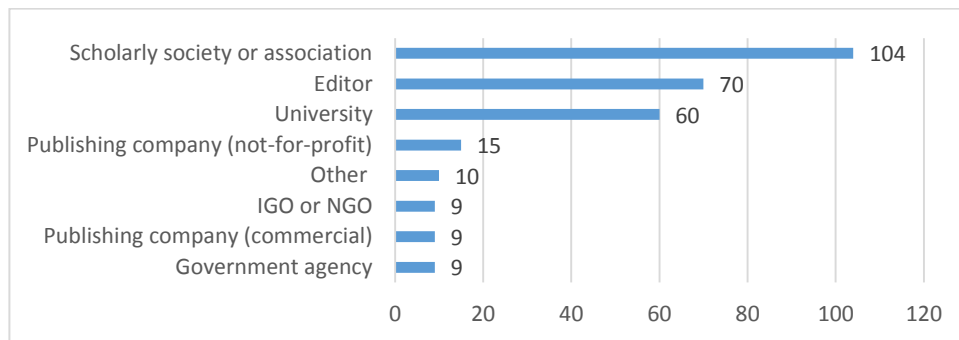


Figure 7: Who is Ultimately Responsible for the Continuation of this Journal?

However, the second-most selected response was “Editor,” selected by nearly one quarter of respondents (24%). Compared with journals run out of the global North, a tremendous amount of responsibility – and burden – rests on a single individual or a small group of highly-involved editors. The number of respondents selecting the option for “Editor” in this question is consistent with comments offered elsewhere in the survey about the contributions of one or two people sustaining a single journal.

Economics of Journal Publishing

Not all journals in Africa operate with funding or cash of any sort. When asked, “does the journal receive monetary funding, income, or revenue of any kind,” nearly one third of individuals responding to this question (28%) indicated that they operate in a “cashless” environment (Figure 8).

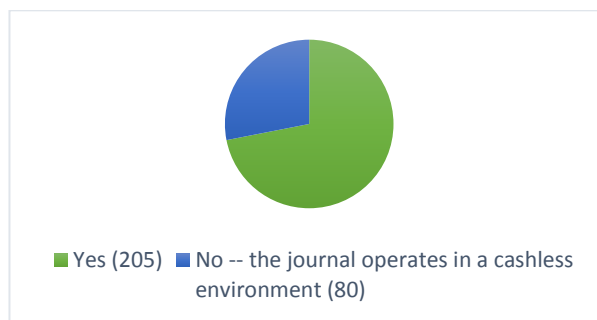


Figure 8: Journals' Use of Monetary Funding

African-based journals in general are even more heavily dependent on various types of non-financial support or resources than in the rest of the world. When asked about the sources of non-financial support or resources, top responses were volunteer time of peer reviewers, the Editor-in-Chief, and editors. However, in addition to volunteered time of reviewers and editors, many respondents also indicated other sources of non-financial support which make it possible for journals to operate. Of particular note: the high number of journals which receive free use of office space, computers, and internet access. 288 individuals responded to this question. Figure 9 presents the number of

responses to each option and the percentage of responses for each option (based on the 288 responses for this question).

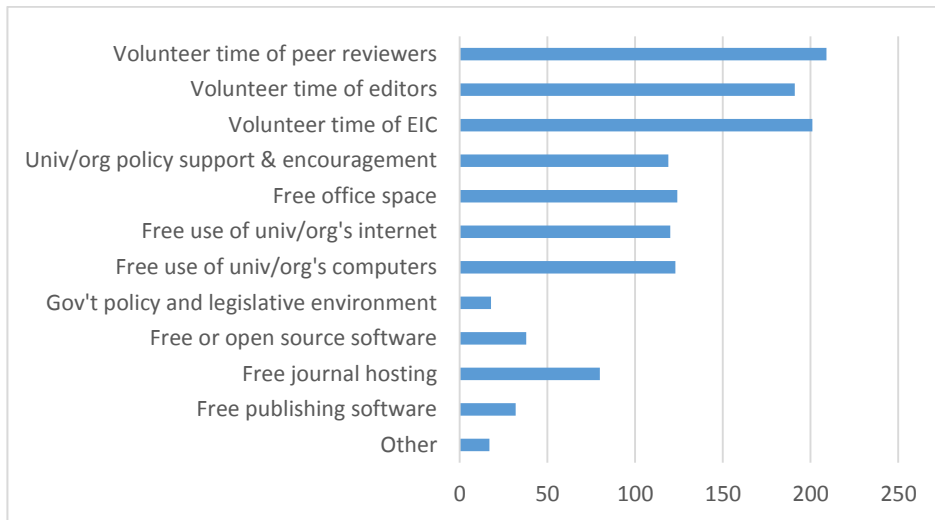


Figure 9: Sources of Non-Financial Support (all publishing models)

For those journals which do utilize money, the journals’ sources of income, funding, and revenue are quite varied yet cluster around a few key areas:

- 1) External donations, grants, and funds from organizations or from individuals such as the Editor-in-Chief
- 2) Internal funding from the association, university, or other organization that manages the journal
- 3) Income from article-processing charges (APCs) and author fees
- 4) Income from print subscriptions

These areas are consistent with the responses selected from options presented to respondents (Figure 10) and from a follow-up question requesting details about other sources of funding, income, or revenue. Article-processing charges (APCs) and author fees of various types was the category selected as “very important” by the highest number of respondents (81).

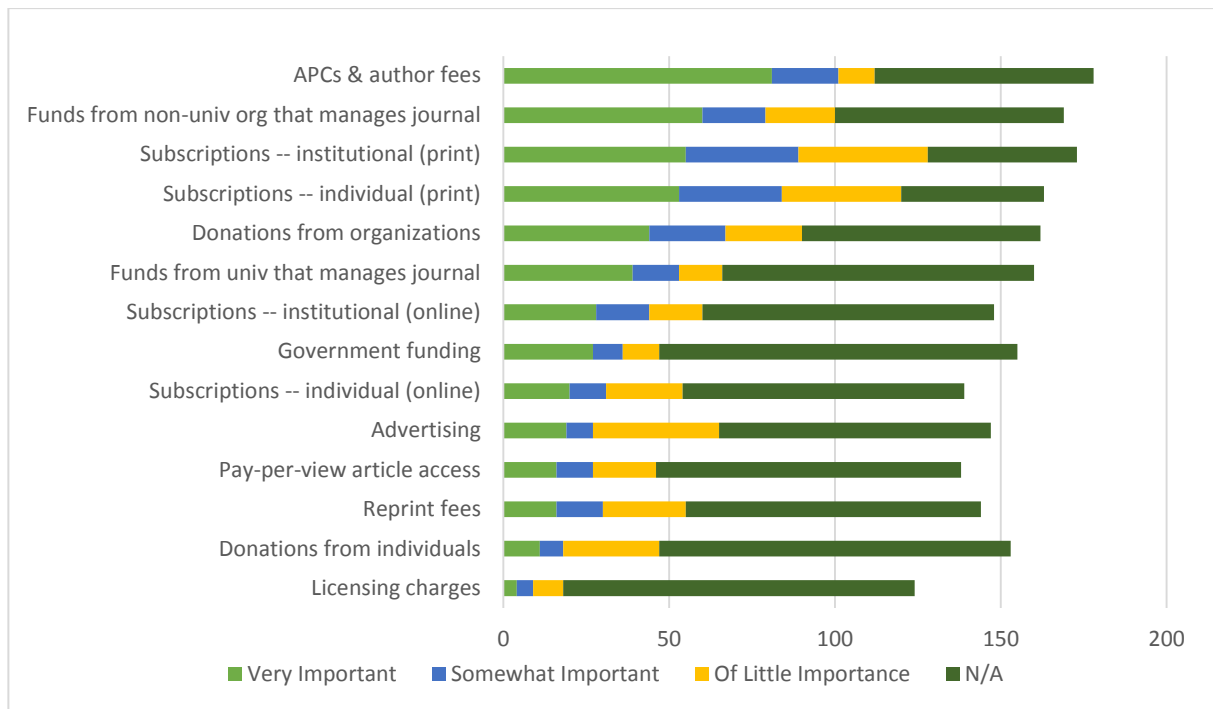


Figure 10: Journals' Sources of Income (all publishing models)

The next two questions focused on general-purpose “article-processing charges” (APCs) – a concept that is widely used in North America, Europe, and Australia to recoup publishing costs specifically for Open Access. However, in other parts of the world such as Africa, these APCs are not specific to Open Access publishing. As presented in Table 1, individuals who responded to this question indicated that their journal levied APCs only to authors once their manuscript has been accepted for publication (61 responses) as compared with at the point of submission (29 responses).

Table 1: Author Fees -- General-Purpose APCs

Fees Charged	Yes	No
Article processing charges (APCs) at point of submission in order for manuscripts to be considered	29	66
Article processing charges (APCs) after manuscripts have been accepted but before their publication	61	37

While many “Northern” and “Western” journals are able to offer waivers for these fees to authors from various countries or who meet certain criteria based on their professional status, the situation is less consistent for African-based journals. Fifty-two individuals answered the open-ended question, “please describe conditions under which a waiver or exemption [to these charges] is made.” Slightly less than half of the responses (25 out of 52) indicated that waivers or exceptions are granted under certain circumstances. Of these, several people noted that exemptions are made based on location. For instance, eight people specifically referenced the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) subsidy system³ and noted that charges were waived for authors outside of South Africa. Slightly more than half of those who responded to this question (27 out of 52) indicated that waivers or exemptions are not granted.

Participants were also asked to share their main expenses. Responses to this question were more spread out across options, although “printing costs” was the clear expenses for most journals – 173 individuals selected this as a “significant” source of their journal’s expenses. Similarly, “graphic design and typesetting,” expenses mostly tied to print versions of articles and journals, was the second-most selected option (87). See Figure 11 for a full breakdown.

³ Uniquely, the South African (SA) government DHET pays SA universities a considerable amount of money (over ZAR 113,000 equivalent to approximately USD 7,500 per article in 2015) for each article published by an author from that university in a journal included in the following lists: SA DHET list, the Thomson-Reuters ISI Web of Knowledge product, the ProQuest product called the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), Norwegian, ScieLO SA and Scopus

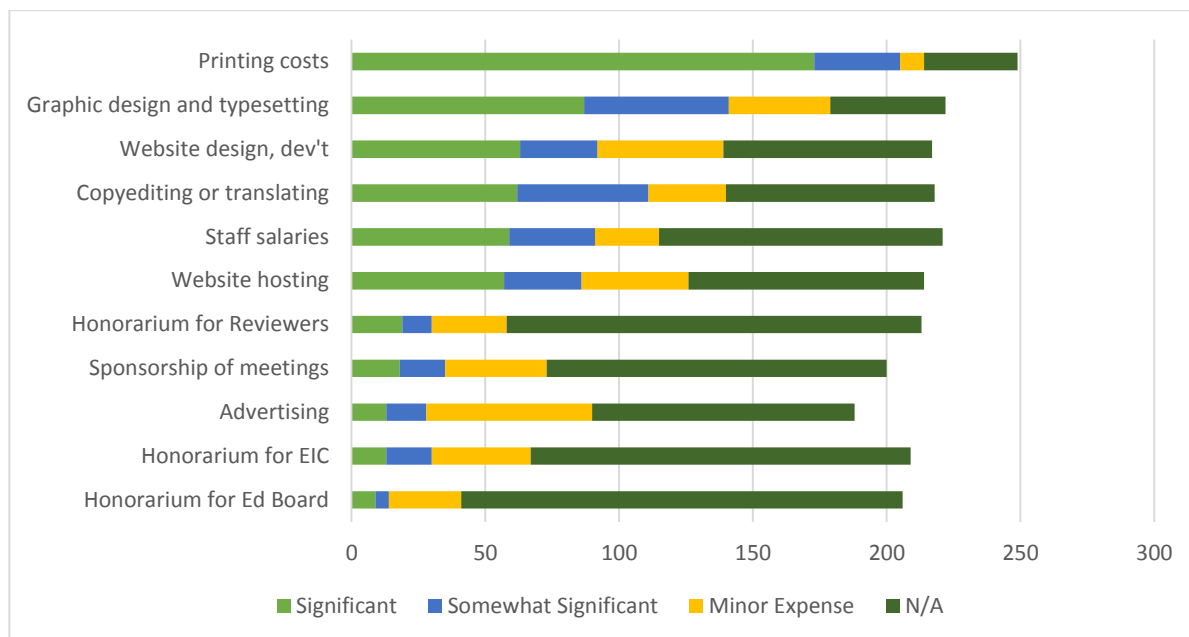


Figure 11: Journals' Expenses (all publishing models)

Table 2 presents the total number of responses when combined for each expense for “Significant” and “Somewhat Significant.” When asked to describe “any other expenses this journal incurs, expenses which were not listed in the previous question,” the most often-cited expenses were related to the postage, mailing, and distribution of printed journals – seventeen individuals referred to some aspect of distributing printed copies of journals.

Table 2: Expenses – Significant + Somewhat Significant

Expense	Responses
Printing costs	205
Graphic design and typesetting	141
Copyediting or translating	111
Website design, development	92
Staff salaries	91
Website hosting	86
Sponsorship of meetings	35
Honorarium for Reviewers	30
Honorarium for Editor-in-Chief	30
Advertising	28
Honorarium for Editorial Board	14

Access and Formats: The Persistence of Print

Nearly all survey respondents indicated that their journal offered both print and online access; furthermore, the breakdown of paid vs. free access is worth highlighting. Respondents were asked whether they offered print (hard copy) or an online (electronic version) to readers, and then were asked if that option was available for a fee or for free.

Nearly the same number of individuals responded to the question regarding print access (276) as online access (275). For print access, nearly three quarters (72%) of these respondents indicated that they offer print subscriptions for a fee. An additional 18% offered print subscriptions for free. Surprisingly, only 26 individuals (9%) indicated that they do not offer print access – a surprising result, when compared with responses to questions later in the survey regarding Open Access and Subscriptions. Breakdowns of print, online, fee and free options are presented in Figure 12.

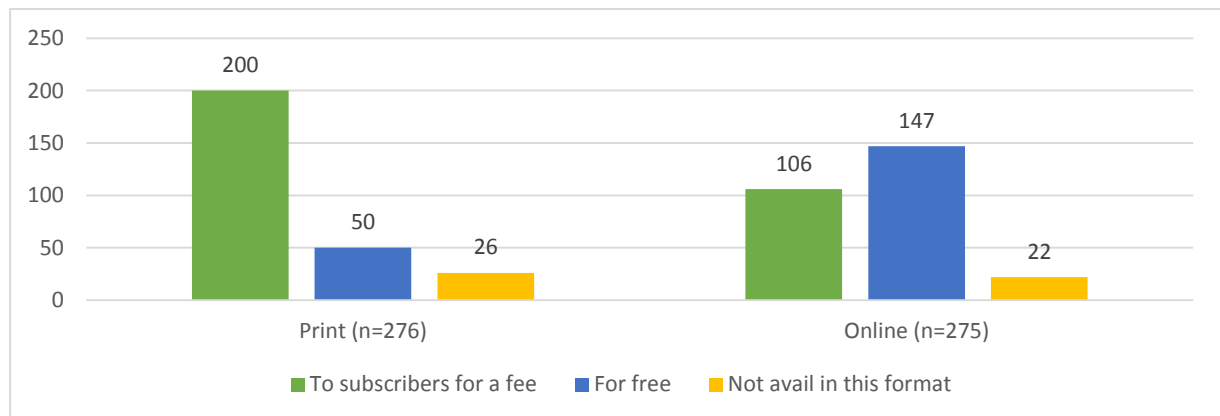


Figure 12: Breakdown of Free/Fee for Print and Online Access

In terms of print access: three quarters of respondents (75%) to this question indicated that their journal was available in print – 250 out of the 333 respondents selected either “printed copies for a fee” or “printed copies for free” when asked about the formats in which their journal was available. Due to the costs associated with production and distribution of printed copies, the high percentage of journals offering hard copies was somewhat surprising – although responses are a bit inconsistent with later questions about Open Access.

Those who indicated that their journal was available in print were asked the follow-up question: “What are the top reasons for offering this title in a printed version/hard copy?” Common themes included printing for libraries or archives; institutional preference for tenure/promotion/review purposes; because subscribers are paying for print; preferences of subscribers/readers; and concerns about lack of internet access, expense of internet access, or inconsistent internet access.

Open Access vs. Subscription Models

Like elsewhere around the world, Open Access is a key issue. Respondents were asked to select the model of access for their journal and then participants were branched to either a set of questions related to Open Access or a set of questions related to their subscription-based model. However, it is worth noting that the response rate to these questions had dropped off from earlier in the survey. Of the 278 responses to the question, two-thirds of the responses were representing South African-based journals.

As described in Figure 13, over half of respondents indicated that their journal offers immediate Open Access. Nearly one third (27%) of respondents are using a subscription-only model.

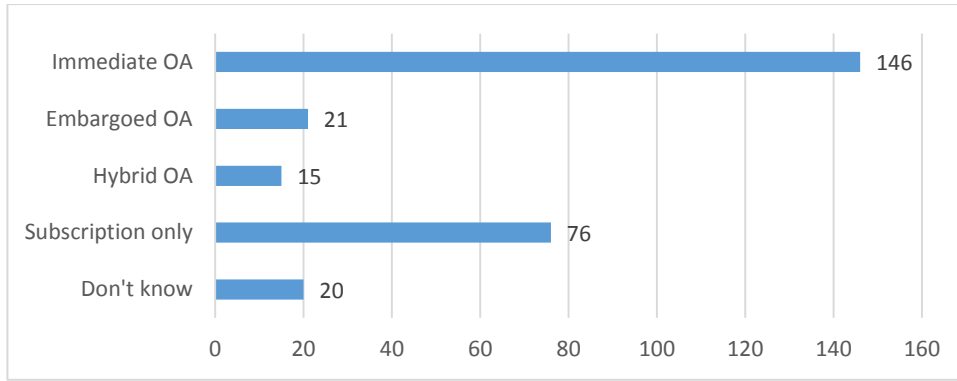


Figure 13: Journals' Access Model

Based on the large number of respondents representing South African-based journals, further breakdowns were examined. This analysis yielded some similar results but highlighted a few important differences – particularly in terms of the breakdown of immediate/full Open Access and subscription models. The set of journals based out of South Africa had a higher percentage of Immediate Open Access (58% compared to 42% of journals based elsewhere in Africa). On the flip side, journals based out of South Africa included a smaller percentage than the average of subscription-only journals – 25% of journals based out of South Africa used a subscription-only model, while all 33% of other African-based journals were using a subscription-only model. Exact numbers are included in Table 3.

Table 3: Access Models, Response Breakdown by South African Journals

	South African-based journals	All other African-based journals	Total
Immediate Open Access	108	38	146
Embargoed Open Access	13	8	21
Hybrid Open Access	6	9	15
Subscription only	46	30	76
I don't know	14	6	20

Of the nearly 150 individuals who responded to the question which inquired whether their journal was always Open Access or if it shifted from a subscription model to Open Access, two thirds (99 out of 152) indicated that their journal launched with an Open Access model. (See Figure 14.) Those that shifted from subscription to Open Access were then asked a follow-up question to determine the approximate year when the shift occurred. A few journals made the switch before 2005, but 20 journals transitioned from subscription to Open Access between 2005 and 2009, and another 27 transitioned more recently, between 2010 and 2012.

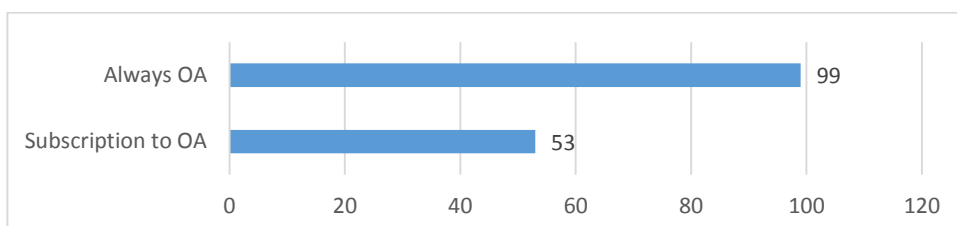


Figure 14: Was this journal always Open Access?

Journals which changed to Open Access were then asked, “What’s changed [since you became Open Access]? How do you know?” Thirty nine individuals responded to this question. Most responses highlighted some aspect of increased visibility, with a few people highlighting issues related to journal management and financing. In particular, responses highlighted increased numbers of submissions, increased numbers of *international* submissions, increased downloads, more comments by readers, increased citations. In addition, four responses were related to management and finance; these highlighted the costs associated with printing, subscription, and advertising sponsors.

The next questions were posed to all respondents who indicated their journal Open Access in any form (immediate, embargoed, or hybrid OA). The first question in this subsection delved into factors and motivations which lead to the decision to be openly accessible. Personal beliefs of the Editor-in-Chief and increasing awareness about Open Access at the global level were by far the top two factors cited by respondents. For both of these options, nearly 120 respondents selected that they were “very important” factors in this decision, followed by increased awareness about Open Access at the national level (86 responses). Figure 15 includes the full breakdown of responses.

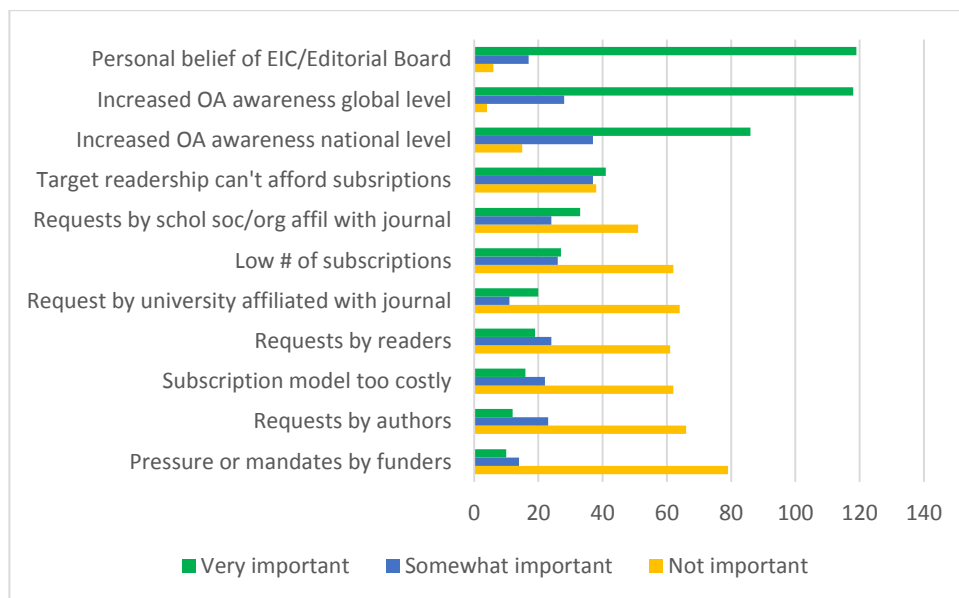


Figure 15: Factors and Motivations for Becoming Open Access

A related question was then posed to survey respondents: “What role did each of the following play in making it possible for your journal to be Open Access?” (Figure 16.) Technology-related factors were most highly rated as playing a key role in making it possible for journals to be Open Access: the availability of free or low-cost journal systems, broadband access of the Editorial Board and/or staff, readers’ broadband access, web hosting, and ICT skills of journals’ teams all received around 60 votes for playing a “very important” role and another 20-40 votes for playing a “somewhat important” role.

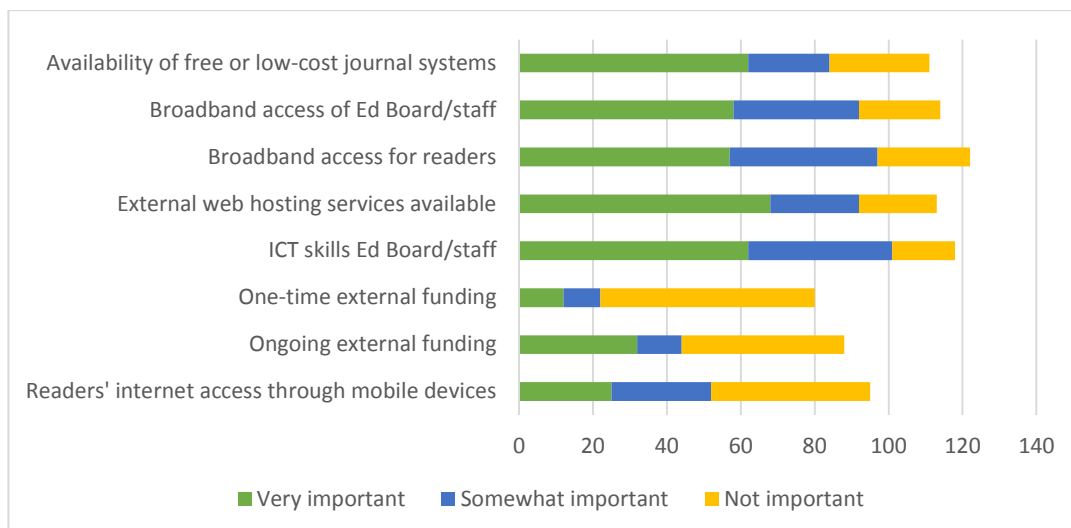


Figure 16: Elements of the Enabling Environment for Open Access

When asked what other key factors led to the decision to be Open Access, several people echoed themes which were already beginning to emerge. For instance, several respondents reiterated the importance of personal beliefs/imperative to provide free access to research: “Personal belief of editor or editorial board to share research outcomes as widely as possible,” “No other realistic option in a market where we cannot sell the printed material, if we are to meet one main objective ‘to take information to health practitioners,’” and “It’s the right thing to do!” Increased visibility also received several responses. For example, one respondent wrote: “It appears to be a good plan on a developing continent to promote access to editorial matter for scholarship in other parts of Africa.”

Several questions in this section tried to touch on respondents’ experiences with Open Access – what they believed to be the benefits for their journals as well as challenges they have experienced. Responses from these questions are included in the full report.

Subscription Journals

Respondents representing subscription-based journals were asked whether they felt their current subscription model is successful. This set of questions had an extremely small number of respondents (66). From within this group, fewer respondents indicated that they felt the model was successful (28 out of 66) as compared to those who did not (38 out of 66). When asked about the benefits of the current subscription model, responses centered on a few categories as seen in Table 4; most responses were tied to income generation. These loosely-defined and somewhat overlapping categories are designed to present the high-level themes, not offer a statistical comparison. For instance, the categories for “Income,” “Subscriptions and Printed Versions,” and “Benefits of Membership” include some overlap.

Table 4: Benefits of Subscription Model – Summary of Responses

Category	Count
Subscriptions lead to income	15
Current model works well	8
Subscriptions as related to printed editions	7
Journal access and/or printed copies as benefits of membership	7
Miscellaneous/other	7
Responses indicated downsides of current model (rather than benefits)	2

Twenty people (who are currently using a subscription model) shared their additional thoughts regarding subscription models and/or Open Access. One respondent wrote of several important, inter-connected challenges:

“We are struggling to raise funds. Having been funded for six years, our funder expects us to be self-sufficient. The publishers do not take on African journals, that is, those that publish material on countries other than South Africa, because they have no distribution outlets in African countries and also because they think there is no market in Africa. We are therefore expected to pay publishers fully for publishing our journals. Electronic publishing might lessen the printing costs, but it might also affect the reception of our journal. There is already prejudice against African journals. Prejudices against online journals would just make issue too difficult for us. This is of course a pity because African journals have to be accessed by all African researchers, they do lack access to the major publishing databases.”

A few respondents offered their thoughts related to general concerns with Open Access:

- “Not in favour of open access, as somebody must pay for disseminating the scientific information published.”
- “O/A has many positive aspects to it, but also negative ones, we think that it has adversely affected the standard of journal publishing. There are way too few stringent quality criteria built into o/a, like newspapers, almost anyone can now become an editor and publish a 'scholarly' journal.”
- “Open access is expensive and makes the author carry the burden of publication.”
- “Authors’ works that might have otherwise attracted royalties from manufacturers will not.”

One participant raised several issues related to Open Access, specifically in terms of its context within Africa: “Open Access would of course be ideal, as the hope is that the articles [the journal] produces would be read widely. Financial sustainability is the constraint. The very low subscription rate (\$15) for individuals based in Africa is one way we have tried to address the access issue in Africa.” The same person also noted some issues regarding peer review and Open Access: “I am concerned at the open access online journals that call for papers one week, promising to publish them the next, peer reviewed. I don't believe these are credible claims.”

Responses from those planning or considering switching to Open Access:

- “In the near future we will be embarking on open access publishing.”
- “The editorial board had agreed we subscribe to the Open Access publishing model to increase readership.”
- “We are considering dumping hard copy publishing and adopting Open Access if we can afford it.”
- “We would like to convert to an Open access journal with an embargo period of one year.”
- “Although authors may opt to pay for open access this is not widely known. We are looking at introducing some form of open access in the near future.”

Two responses specifically indicated a preference for Open Access (“I would prefer if we go open access route”, “Open access will be encouraged if we are financially sound”), and a few others requested more information and/or training: “Advise us on how to go on open access. We would appreciate that.” “I would like to know more about the advantages of open access in economic terms over our subscription method.”

Predatory Open Access

One open-ended question asked participants if they were aware of the term “predatory Open Access,” and, “if so, has this influenced your journal’s practices in any way?” This question – which was nearly at the end of the survey – received 185 responses. Of these responses, 75% indicated that the respondent was not familiar with the term ‘Predatory Open Access,’ while 26% of respondents were familiar with the term. Table 5 includes a breakdown of the responses as they were coded into “yes” and “no” categories.

Table 5: Familiarity with 'Predatory Open Access'

	Responses	Percent
“No” – I am not familiar with the term ‘Predatory Open Access’	136	74%
“Yes” – I am familiar with the term ‘Predatory Open Access’	49	26%
Total	185	100%

Only six respondents indicated that this concept has directly influenced their journal’s practices. Specific responses included:

- “It has influenced my journal's practices in that we have in place a firm policy that guard against predatory practices and we adhere to it strictly.”
- “‘Predatory OA’ is an issue and is a concern for authors in making sense of OA as a model.”
- “Predatory Open Access has moved us to continuously enforce publication standards and to only charge Article Processing Fees on acceptance for publication.”
- “We make it explicit that ability to pay is not a condition for publication, and only invoice on acceptance.”

Those respondents who indicated that they were familiar with the concept offered mixed reactions about whether it has affected their practices:

- “‘Predatory publishing’ is a big concern for many African authors with its exploitative dimensions, taking advantage of the publishing imperative.”
- “The journals are rubbish and not scholarly accredited.”
- “We advise all our students and colleagues not to publish in or cite articles from predatory OA journals.”
- “It hasn’t influenced journal's practices, as [we don’t] charge authors to publish.”
- “I have heard about it but it does not affect us in anyway because our journal follows the best global practices in journal publishing. Besides, our journal is not an open access journal.”
- “It hasn't influenced our work in any way because we have our niche area and those interested in advancing the course of academic research do seek us out, instead of the other way round.”
- “It is a menace.”
- “No. [Our journal] publishes papers based on research quality as resulted from thorough peer-review process and board of editors’ decisions. The Journal has given 80% full waiver of APC to authors as we see quality research as a priority.”
- “Not really, we have maintained a strict adherence to our peer-review process.”
- “We have never charged author fees, and do not plan to in the future.”
- “We have waivers and discounts in place for low-income countries (many from Africa) to enable authors from these countries to have access to OA options. We place great importance on the standards and integrity of the peer review and editorial processes to assure authors that acceptance is based on the quality and suitability of their articles and not subject in any way to their ability to pay.”
- “We maintained integrity in peer review and do not charge exorbitant processing fees.”
- “We make sure there is quality peer review process.”
- “No, it has not although we get a lot of questions and we need to guide editors and authors.”

- “There is a lot of this on WAME forum.⁴ I think we need to learn more about this and create awareness among authors.”
- “We always have to warn our editors and societies against these scams and refer them to Beall's list.⁵”

Additional Notes & Observations

Impact Factor Fundamentalism

In recent years, many Open Access advocates around the world have pushed for alternatives to the Thomson-Reuters ISI Impact Factor (IF), the reigning quantitative metric (inappropriately) used as an indicator of the value or impact of articles. However, the issues surrounding the IF are even more pronounced in Africa. While the IF was not directly addressed through the survey, the survey elicited a striking number of comments regarding pressures around Impact Factors, particularly the pressure for journals to get an IF despite it being extremely unusual for African-published journals to be included by Thomson-Reuters in its core journal lists, and the pressures that African researchers face in publishing in the (usually Northern) journals which Thomson-Reuters has chosen to be included in the Impact Factor lists, even if that means African authors focus on research interests of the global North, at the expense of subjects of importance to developing countries and localized research interests. As Gray and Wiens (2014) wrote in a recent report: “Of particular concern was the effect that this system has had given its bias in favour of the research interests of the global North, in consigning developing country research to the periphery and undervaluing research that was of relevance to Africa.”⁶

While this study was not designed to focus explicitly on the Impact Factor or national/university-level policies for the review and promotion of researchers, these issues are currently still intertwined with journal publishing. As long as African researchers are pushed by institutional policies to publish in overseas journals with Impact Factors in order to receive higher “promotion points” from their universities as suggested by survey respondents, African journals will continue to be at a disadvantage compared to their Northern counterparts; with much of the quality research done in the continent, by Africans and on African issues, sent overseas for publication. In the light of this negative influence of university administrations using the Impact Factor as a criterion to evaluate performance of academic staff in Africa, it would be useful for future studies to examine the promotion and review policies and practices of African universities in regards to journal publishing, and make recommendations for constructive change. Surprisingly to the authors of this paper, discarding the Impact Factor was not a key recommendation to African university administrations in the excellent Scholarly Communications in Africa Programme document published in 2014⁷. However, an interesting more recent development to watch in this regard is Thomson-Reuters’ new IF product, which provides a separate journal list called the Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), “which will extend the universe of publications in Web of Science to include high-quality, peer-reviewed publications of regional importance and in emerging scientific fields”⁸.

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⁴ World Association of Medical Editors (WAME): <http://www.wame.org/>

⁵ Beall’s List of Publishers: <http://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>

⁶ Eve Gray and Kelsey Wiens. “Open Access Dialogues: Report on the Global Electronic Debates.” Retrieved from <https://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/OpenAccessDialoguesReport.pdf> on September 28, 2014.

⁷ Trotter, H., Kell, C., Willmers, M., Gray, E., & King, T. (2014). Seeking impact and visibility: Scholarly Communication in Southern Africa. Cape Town: African Minds <http://www.africanminds.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/9781920677510-content2.pdf>

⁸ Retrieved from http://wokinfo.com/media/pdf/ESCI_Fact_Sheet.pdf on 25th March 2016

Throughout the survey, respondents' answers emphasized a scarcity of resources for all types of business models. Rather strikingly, close to one third of respondents indicated that they operate in a "cashless" environment, which highlights the pervasiveness of resource scarcity for scholarly journals throughout Africa. The potentially positive implication of this, however, is that with a supportive policy environment together with training of journal staff, transitioning to a diamond (also called platinum) Open Access publishing model (where no fees are charged to readers or to authors) may well be quite easily attainable by these journals.

For journals that rely on funding income, sources of funds appear to come from a variety of sources. Print subscriptions, author-side fees, and donations all play a significant role. Likewise, it was common for respondents to place a high level of importance on funding from managing organizations (universities, scholarly societies, professional associations) and external funding.

Respondents also emphasized in-kind support from affiliated organizations (e.g. office space, internet access, telephones) and the volunteer time of editors, peer reviewers, and Editors-in-Chief as playing a significant role in supporting their journals' operations. However, several respondents noted concern about an over-reliance on one or two dedicated members of the team and raised concerns about future of their journals once these individuals retire.

Contrary to responses to other questions, participants indicated a great deal optimism for the future. Of those who answered the question, "What do you anticipate your financial status to be in 3-5 years," over half indicated that they expected their journal to be breaking even at that point and another 39% of respondents believe that their journal will be generating a surplus at that point. Even with the self-reported optimism, questions remain about the long-term financial sustainability for many African-based journals.

Tensions between Open Access, Subscription-Based Models; and between online and print

Issues related to Open Access are extremely complex. As one respondent noted:

"Open Access is of course a major issue and very complex for those living and operating in Africa. Too often it is held up to be a panacea for 'the developing world'. OA may boost dissemination but it arguably impedes or complicates knowledge production for many in Africa. Discussion needs to be grounded in the operational aspects of running journals and the very real costs involved and also the importance of knowledge production from local contexts."

Open Access may offer free access for readers, but the very real loss of income from subscriptions was noted by several respondents and contributed to some journals' lack of financial stability. Whereas in the Global North, many Open Access journals have introduced article-processing charges as a means of generating income to support operations, many African-based journals (including subscription-based titles) already have author-side fees in place, or are concerned that African authors may be unable to pay such fees. Furthermore, many journals in the Global North offer waivers for authors from selected countries, but few African-based journals reported offering waivers, thus incentivizing African authors to publish elsewhere. As one respondent noted:

"Since open access and no subscription fee for readership, financing has been an issue as most authors from developing countries make requests for full waiver of Article Processing Charges."

The survey also indicated some level of confusion with terminology, most notably around Open Access as compared with online access. When asked about the benefits of Open Access, the survey elicited several comments specifically about online publishing as an alternative to hard copies, such as “easier to manage without the headache of finding the costs of printing.” Further work might be conducted in the future to review journals’ copyright and licensing policies in comparison with their self-reported status as Open Access. In other words, are some journals self-reporting their status as “Open Access” when they are not consistent with the DOAJ or OASPA criteria of being an Open Access journal? The issue of defining Open Access is much broader than this study, yet confusion with terminology reiterates the challenge, and also suggests large variances in the extent of in-depth knowledge about Open Access on the part of African-published journals.

A very high percentage of respondents indicated that they are (still) producing print publications for a combination of reasons. Key themes which surfaced repeatedly referred to institutional preferences for print in terms of tenure/review/promotion, preferences by readers, concerns about adequate internet access, and the importance of long-term preservation and access. As one respondent noted:

“Many traditional subscribers are unable to operate within the digital environment and struggle to access the journal, subscribe electronically, and download copies. Many still insist on printed copies of the journal.”

Key differences in the norms of scholarly journal publishing in Africa compared to those elsewhere

Continuing from the previous section, in terms of expenses, printing continues to require a significant investment by African journals, even as many journals in the rest of the world are shifting to online-only or print-on-demand models.

While most African journals are operating on very small budgets, some respondents indicated they are paying an honorarium to Editorial Board members, Editors-in-Chief, or peer reviewers – the latter being a practice which is different from (or anathema to) most journals operating elsewhere in the world. 2.9% of South African journal respondents listed peer reviewer honorariums as an expense, 18.6% of journals based in African countries other than SA or Nigeria listed peer reviewer honorariums as an expense, and a full 31.6% of Nigerian respondents did so. This issue is always contentiously debated at AJOL training workshops, with proponents of an honorarium to cover reviewer’s costs often claiming that without this, the journal would be unable to secure reviewers at all.

Less than 20% of African-published journals responding to this survey indicated that they are published by a commercial publisher. Instead, over 60% of African journal respondents are published from a university⁹ (30%) or by a scholarly association (31%), and are often extremely heavily reliant on volunteerism and in-kind support for all aspects of implementing the publishing practices and processes. When South African and Nigerian responses are removed, the proportion of university and society journals becomes even higher compared to commercially published titles. This finding is in line with AJOL’s observations of the norms of its partner journals from throughout the continent, with many journal applicants leaving the “publisher’s information” section on the AJOL application form blank, or filling in the details of a printer that does not offer any other publishing services to the journal. It would be interesting to compare these ratios with those from Latin America.

⁹ including university presses, university departments, university libraries, research centers affiliated with universities, and all other types of university affiliates.

Somewhat surprisingly to the authors, over half of the responding journals indicated that they are fully and immediately Open Access (with the latter being loosely defined as free full text online). This is perhaps counter to impressions of a lag in African journal publishing in this regard, and is actually likely to represent a higher proportion of OA journals compared to that in the Global North. However, this percentage of OA titles is low compared to that in Latin America, which, as another developing country region, may serve as a very useful model for scholarly journal publishing in Africa to emulate going forward, particularly as regards the diamond (or platinum) Open Access model, which is widely implemented in Latin America.

Very few respondents indicated that the government was a particularly important source of funding or of a supportive and enabling policy environment – a key difference from other parts of the developing world such as Latin America, where Open Access is being embraced and supported in policy and funding by the public sector.

For More Information

As has already been mentioned, this article presents a small subset of findings from the survey. The full report is available from AJOL's website. Once anonymised and fully analyzed, much of the data will be made accessible in OA through Figshare.

