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Response to comment on “Open is not forever: a study of vanished open access journals”

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The comment authored by Shelomi raises the argument that we failed to account for predatory journals, which the author defines as journals that “practice no peer review” and that “exist solely to defraud academics.” According to Shelomi, the potential vanishing of such journals would only be a positive event. We consider any discussion and feedback concerning journal preservation and our study valuable. To avoid any misunderstandings, Shelomi seems to refer to an older version of our manuscript and dataset that was shared as a preprint, not the ones used for the published article in *JASIST*. Here, we respond to the major points raised in the comment. Our responses refer to the peer-reviewed article, not the preprint.

Shelomi's seems to imply that our study was built solely on journals that were removed from the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and that the change in the DOAJ's indexing criteria caused many journals to vanish in 2014 because they were predatory. Shelomi fails to acknowledge that we used several data sources to identify vanished open access (OA) journals. The DOAJ was just one of these, albeit the most prominent, and many journals that we identified through the DOAJ were also found through Scopus and Ulrichsweb. In addition, the majority of journals in our sample were affiliated with a university or a scholarly society. Shelomi further suggests that a possible explanation for the large number of vanished journals from North America is that they were predatory and, therefore, excluded from the DOAJ. This is not something we can prove or reject with only bibliometric data at hand. However, the observation we pointed out earlier applies here as well: Many of the vanished journals from the United States were indexed in Ulrichsweb or affiliated with a university or scholarly society. Through this lens, we do not see that North American journals and their removal from the DOAJ would form a strong causal pattern as Shelomi suggests. For those interested, Frantsov (2019) provides a dedicated review of journals removed from the DOAJ—such an analysis was outside the scope of our study.

Shelomi's comment overlooks that our study is about identifying lacking preservation regardless of scholarly quality. We hold that if the scholarly community did more to archive and preserve openly published scholarly materials—regardless of the outlet—less would be lost over time. We do not condone predatory publishing practices but the need for increased preservation of scholarly content should not be dismissed. We purposefully did not cross-check our data with lists of journals of alleged “questionable” quality because, at this moment, there is no transparent or ethical way of reliably identifying such journals, particularly in cases where all or large parts of the websites and content are missing. If and how journals should be assessed for potential predatory practices is still a hotly debated topic in the scholarly community, with no straightforward or definitive way of classifying

journals. Without question, there is room for extensive analyses of journal histories and circumstances that influenced their lifecycles and existence, but such studies should avoid categorizing journals based on non-transparent criteria or jumping to conclusions. Contributions that only scratch the surface of this complex issue, which there is no shortage of, do more harm than good.

We want to emphasize that our dataset is completely open and includes information about the sources through which we identified the journals (Laakso et al., 2020). We invite those interested to have a look at the remains of the journals themselves and to use the dataset as a foundation for further studies.

References

- Frantsvåg, J. E. (2019). The DOAJ spring cleaning 2016 and what was removed—Tragic loss or good riddance? *Publications*, 7(3), 45. <https://doi.org/10.3390/publications7030045>
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