

Flipping the South African Journal of Business Management: The implications of going Open Access

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Introduction

For most of the history of academic publishing, the subscription model, where readers pay for new journal issues, has dominated. Recent years have seen a push against this model. There are two motivations for this push. Firstly, the research findings should be publicly available as it was publicly funded. Restricting access to journals behind paywalls limits science as the scientific community continues to build on past work. The common thinking on this topic is that it is ludicrous to expect institutions that supported the research to repurchase it for its community to read.

Secondly, the motivation for moving away from the subscription model centres around the publication timelines. Articles in printed journals, usually published in a few issues throughout the year, are made available months after they are accepted, finalised and electronically indexed even later. This time delay results in the ageing of the research, potentially impacting its timely relevance and, thus, its contribution.

The Open Access (OA) movement is a response to these issues. By changing the funding model, where the author pays, scientists and their institutions effectively open the research results to the public. Articles are made available as soon as they are finalised. A journal's transition from a subscription to OA is commonly termed 'flipping the journal'.

The *a priori* assumption in flipping journals is that removing the restrictions on readers will increase the number of readers, resulting in a corresponding increase in citations. However, this has not been the universal experience (Langham-Putrow et al., 2021), with many factors influencing the relationship between readership and citations.

Moving to an author-pays funding model (Gold OA) might discourage authors who could only afford the dramatically lower author-processing costs that were charged in the subscription model. 'With a new publishing model comes the potential for new communities of authors and readers to gather around it' (Lerro, 2018).

A third point, linked to the previous two, was the effect that flipping the journal would have on the reputation of the journal. Despite the many OA journals with solid reputations, there are still those that equate the Gold OA model with predatory practices. Many predatory journals have used the OA model to lure unsuspecting authors to part with their research funds under the promise of rapid publication, which is achieved by the complete disregard for scientific checks.

Lacking in the literature on flipping journals was the lived experience of a journal that moved to an OA model on these three related issues: the citation advantage, the changing communities and the reputation of the journal. This article presents the case of the South African Journal of Business Management (SAJBM) and explores the following research questions:

1. What has the impact of moving to OA been on the authorship profile of the SAJBM in terms of:
 - a. Volume of articles
 - b. Geographical location of the authors
 - c. Topics of the articles
2. How has the move to OA impacted the citation behaviour in terms of:
 - a. Time to first citation
 - b. Number and geographical region of citing articles
 - c. Topics of citing articles
3. What impact has the move to OA had on the journal's reputation?

Note: Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article as Online Appendix 1.

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Growth of Open Access in South Africa

The timeline of OA initiation and global adoption has been well documented and will not be repeated here. The South African case is not as well described. The Registry of Open Access Repository Mandates and Policies (ROARMap, 2022) shows the first South African entry dating from 2005. In that year, De Beer (2005, p. 98) reported on the first survey that looked at OA awareness at a South African university, where only half of the respondents reported a working knowledge of OA journals and described OA initiatives as 'disparate' and isolated (De Beer, 2005). In another study published a year later, OA was reported not to be a factor influencing the choice of journal (Möller, 2006, p. 117). A number of researchers had reported not yet to have read any OA publications, with uncertainties around the peer-review process, potential impact and recognition in the South African review committees (Möller, 2006). Further results show the slow progress of OA at that time, 'here is little likelihood of South African researchers choosing to publish in open access journals' (Möller, 2006) unless there were more local OA journals (Möller, 2006).

Thankfully, the number of local OA journals has grown. In 2006, there were only five OA journals located in South Africa (De Beer, 2006, p. 13). Seven years later, this figure had grown to 43 (Nwagwu, 2013, p. 6) and 67 in 2015, dwarfed by Egypt's 441 (Fox & Hanlon, 2015, p. 703). The growth continued in subsequent years, with 75 in 2015 (Ezema & Onyancha, 2017, p. 105) to 129¹ listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals in 2022.

However, there is still room for further growth. Institutions with OA policies still support closed-access journals (e.g. Mousaion at the University of South Africa or Studies in Economics and Econometrics at Stellenbosch University). There is little to no pressure from institutions whose researchers serve on editorial boards to ensure that the journals move to OA, despite policies that provide pressure to authors. Should this oversight be addressed, there would be exponential growth in the near future of South African OA journals.

History of the South African Journal of Business Management

The first issue of the SAJBM was published in 1969 as the journal of the South African Association of Business Management. Professor D.C.U. Conradie, the president of the association's council, was the first editor. It was funded through advertising that was included in the printed editions. The editorship rotated through various presidents and business schools until it settled at the University of Stellenbosch Business School (now Stellenbosch Business School) under the editorial eye of Prof. Eon van der Merwe Smit in 1999, with Marion Leurs as the managing editor.

1.As of 27 October 2022.

The journal remained with Smit for the following 18 years, with Ilse Munnik taking over from Leurs in 2014. The editorship then passed to Prof. Mias de Klerk upon Smit's retirement from the Stellenbosch Business School, with Dr Lara Skelly as the managing editor.

In anticipation of the move to an author-pays OA publishing model, the author processing charges were doubled in 2016 and 2017. In the years prior to changing the publishing model, there was no noticeable difference in the submissions to the journal, which provided the editors with some confidence that the OA publishing model could succeed. The author processing charges were increased in line with other OA journals in the country as well as within the discipline.

In 2018, the University of Stellenbosch Business School² partnered with AOSIS, an independent South African publisher that had been publishing OA material since 1999 and currently houses 45 scholarly journals. AOSIS is a local publisher of good repute that the editorial team had a good experience with a track record of efficient management of OA journals. The transition took several months and included moving old issues to the new platform, communicating the funding model change to potential authors and recreating the reviewer database.

By 2019 it was clear that the OA model was financially sustainable. What was not yet apparent was the effect that changing to the OA model would have on the journal itself.

Methods

Given that the SAJBM transitioned to an OA model during 2018, the years between 2019 and 2021 (inclusive) were taken as the 3 years post-OA. As a comparison, data from 2015 to 2017 were taken as the pre-OA years. All data were downloaded from Scopus in June 2022. The citation data include self-citation.

Quantitative measures were compared using a visual analysis generated in Microsoft Excel. Semantic maps are visual representations of word associations. They were created in VOSviewer (Leiden University, Centre for Science and Technology Studies, Leiden, Netherlands) (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). It accepts bibliographic information from several sources. In this case, data from Scopus were used. Terms were extracted from titles, keywords and abstracts and visually displayed in a semantic map. The size of the circles represents the frequency of the terms; the more frequent, the larger the circle is displayed. The geographic spread shows the regularity of terms used together. The more regularly terms are used together, the closer they will be displayed. The VOSviewer then colour codes the terms that are most frequently clustered together.

For example, in Figure 2, 'performance' and 'study' regularly appear in the same article, and this is shown by the close proximity of these two keywords. While 'study' and

2.Now Stellenbosch Business School.

'advertising' are not that often used in the same article, as shown by the 'advertising' outlier.

The VOSviewer parameters were as follows: counting was set to full, as opposed to binary, minimum occurrences of terms were set to 10, and relevancy score was the default 60%. Full-size versions of these maps are available for download (Skelly, 2022).

Results

Profile of the South African Journal of Business Management

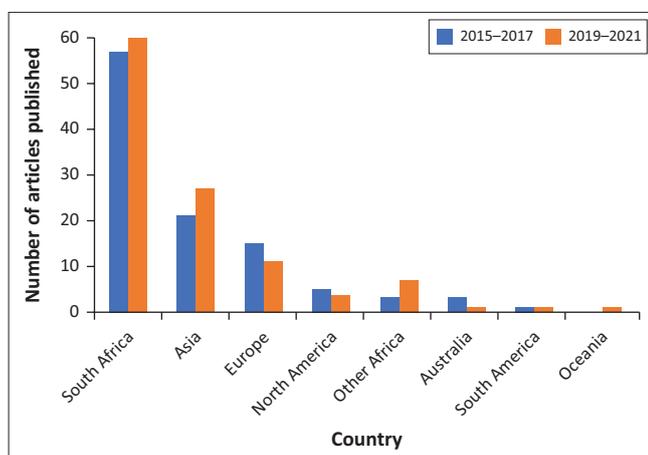
Volume of articles

Unfortunately, an accurate record of the number of submissions to the SAJBM before 2015 was not kept. However, it has been estimated to be around 300 manuscripts annually, while in the later years (2019–2021), the average number of submissions is 425, some of which was a result of the publication spike that many journals saw during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. To look at the impact on the volume of flipping the journal, the number of articles can be examined. There was a slight increase in the number of articles published in the OA model (see Figure 1). Whether this is a result of the attractiveness of the publishing model is not known. This increase could also be attributed to the move to an electronic submission management system, which coincided with the move to OA. One would assume that such a system would improve efficiency, resulting in more articles moving from submission to publication.

Geographic distribution of authors

The geographical distribution of authors has remained stable (see Figure 1).

Moving the journal to an OA model has not significantly impacted the journal's identity, as an avenue for South African authors, despite the updating scope note to remove a focus on articles relevant to the South African context (SAJBM, 2022). In the later years, more articles were published



Source: Data sourced from Scopus, 22 June 2022

FIGURE 1: Number of articles by author's region.

from Africa and Asia; however, there has been a drop in publications from Europe, North America and Australia. The editors attribute the increase in publication numbers to the change in the editorial system, going from a manual system to an electronic one. The reduction in publications from Europe, North America and Australia remains a question to the editors.

Topics of articles

Semantic maps of the topics of the SAJBM are shown in Figure 2 for pre-OA and Figure 3 for post-OA.

Comparing the geographic spread of the two semantic maps, both show a unimodal distribution, with all terms closely located in one centre. This grouping indicates that there has been one community, which is most likely interdisciplinary, focused on topics related to business management, rather than two or more distinct communities, each addressing discreet topics. This distribution has not changed during the journal's transition. The journal's identity continues as one that speaks to issues on business management, broadly and interdisciplinarily, as the terms are clustered around 'study', showing the journal as one that is firmly rooted in the scientific method.

Topics have shifted somewhat, which can be seen in the change in the dominance of some keywords. For example, finance keywords (yellow in Figure 2) are less prominent post-OA, while organisational behaviour topics (green in Figure 3) are more prominent post-OA. The shifting interest is likely because of the natural shift within the discipline.

Who is citing South African Journal of Business Management?

The move to OA had a marginal impact on the authorship in the SAJBM. The impact on citations is of particular interest in changing models as the increase in citations is given as the primary advantage of OA to authors and journal editors.

Time to first citation

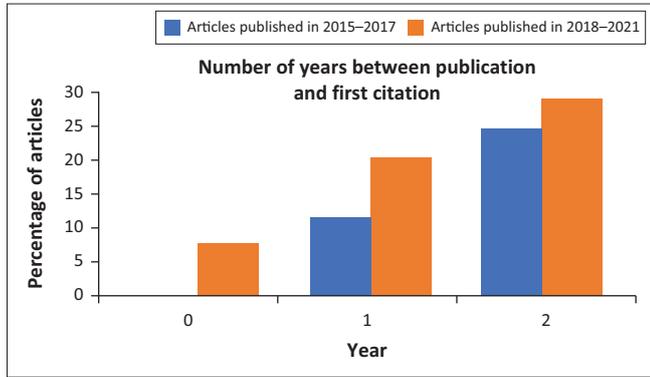
Prior to going OA, no articles were cited in their year of publication (see Figure 4); by opening the readership of the journal, articles appear to garner citations sooner, with 7.6% of the article published cited in their first year. It is reasonable to conclude that the speed of first citation has improved in the new model, with more articles cited sooner. The time to first citation has traditionally been overlooked as part of the citation advantage of flipping a journal.

Volume and geography of citations

Removing the paywall to readers has had the hoped-for effect of increasing the citations, the most striking change. The journal has shown a clear citation advantage in the move to OA (see Figure 5). Some of this increase could be because of the increased research activity that the editors experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, but certainly, a good part of

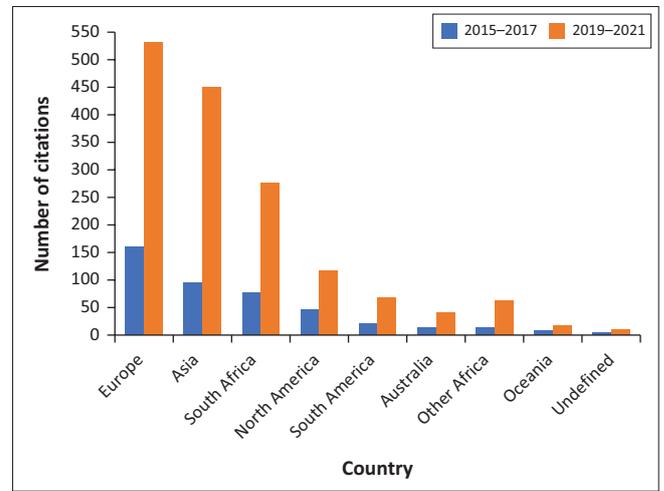
Other editors and publishers may be concerned that their journals might not experience a citation advantage in flipping their publications. The benefit to the journal might come in other areas, such as reducing the lag to the first citation, effectively increasing the speed of impact, or changing communities of authors and readers to better align with the journal’s strategy.

It is a worthwhile exercise to track the journal’s communities and visibility. Data drawn from Scopus provided valuable knowledge for the SAJBM experience; should a journal not



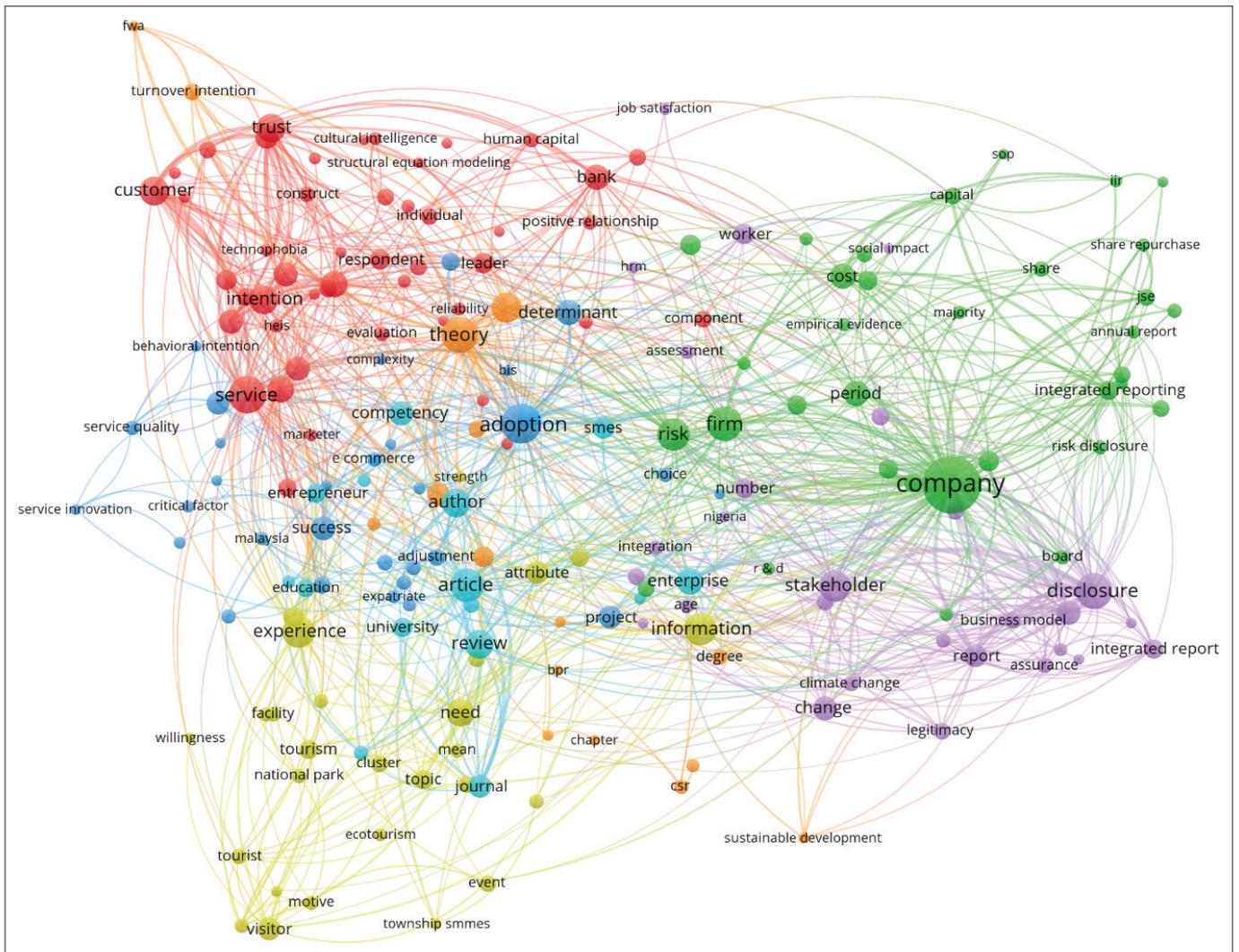
Source: Data sourced from Scopus, 22 June 2022

FIGURE 4: The percentage of cited articles, by years after publication.



Source: Data sourced from Scopus, 28 June 2022

FIGURE 5: Number of citations by region.



Source: Data sourced from Scopus, 10 August 2022, created with VOSviewer. Full-size images can be downloaded at <https://doi.org/10.17028/rd.lboro.20464023>

FIGURE 6: Semantic map of topics in articles citing the South African Journal of Business Management in 2015–2017.

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