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## Investigation and Analysis of Open Access Journal Rights Policies

**Authors:** Liu Jingyu, Huang Jinxia, Wang Fang, Liu Jingyu

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### Abstract

Through an investigation of website information from 20 open access journal publishers, this study sorts out rights information related to the reuse of open access journals, further summarizes three main types of current OA journal rights policies—including open access policies, website use policies, and bulk data acquisition policies—and analyzes the impact of policy content on library construction of open access journals and countermeasures that libraries can adopt.

### Full Text

## Investigation and Analysis of Open Access Journal Rights and Interests Policies

**Liu Jingyu, Huang Jinxia, Wang Fang\***

\*\*(\*National Science Library, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, 100190)\*\*

**Abstract:** Through investigating website information from 20 open access journal publishers, this study identifies rights-related information pertinent to the reuse of OA journals and further categorizes three primary types of current OA journal rights policies: open access policies, website usage policies, and bulk data acquisition policies. The analysis examines how these policy contents impact library-led OA journal development and proposes actionable strategies for libraries.

**Keywords:** open access journals, open access, rights policies, open resources

Open Access (OA) journals allow any user to freely access, read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, and link to full-text articles via the public internet for legitimate purposes such as indexing or software development [1]. OA journals typically undergo peer review and operate through author-pays

models or funded publication, with content usage and sharing governed by Creative Commons agreements that break traditional copyright restrictions. These characteristics make OA journals a cornerstone of the open access movement, significantly advancing scholarly communication. Consequently, the reuse of OA journals has become a critical focus for library resource development [2]. However, open access does not equate to unrestricted utilization. In the digital environment, OA journal reuse remains subject to multiple constraints, requiring compliance with content-related rights regulations, proper management of relationships among authors, publishers, users, and other stakeholders, and ensuring that all parties' rights are fully represented and protected—while securing additional rights for libraries [3].

Currently, constraints on OA journal reuse, such as copyright, licensing, and download policies, are primarily published on OA journal or publisher websites. Practical resource development reveals significant inconsistencies in the content and format of OA policies, substantial variations in publisher and journal website design, scattered distribution of open resource rights information that is difficult to locate and analyze, and non-standardized terminology. These challenges create substantial difficulties for library open resource developers in identifying rights information and understanding constraints, making it hard to grasp the overall rights landscape and its impact on reuse.

Against this backdrop, and in conjunction with the National Science and Technology Library (NSTL) open resource development initiative, this study selected 20 representative OA publishers to investigate rights-related information on their OA journal websites, identify policy types relevant to OA journal reuse, and analyze how these policies affect resource utilization.

## 2. Basic Characteristics of Open Access Journals and Related Rights Stakeholders

Understanding OA journal policies requires clear comprehension of OA journals' inherent characteristics and rights constraints, including the key stakeholders and their claims. Literature review reveals that OA journal production and dissemination exhibit several features: (1) OA journal content primarily comprises OA articles, including metadata and full text in PDF, XML, and HTML formats; (2) article content is created by authors while metadata is generated by publishers; (3) OA articles may be funded by institutions during creation; (4) OA journals are formally published by diverse entities, including traditional commercial publishers (e.g., Springer, Elsevier), pure OA publishers (e.g., Hindawi, Frontiers), integrated platforms (e.g., SCIELO), and scholarly societies (International Institute for Science); (5) OA journals are typically released on publisher platforms or aggregated on unified platforms.

Based on these characteristics, OA journal rights stakeholders include authors, funders, publishers, and journal platform owners. Their specific claims are:

- 1) **Authors** naturally hold copyright. For gold OA journals, most retain

copyright, transferring partial rights through licensing agreements, typically Creative Commons licenses. Authors' rights claims manifest as copyright statements and selected usage licenses.

- 2) **Funders** generally do not hold copyright except for works made for hire. Their role primarily involves encouraging researchers to select appropriate licenses and regulating article self-archiving. Funder policies also influence publisher open access strategies. Funders' rights claims are expressed through publisher-provided licenses; for example, Oxford University Press (OUP) stipulates that articles funded by the Wellcome Trust and RCUK may use CC BY licenses.
- 3) **Publishers** hold publication rights, processing metadata and managing publication and distribution workflows. Publishers recommend open access policies for authors based on funder policies. Their rights claims appear in OA publishing agreements, article self-archiving policies, and copyright protection for website content and design beyond author and third-party copyrights.
- 4) **Platform owners** hold database rights and copyright for platform design and content.
- 5) **Users'** rights are indirectly expressed through usage permissions stipulated in license agreements, placing users in a passive acceptance position.

These stakeholder claims constitute the focus of this study's rights information, reflected across publishing platforms from article copyright to publisher rights, user permissions for reading, downloading, copying, derivative works, and redistribution, platform terms of use, and author self-archiving rights.

### 3. Distribution of Open Access Journal Rights Information

This study investigated 20 typical OA publishers or platforms, examining all rights-related information on their websites, including 栏目 names and specific content. The publishers encompassed traditional major publishers (Springer Nature, Elsevier, Wiley), new fully OA publishers (Medknow, Dove Medical Press, MDPI), and OA journal platforms like SCIELO, covering **2,500 journals**.

Findings show OA journal rights information is distributed across: OA journal introductions, Open Access sections, Open Access Policy sections, author submission guidelines, website terms of use, Help, FAQ, and metadata bulk harvesting sections. Rights policies are generally consistent across journals from the same publisher, though licenses may vary.

Among the 20 publishers, 18 maintain dedicated "Open Access Policy" sections with names including Open Access, Open Access Policy, Open Access Statement, Open Access Information and Policy, and Open access and Copyright. These sections cover key OA journal rights:

**9 publishers** declare their publishing models; for example, Oxford University Press supports open access through two models: Oxford Open and fully open access journals.

**16 publishers** articulate clear copyright policies: article content copyright belongs to authors, third-party content copyright or trademark rights remain with original creators, and publishers hold exclusive or non-exclusive rights for publication and commercial operation.

**All 20 publishers** regulate OA journal article reuse: **8** follow CC BY for all content, **6** use CC BY-NC prohibiting commercial reuse, and **5** offer the most restrictive CC BY-NC-ND license as an author option.

**5 publishers** specify article access timelines and copyright; for example, SCIELO states all platform content is freely accessible upon release, while Medknow's PDF policy allows free HTML access for all OA articles but only partial free PDF access.

**5 publishers** propose self-archiving policies; Scientific Research Publishing states authors may freely archive preprints or postprints and should utilize SCIRP-generated crossref.org links when linking to their work.

**10 publishers** establish Article Processing Charge (APC) policies.

**5 publishers** declare long-term preservation policies for OA journal content; for example, Springer, as a LOCKSS member, implements long-term preservation for digital publications.

Beyond dedicated OA sections, website terms of use also contain OA journal rights information. Among surveyed publishers, **14** have explicit website/platform terms (e.g., Terms of Use, Terms and Conditions, General and Licence Terms and Conditions):

**8 publishers** claim copyright for websites and all content under relevant laws; BMC's terms specify that unless otherwise stated, website content is BMC property, copyright belongs to BMC and its licensors, and trademarks are protected under UK and international law.

**10 publishers** regulate website content reuse regarding copying, derivative works, redistribution, commercial use, alternative storage, and automated downloading. BMC and Libertas Academica Ltd. prohibit crawling, copying, linking, or machine harvesting to create new databases. Sciencedomain International and Frontiers forbid copying or machine harvesting to form new databases. Oxford University Press requires compliance with technical limits of one page per minute for automated downloads, with potential access blocking for violations. Medknow prohibits storing any website content in other databases.

**5 publishers** reserve rights to terminate user access or modify terms.

**8 publishers** specify jurisdictional governance; BMC terms are governed by UK law, Molecular Diversity Preservation International by Swiss law, and

Springer by German law.

**6 publishers** establish website linking policies; Molecular Diversity Preservation International states that linking to their site does not imply MDPI endorsement of linked content, and MDPI reserves the right to compel removal of any links.

Beyond direct rights descriptions, publishers' bulk acquisition and text mining policies also impact OA resource reuse. Among the 20 publishers, **9** provide OAI-PMH standard interfaces or APIs for metadata harvesting (Hindawi offers OAI; Springer, BMC provide proprietary APIs). Molecular Diversity Preservation International provides both OAI interfaces and MDPI Full-Text Corpus Download services for zip file packages.

Additionally, **2 publishers** regulate text mining of bulk OA content. Elsevier provides text mining APIs; OA articles can be directly mined but reuse must follow specific licenses. Wiley offers three license options—CC BY, CC BY-NC, and CC BY-NC-ND—with explanations for non-commercial and commercial use considerations. Non-commercial text mining is permitted under the latter two licenses but must link to bibliographic information.

## 4. Main Types of Open Access Journal Rights Policies

The analysis reveals that while no unified standards currently exist for OA journal rights information distribution and content, typical publishers show convergence in both 类目 locations and policy items. To better comprehend the overall rights landscape, this study classifies OA journal rights policies into three types: “Open Access Policy,” “Website Usage Policy,” and “Bulk Data Acquisition Policy.” Among the 20 surveyed publishers, most have explicit open access and platform usage policies, while few provide bulk data acquisition policies, with most lacking clear statements on bulk access.

### 4.1 Open Access Policy

The “Open Access Policy” primarily addresses OA journal article content reuse, including: (1) **Publishing policy**: journal publishing models such as gold or green OA; (2) **Copyright policy**: copyright holders (typically authors or publishers); (3) **Third-party copyright policy**: statements on third-party content within articles; (4) **Article reuse policy**: usage or open access licenses; (5) **Article access policy**: immediate vs. delayed OA and which versions are openly accessible (e.g., PDF access policies); (6) **Self-archiving policy**: permissible article versions, embargoes, and repository requirements; (7) **Long-term preservation policy**: data security through long-term preservation and backup, often mentioning partnerships with preservation organizations; (8) **APC policy**: article processing fee standards.

The table reveals varying completeness in publishers' open access policies, though all have explicit regulations for OA journal content reuse. Most OA journals

include copyright statements for article content, but third-party content copyright policies remain underdeveloped. Few publishers have policies on article access, self-archiving, or long-term preservation. Additionally, publishers introduce their own open publishing policies and APCs. Overall, publishers' primary concern remains how users may utilize resources on their platforms.

#### 4.2 Website Usage Policy

“Website Terms of Use” generally apply to all platform or website content, including: (1) **Website content reuse policy**: regulations on copying, derivative works, distribution, and commercial use; (2) **Website content access and security policy**: restrictions on automated downloading and security provisions; (3) **Website content storage policy**: rules on storing website content to create new databases; (4) **Termination and modification rights policy**: publishers typically reserve rights to terminate user access or modify terms; (5) **Website linking policy**: linking to and from the website.

The table shows inconsistent constraints across OA journal websites/platforms. Some publishers, like Hindawi and SCIELO, have no website terms, while others, including both traditional commercial publishers (Elsevier) and pure OA publishers (Frontiers), have extensive terms. Most restrict website content reuse methods, with some providing detailed specifications on content acquisition (e.g., machine downloading), copying, and storage. Publishers also typically reserve rights to modify terms and terminate access, which may affect user experience.

#### 4.3 Bulk Data Acquisition Policy

The “Bulk Data Acquisition Policy,” emerging from open resource characteristics, typically appears as technical solutions like “open interfaces” or bulk download services, including: (1) **Metadata harvesting policy**: provision of standard metadata harvesting interfaces; (2) **Full-text download policy**: FTP or zip file download services; (3) **Text mining policy**.

The table indicates that few OA journals currently have bulk data acquisition policies. Only Elsevier and Wiley provide policy statements on text mining of bulk data. Overall, OA journals show low consistency, standardization, and completeness in rights policies, with significant variation among publishers. However, constraints on article and website content reuse are relatively well-developed, suggesting these should be priority concerns in open resource development. The lack of clear policies on bulk data may hinder large-scale reuse, indicating libraries should focus on rights management and risk mitigation through collaboration with providers.

## 5. Impact of Open Access Journal Rights Policies on Resource Reuse and Countermeasures

In current library open resource development, OA journal reuse primarily manifests as harvesting, storage, integrated discovery, downloading, deep processing and analysis, and third-party provision. The analysis reveals that various rights policies constrain these reuse methods at different levels.

### 5.1 Broad Impact of Open Access Policies, Focusing on Content Utilization Constraints

OA journal publishing policies fundamentally explain a journal's open access stance, providing essential guidance for the entire reuse workflow. Publishers' open access policies primarily include copyright and article reuse policies, both focusing on content usage. Copyright policies require respecting work copyright—a principle mandatory in both open and traditional publishing. Article reuse policies regulate individual OA article usage, including reading, downloading, copying, distribution, derivative works, printing, indexing, and linking.

The survey found all OA journals assign copyright to authors, with publishers holding exclusive publication or commercial exploitation rights; figure copyright belongs to authors; trademarks or other third-party content copyright remains with original creators; and unclear copyright generally belongs to publishers (e.g., BMC). Most OA journals adopt CC licenses, but only 8 use CC BY for all content, granting broad user rights, while others employ stricter licenses or retain copyright under national fair use principles.

Consequently, libraries must properly attribute copyright holders throughout OA journal reuse, including third-party resources, and identify citation sources. During organization, processing, and service provision, libraries must distinguish service purposes to ensure compliance with license terms. Since current licenses primarily address individual works, the mixing of multiple licenses and varying openness levels in bulk data reuse should be addressed through publisher collaboration.

### 5.2 Website Usage Policies Focus on Resource Acquisition and Storage Constraints

Most publishers' website usage policies provide detailed specifications on content acquisition, storage, linking, and security. Regarding automated crawling that may cause pressure and security risks, publishers' attitudes vary: some permit OA journal harvesting while others explicitly prohibit it. For example, Libertas Academica Ltd. prohibits crawling except for OA articles; Sciencedomain International and Frontiers forbid any copying or machine harvesting; Oxford University Press requires compliance with technical limits of one page per minute for automated downloads, with potential access blocking for violations. For storage, Medknow explicitly prohibits storing any website content in other

databases, while Libertas Academica Ltd. prohibits reproducing or creating new databases from non-OA content. Regarding linking, OA platforms generally encourage linking to their sites but disclaim responsibility for linked content and reserve rights to terminate linking privileges.

Therefore, libraries must comprehensively and accurately understand these key rights points in target websites' usage policies before harvesting, storing, and building service systems to reduce risks during resource integration and utilization.

### 5.3 Incomplete Bulk Data Acquisition Policies Impact Resource Harvesting and Deep Processing

Only half of OA journals provide bulk metadata acquisition via OAI or API, with other publishers offering no explicit statements on bulk access. Few publishers provide direct full-text download pathways—only MDPI offers such services through MDPI Full-Text Corpus Download. This policy landscape affects library bulk harvesting and storage. Additionally, 绝大多数 OA journals lack policies or statements on bulk utilization such as text mining, with only Elsevier providing text mining APIs and stating CC-licensed content may be mined, and Wiley permitting text mining of CC-licensed OA articles but without providing bulk data interfaces. Since libraries primarily rely on centralized, bulk harvesting, storage, and analysis to serve the public and researchers, policy gaps or ambiguities hinder OA journal reuse. Libraries should emphasize rights management and risk handling at the front end of utilization activities, collaborating with resource providers to mitigate risks and ensure sustainable open resource development.

Comprehensive analysis and mastery of OA journal rights policies constitute a prerequisite and foundational step for library OA journal development, serving as a critical reference for identifying key rights risks and addressing issues. While current OA journal rights policies lack unified standards, this study's classification reveals discernible patterns in information location and content. This work aims to help library resource developers better understand OA journal rights constraints and provide reference for analyzing rights information in other open resource types.

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