



EDITORIAL

The Open-access Journal Controversy

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When you wake up in the morning do you read the paper? Watch the news? Or instead do you scroll through the multitude of applications on your phone or computer checking various social media sites, news outlets, or magazine articles? If you do not, you are in the minority. We are living in the age of information. At no other time in human history has there been such seamless, immediate access to information. But is that for the best? It has become expected in this era of instant gratification to feel comfortable with free, instant, and many. We want options. 47% of the global population uses the internet. We believe that universal access to knowledge is a human right in the same way that many fight for the equality of opportunity. However, as we navigate the uncharted territory of technology, we must be diligent and cautious.

Open-access journals epitomize the idealization of universal access to knowledge. Why should an assistant professor in Thailand be forced to pay a \$50 download fee, 2 days salary, to access an article that they wrote? However, in the same vein, why should they have to pay \$1,500 to submit an article to a journal. It is likely that they cannot afford either scenario. Both business models present paywalls that limit universal knowledge access either on the front end or the back end. The reality is that the costs associated with journal production, upkeep, and innovation are impediments to an ideal system of free submission and free access; however, such an ideal is unsustainable. The dilemma of scholars worldwide then becomes which is the better of two evils?

When speaking on information sharing, one of the most concerning aspects of the modern era is information overload. We are now bombarded with a plethora of resources all of which compete for our attention, and because the barrier to entry has been lowered with the internet, who is to say that these resources are of a credible quality? The traditional subscription-based access to peer-reviewed journals is a system not without flaws; however, its embedded process of checks and balances ensures the most honest and high-quality works

make it to print. A major concern of open-access journals is the potential for further creation of academic “noise” during a time period when researchers are already inundated with daily updates of new publications. Predatory journals are a coined term for open-access journals scamming scholars for financial gain with little concern for the dilution of academic innovation.

Far from being a concern in theory, an investigation by Bohannon (2013) has shown that this is very real and wide spread among open-access publishers but thankfully not universal. Bohannon submitted a series of “fake” scientific studies to open-access publishers between January and August 2013. The studies were performed by non-existent authors from non-existent academic institutions reporting the results of laboratory studies that were fictitious with many obvious errors in experimental design and results presented. At the time of reporting, the papers had been accepted for publication by 157 open-access journals and rejected by 98 open-access journals and had a decision pending in 49 open-access journals. Bohannon noted that, in approximately 60% of cases, an editorial decision was made without evidence of a peer-review process.

Like any evolutionary process, some entities are developing niches in an effort to create spaces of academic and financial integrity. Some publishing companies are adopting a “hybrid” business model that incorporates open-access systems into the traditional membership subscription. This model is not only designed to compete with the overwhelming expansion of the open access market but also helps to distribute the costs equally between the two business models. In theory, if such a company chose to cap its profit margin, this blended system could lower to costs of services. Another niche is the creation of “green open access,” a strategy of self-archiving articles onto public depositories. This allows scholars who cannot afford subscriptions access after publication. Many journals connected to scholarly societies are beginning to adopt these strategies in an effort to better universalize the research. The global academic community

is no doubt in a period of flux. It is our duty to approach this change with a healthy, idealistic skepticism in an effort to create an environment that most effectively fosters the birth of innovation and the furthering of our scientific exploration into truth.

Moreover, with all these in mind, we embark on this new journal which aims to be scientifically rigorous, educational, and informative in a way that is readily available without financial or technical barriers.



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