

Charging for Research Submissions: An Exploitative Practice That Should Be Abolished

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Abstract

Charging fees for research submissions is a growing trend in academic publishing that has sparked considerable controversy. This practice, which forces researchers to pay for the mere consideration of their work, is not only exploitative but also fundamentally undermines the integrity of scholarly communication. This paper argues that charging submission fees is a blatant violation of the ethical principles that should govern academic publishing. Journals that engage in this practice prioritize profit over the advancement of knowledge and should not be allowed to operate within the scholarly community.

Introduction

Academic publishing is built on the foundation of advancing knowledge and contributing to the global exchange of ideas. Researchers dedicate their careers to producing work that pushes the boundaries of human understanding, often without financial compensation. However, the recent trend of charging fees for research submissions represents a perverse distortion of this noble endeavor. Submission fees, which require researchers to pay simply to have their work considered for publication, are a gross exploitation of the academic community. This paper contends that such fees are not only unethical but also represent a blatant disregard for the principles of fairness and accessibility that should be at the core of academic publishing. Journals that engage in this practice are little more than profiteering entities that exploit the very individuals they should be serving, and they should be dismantled.

The Exploitative Nature of Submission Fees

At its core, the practice of charging submission fees is a predatory tactic that takes advantage of researchers, particularly those who are most vulnerable. Academics, especially early-career researchers, are under immense pressure to publish their work to secure tenure, funding, and professional recognition (Cameron, 2005). Journals that charge submission fees prey on this desperation, forcing researchers to pay exorbitant fees with no guarantee that their work will even be considered, let alone published.

This practice is particularly egregious because it targets individuals who are already contributing their labor for free. Researchers are expected to produce high-quality work, often over many years, and submit it to journals without any expectation of financial compensation. Peer reviewers, who are also unpaid, dedicate their time and expertise to evaluate submissions, all in the name of advancing knowledge. To then demand that researchers pay for the privilege of having their work reviewed is an insult to the very ethos of academic publishing (Tennant et al., 2019).

The Barrier to Access and Equity

Submission fees are not just exploitative; they also create significant barriers to access, particularly for researchers from underfunded institutions, developing countries, and marginalized communities. Academic research should be an inclusive endeavor, where the quality of work is the sole determinant of publication, not the financial resources of the author (Piron, 2018). By imposing submission fees, journals effectively gatekeep access to academic publishing, allowing only those with the means to pay to participate.

This practice perpetuates existing inequalities within academia, where well-funded researchers from prestigious institutions can afford to publish their work, while those from less privileged backgrounds are excluded. It is a system that privileges wealth over merit, undermining the fundamental principle of equal opportunity in scholarly communication (Suber, 2012). Journals that engage in this practice are complicit in maintaining and exacerbating these inequalities, and they should be held accountable for the harm they cause to the academic community.

The False Justification of Financial Sustainability

Proponents of submission fees often justify the practice by arguing that it is necessary for the financial sustainability of journals, particularly those operating under an open-access model. They claim that without these fees, journals would not be able to cover the costs of peer review, editorial work, and administration (Björk, 2017). However, this argument is nothing more than a convenient excuse for exploitation.

There are numerous alternative models for funding academic journals that do not involve charging submission fees. For example, many journals successfully operate on a subscription-based model, where readers, rather than authors, pay for access. Others rely on institutional

support, grants, or non-profit funding to cover their costs (Willinsky, 2006). The fact that some journals choose to exploit researchers by charging submission fees instead of exploring these alternatives is a clear indication that their primary concern is profit, not the advancement of knowledge.

Furthermore, the claim that submission fees are necessary to cover the costs of peer review is particularly disingenuous. Peer reviewers are not compensated for their work, meaning that the fees charged by journals do not go towards paying for the actual labor involved in the review process. Instead, these fees often go directly into the pockets of journal publishers, who prioritize their financial gain over the integrity of academic publishing (Shamash, 2016). This is not a model of sustainability; it is a model of exploitation.

The Impact on Academic Integrity

The practice of charging submission fees also has a corrosive effect on the integrity of academic publishing. When journals prioritize profit over quality, the entire peer-review process is compromised. Journals that charge submission fees may be more inclined to accept lower-quality work simply to maximize their revenue, leading to a dilution of academic standards (Beall, 2012). This is particularly concerning in the context of predatory journals, which often exploit submission fees as a primary revenue stream while providing little to no legitimate peer-review or editorial services.

Moreover, the existence of submission fees creates a perverse incentive for researchers to submit their work to less reputable journals, simply because they cannot afford the fees charged by more prestigious publications. This undermines the entire academic ecosystem, as high-quality research may be published in venues that lack rigorous peer-review, while wealthier researchers are able to secure publication in more reputable journals, regardless of the quality of their work (Eve, 2014).

In this context, submission fees do not just represent an unfair financial burden; they actively degrade the quality and integrity of academic publishing. Journals that engage in this practice are not contributing to the advancement of knowledge; they are exploiting the academic community for financial gain, and they should not be allowed to operate.

Conclusion: Submission Fees Must Be Abolished

In conclusion, the practice of charging fees for research submissions is a deeply exploitative and unethical practice that has no place in academic publishing. Journals that engage in this practice are prioritizing profit over the advancement of knowledge, and in doing so, they undermine the very foundations of scholarly communication. Submission fees create barriers to access, perpetuate inequalities within academia, and degrade the integrity of the peer-review process.

There are numerous alternative models for funding academic journals that do not involve charging submission fees, and journals that choose to exploit researchers in this way should be held accountable for their actions. The academic community must take a stand against this exploitative practice, demand greater transparency and fairness in the publishing process, and work towards a model of scholarly communication that truly serves the interests of researchers, not profit-driven publishers. Until submission fees are abolished, the integrity and accessibility of academic publishing will remain under threat.

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