

OPEN – ACCESS PUBLISHING: MIRED IN CONTROVERSY

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Publication output continues to be a key metric of the worth of a scholar and eventually of a university or any other research institute. The 'undue' focus on peer-reviewed research publications has grimly evolved towards open-access publications by emphasizing quantitative indices like citation counts. Open access papers are alleged to have some citation advantage over their subscription-based counterparts (Ottaviani, 2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2021). However, some studies report that open-access citation advantage is limited to subsets only and is not an across-the-board advantage (Langham-Putrow, 2021; Basson *et al.*, 2021). Despite these divergent findings, however, open-access publishing is all the rage these days. Funding agencies have also taken fancy to it and publication charges are being specifically provided. The agencies are justified in their mission as major breakthroughs in science and technology and their eventual benefits to the civil society cannot happen in laboratory group cocoons but when shared across the boundaries and led to evolve through symbiotic collaboration. Science grows incrementally, as in Newton's words: researchers too ride on the shoulders of giants (Park *et al.*, 2023). Government policies on open access and data sharing not only aim at tiding over financial hurdles of open access peer reviewed publishing but also on developing open-access repositories at various levels. Unfortunately, however, most of the research/data repositories have a one-way flow of ideas as their use has not yet found much favour with the academics with respect to identification of knowledge gaps and launching pads for their future research.

Though initially conceived with good intentions, evolution of publishing pressure towards citation pressure has taken a heavy toll on financial health of the research institutes and quality of research output. Disruptive research and innovations need to have a spontaneous uptake; instead, time and other scarce resources are employed to shine selective light on disruptiveness of the research by publishing in high impact open-access journals. Despite the prevalent open-access surcharged publishing environment, the papers and patents are reported to have become less disruptive over time (Pammolli *et al.*, 2011; Bloom *et al.*, 2020). Park *et al.* (2023), based on a comprehensive 60-year analysis spanning 45 million papers and 3.9 million patents from six large-scale datasets, concluded

that papers and patents are increasingly less likely to diverge from the past and provide a new significant direction to the research and technology.

The cult of open-access publishing has had a ripple effect not only on their contributors but also on the journals as well. Not only scholars, but the journals have also started to swim along the tide of open-access publishing. Subscription based journals are gradually upgrading, through hybrid models, towards open-access journals. Pandita *et al.* (2022) studied distribution and growth of open-access journals across the world and reported that the number of open-access journals registered in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) rose from 22 in 2002 to 16589 in 2021 (date of retrieval July 17, 2021). The study further reported that on an average 830 journals get added to the directory every year. Another interesting find of the study is that post-2017 listings had 46% share.

Another worrisome outcome of open-access publishing trend is the increased preference of authors for the journals with higher article processing charges (APCs). Morrison *et al.* (2021) observed, based upon the analysis of the open-access papers published over the period 2011-2021, that though the global average of APCs per journal increased slightly from 906 USD to 958 USD, the per-article average went up considerably from 904 USD to 1626 USD, suggesting thereby the preference of authors for the expensive journals.

The light shed on the various unhealthy developments in the open-access publishing by various counter-intuitive analyses suggests that commercialization of scholarly enterprise needs to be managed at the earliest by appropriate public sector interventions. As suggested by Morrison *et al.* (2021) and by one of the earlier editorials (Sekhon, 2022), 'diamond' open-access publishing (involving no APCs) model needs to be developed by various universities and use of research repositories needs to be promoted in a mission mode for unrestrained flow of ideas across geographical and financial boundaries.

LITERATURE CITED

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