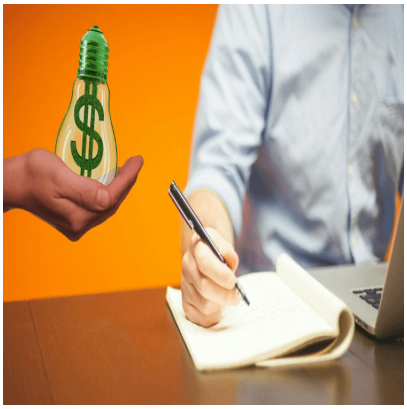


Description

The move towards open access (OA) has been embraced by a number of journals. However, one issue that arises when discussing OA is the fact that some journals do not charge article processing charges (APCs). OA journals do away with paywalls, but they need to make a profit elsewhere. It was also noted that large publishers such as Elsevier and Wiley publish 1,676 and 1,300 OA journals, respectively. According to Crawford's preliminary numbers, there are 8,760 OA journals and 73% do not charge APCs.

> According to one of the articles by David Crotty, "If one really wants the world to be a fully OA publishing ecosystem, then one has to be realistic about the economics of such a system, and create functional and sustainable real-world strategies for long-term support."

APCs have become controversial. APCs are a product of OA publishers' need to generate revenue. Then, why are some OA journals not charging APCs? It is clear that charging APCs is the pathway to a fully OA publishing system. APCs are used to cover for the costs of article processing and subsequent (OA) publication.

Trends in APCs

APCs have helped OA grow in recent years. In addition to these, publishers are warming up to content sharing. Following sites such as SciHub and LibGen, publishers are looking for ways to develop their own sharing policies. For instance, Springer Nature and Elsevier launched trial programs in 2016, which enable researchers to publish and share their papers. However, APCs are increasing too, which is detrimental to other publishers. One of the biggest concerns is that shifting to an APC system from subscription fees may impede global participation.

OA Journals with Lower APCs: Sustainable?

APCs have grown in recent years by as much as 6%. OA journals are not the only ones who embrace APCs. Hybrid journals have followed the trend, but have recommended higher charges. However, the APCs of OA journals are rising faster than the those of hybrid journals.

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APCs can be sustainable if the business model is modified. According to SciElo, publishing costs for smaller OA publishers is offset by their online availability. That is, they do not depend largely on publication and distribution costs. Furthermore, the newest OA journals have streamlined technological approaches to publication, due to better workflow management and advanced technologies. Thus, lower APCs for OA journals are sustainable.

Challenges of APCs and Effect on Library Budgets

The growth of APCs is explosive. The amount APCs paid in 2014 was more than double when the RCUK granting fund was introduced. There are two reasons why APCs may have an effect on library budgets: APCs make up at least 12% of publication costs and this percentage is likely to grow as gold OA becomes more common. However, libraries are not able to keep pace with inflation. Case in point: subscription expenditure by libraries rose from 21 to 23% in just five years. While the library expenditure is affected by APCs, the changes that it brings may be more substantial.

Possible Solutions

There are three possible solutions to the problem of budget allocation and APCs. One of these solutions is to select who should pay APCs. For instance, authors who are at the institution should pay for APCs. However, problem arises when authors are from different institutions or have different sources of funding. If the author is affiliated with more than one university, then the co-authors or principal author should shoulder the APCs. Another solution is to discuss different licensing options with researchers (e.g. CC-BY vs. CC-BY-NC).

Comparison Between High APC and Low APC Journals

Often, journals that set too-low APCs have an advocacy strategy. By fixing APCs, publishers are trying to show that OA is a pathway to cost savings. Journals that charge high APCs pass on the burden to authors. In terms of content, low APC journals attract poorer quality content compared to journals with high APCs.

What do you think about the high APCs of journals? Would you like to suggest any solutions? Please share your thoughts with us in the comments section below.

Category

1. Journal Guidelines
2. Reporting Research

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