Hybrid Journals – Are Publishers Double Dipping?

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Free access to research is essential to the growth of a field. It allows *all* researchers – including those who cannot afford journal subscriptions – access to information. This accelerates growth because knowledge is accessible and can be used in future studies. However, someone must pay for this service. Open Access (OA) journals recover their costs from authors via an article-processing charge (APC). Some authors are obliged by their (that may be more prestigious and have a higher impact factor than open access journals). Some subscription-based journals also give the option to make an article "open access" on payment of a publication charge. These journals are hybrid journals.

The Case of Double Dipping

In such a scenario, a publisher benefits twice:

1. From an author to make an article “open-access.”
2. From a library for a subscription to that journal.

This is “double dipping.” No researcher or funding agency wants to pay twice for an article. The academic publishing community denies double dipping. Their response is to offer discounted subscription fees that offset the publication charges that make an article open access. This is not easy to implement because libraries of large research institutions subscribe to many journals and often buy bundle subscriptions. How is it possible to determine the exact price of one journal using this business model?

Hybrid OA Journals Are Expensive

It is a known fact that funding resources are scarce in the research industry. Hybrid OA journal fees are much higher than the APC’s of OA journals. Furthermore, libraries end up inadvertently paying more than once for titles that may be part of more than one bulk package. Double dipping makes access to research very expensive.

In addition to the extra cost, hybrid OA articles do not guarantee to be fully accessible to readers. Previously, some articles have taken months or years to become fully “open access.” This becomes a waste of money especially since some journals automatically make their articles freely available after a set period.

In response to these accusations, many hybrid OA journals declare a “no double-dipping policy.” Generally, they discount their subscriptions based on the number of OA articles published in previous years. Some top hybrid OA journals are not transparent about their double-dipping policy. This does not mean they are double dipping, but it does raise suspicions amongst researchers.

Anti-Double Dipping Alliance

An Anti-Double Dipping Alliance has been formed to make it easier for librarians to determine whether they are paying for a journal article or a book title more than once. This Anti-Double Dipping Alliance – an initiative by Knowledge Unlatched was formed in May 2018 to eliminate double dipping in the library acquisition process. This alliance aims to provide scholarly content on a central online platform. This will prevent librarians from purchasing the same title in more than one business model. Invitations are open to participate with the Anti-Double Dipping Alliance. The following companies have partnered so far: Delbanco, Dietmar Dreier, JSTOR. Also, LM Information Delivery, LYRASIS, Missing Link, OAPEN, and Project MUSE have also joined the alliance.

Free accessibility to research is essential. However, the cost of getting the articles to the reader needs to be covered. Everyone agrees with this. If publishers are receiving two payments for one article, we need to address this issue. Do you think the Hybrid OA model is a sustainable model or do you think academic publishers are abusing it? Let us know your thoughts in the comments section below.

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