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Email solicitation for scholarly work – a single researcher’s perspective

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Introduction: Publishing is important for career progression. The traditional journal model results in subscribers bearing publication costs. The eagerness with which researchers seek journals for the publishing of their work, along with the internet, has resulted in the creation of a new model called open access (OA). Author/s or their institution/s pay an actual publication fee. This has in turn resulted in the creation of questionable journals which charge steep publishing fees. **Methods:** Emails soliciting publication to one of the authors (VG) were collected for the month of March 2015. Information collected included costs of OA publishing, and whether or not this information was readily available. The appropriateness of said solicitations was also assessed with regard to topics with which the targeted author was familiar. **Results:** There was a total of 44 solicitations: 3 were duplicates. Out of 41 solicitations, 20 (49%) were appropriate. The open access fee was readily available in 27 out of 41 solicitations (66%). The open access fee averaged \$475, ranging from \$25 to \$1500. The only journal which provided true OA was *Medical Principles and Practice*, with no fees charged whatsoever. **Discussion:** Potential authors should carefully investigate OA journals prior to choosing journals wherein to submit their work.

Keywords: *access to information, information dissemination/*methods, internet, peer review, research, periodicals as topic/economics/*standards, publishing/*economics*

Introduction

Publishing legitimate research is a responsible task, requiring diligence not only from authors, but also from reviewers, editors, and publishers. This is because the publishing of research is important not only for the furtherance of knowledge, but also for career progression for the individual, who must contend with a “publish or perish” paradigm.

Unfortunately, the review, collation, production and dissemination of literature is not without costs, and these finances must be borne by someone. The conventional journal model results in subscribers (individuals or libraries) bearing publication costs. The author pays no fees and this forms the basis of the traditional subscription journal. The expectation is that authors present their research without expecting any reward other than publication. Peer reviewers and editorial committees do not expect financial reimbursement. This model is described as collaborative publishing. Once accepted, the paper becomes the copyright property of the publisher. Readers must buy the journal in order to read the publication and this model has worked for literally centuries.

Open access (OA) is a new model, wherein the author/s or their institution/s pay an actual publication fee. This has been facilitated by the Internet which provides a simple means for the world-wide electronic dissemination of

literature. Its ubiquitous presence allows everyone potentially unhindered access, free of charge. Distribution costs are nullified, while other journal expenses are not. There are no subscription costs to readers.¹ In the main, the model has worked.² However, the principal disadvantage is that with the prevailing 'publish or perish' mentality, it is easy for a new journal to start up and shortly become inundated with authors who need their work to be published in order to further their career.³

The eagerness with which researchers seek journals for the publishing of their work, along with the Internet, has resulted in the creation of a veritable multitude of questionable OA journals which charge steep publishing fees. This has become a rapidly-evolving and thriving business. Researchers are literally bombarded by emails soliciting papers for publication, in the expectation that any such papers would result in fees being presented to researchers who accept these invitations.

This study was carried in order to assess the quality of journals soliciting such work by email from one of the authors.

Methods

Emails soliciting publication to one of the authors (VG) were collected for the month of March 2015. The information collected included costs of open-access publishing, and whether or not this information was readily available. Multiple solicitations from the same publishing house were counted only once.

The appropriateness of said solicitations was also assessed, only being considered appropriate if they suitably appertained to paediatrics, paediatric cardiology, or other topics with which the targeted author (VG) was familiar.

Results

There was a total of 44 solicitations for the calendar month May 2015. Three were duplicates. Out of 41 solicitations, 20 (49%) were considered appropriate. Inappropriate journals included, for example, *Journal of Glaciology* and *Journal of Primatology*.

The open access fee was readily available in 27 out of 41 solicitations (66%), being directly available in the solicitation email or in a link from the said email. For the other

journals, OA fees were not readily available, including declaration on the journals' websites.

The open access fee averaged \$475, ranging from \$25 to \$1500. The only journal which provided true OA was *Medical Principles and Practice*. Furthermore, this journal does not (at the time of writing) charge an OA publishing fee.

Discussion

OA is a tempting model to which many conventional journals have migrated, partially or completely. Many traditional journals offer an optional OA fee to authors so that their paper may be freely available online without any form of subscription to the journal. Indeed, established publishers who have moved to the OA model typically charge authors fees in the region of £1000 or more for the publication of a paper once the paper has been through the mill of the conventional peer-review process and has been accepted,⁴ OA thus merely redistributes costs.⁵

Furthermore, over the past decade, numerous illegitimate and downright predatory journals have emerged in most fields of science. These pave the way for poor-quality articles that circumvent the peer-review process and the evidence-based paradigm of research.^{6,7}

The repercussion is inevitable and ongoing. Indeed, several fast-expanding and indexed open-access journals have been delisted from Scopus and have lost their impact factors issued by Thomson Reuters.⁸ It therefore behoves authors, reviewers, editors, established publishers, and learned associations to keep themselves informed with regard to these dubious publishing practices.⁸

Readers should therefore remain alert with regard to journal/s as source for their education, and potential authors should carefully choose legitimate journals for the review and publication of their precious work lest they inadvertently tarnish their scientific reputation.⁹

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