

Make Knowledge Free Albert P'Rayan

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The Open Access Movement is gaining momentum for its intention to make research material freely available to all

Assume that you wish to conduct research and write a scholarly article on a particular topic. During the process, you Google the topic and find some relevant research papers on the topic. After going through the abstract of a particular article, you feel like going through the full article.

When you click on the link to have access to the full paper, the following message flashes on the screen: *You do not have access to the full version of this article. View access options below.* The access options are: \$7 for 48-Hour Access, \$16.50 for Read-only, and \$42 for full text and PDF download. You try another research paper and again you get a similar message that you have to pay a certain amount of money for the article. You get frustrated and decide not to try again. You put an end to your research work.

This is what many independent researchers face when they wish to have access to some useful scholarly articles.

Of late, many research activists, scientists and scholars, across the globe, have raised these questions: Is it ethical for researchers and scholars to hide their scholarly work behind a paywall? Don't researchers have a moral responsibility to make their new knowledge known to the world by making it available free online? Taking a moral stand, British mathematician Sir Timothy Gowers, who won the Fields Medal, leads a boycott against the publisher Elsevier and has started the new Forum of Mathematics journal. Gowers says that the journal, "will not under any circumstances expect authors to meet APCs (article processing charges) out of their own pockets, and I would refuse to be an editor if it did".

A few months ago, 11 European funding agencies announced an open-access initiative which requires grantees of research funds to make their research articles freely available online so that other scholars can have access to the articles.

Grantees will not be permitted to publish their scholarly articles in journals such as *Nature*, *Science*, *Cell*, and *The Lancet* unless the journal publishers change their access policies.

Open Access Movement

Open Access (OA) has gained momentum during the past decade and many publishers have open access channels. OA refers to "freely available, digital, online information" and it is based on the idea that all scholarly articles and scientific research papers should be made freely available to anyone who wants to use it for

research purposes. It is opposed to the subscription-based model which requires readers to pay for scholarly articles they want to have access to. The need to overcome the roadblock has resulted in laying the foundation for the Open Access Movement (OAM). It aims to promote voluntarism and provide readers with unrestricted access to research articles.

Peter Suber, Director of the Harvard Office for Scholarly Communication, and Stevan Harnad, a cognitive scientist are prominent OAM activists. Stephen Krashen, a well-known linguist, second language acquisition expert, researcher and open access activist, publishes exclusively in open access journals and make all his articles for free for download at sdrkrashen.com.

Open access is not something new in India. Way back in 2004, the Chennai-based MS Swaminathan Research Foundation organised workshops on the need for open access, and in 2009, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) made it clear that grantees should provide access to their scholarly work.

Myths

Open access is widely misunderstood in India because of certain myths about open access journals.

Myth 1: Open access journals (OAJ) are not peer-reviewed.

Myth 2: Reputed universities and university faculties do not give researchers credit for promotion if the papers are published in OAJs.

Myth 3: It is very expensive to get papers published in OAJs.

It is wrong to say that articles submitted to OAJs are not peer-reviewed. Almost, all OAJ articles are peer-reviewed. Editors of repute do not simply accept a scholar's paper without subjecting it to the scrutiny of experts in the field. Again, it is wrong to say that universities do not consider OAJ articles for promotion. There are many OAJs with high-impact factors and the papers published in such journals are highly cited and many universities do give credit to such papers.

It is not true that all OAJs charge high article processing fees. There are many highly subsidised quality OAJs and scholars can publish their articles by paying nominal charges.

What should be done?

Universities and colleges in India should encourage their scholars to publish in OAJs. If required, educational institutions and funding agencies should come forward to pay article processing fees charged by some.

It is the moral responsibility of scholars to promote scholarship and make knowledge freely available to all. By publishing in OAJs, researchers and scientists serve the humanity in a better way.

The author is an academic, columnist and freelance writer. Email: rayanal@yahoo.co.uk