

Iran universities contribution to public knowledge: the case of submission to closed access journals

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Since the beginning of the open-access movement in 2003, many scholarly publishers have turned to this new model of knowledge distribution. The rationale that publicly funded works must be publicly available to anyone who needs that information seems indisputable. This is particularly necessary as Arthur Amman, the president of Global Strategies for HIV Prevention, pointed out the case of South Africa's access to medical information. He concludes that the restricted model of access to vital knowledge (e.g. medicine) potentially is associated with increased morbidity:

"I recently met a physician from Southern Africa, engaged in prenatal HIV prevention, whose primary access to information was abstracts posted on the Internet. Based on a single abstract, they had altered their prenatal HIV prevention program from an effective therapy to one with lesser efficiency. Had they read the full text article they would have undoubtedly realized that the study results were based on short-term follow-up, a small pivotal group, incomplete data, and unlikely to be applicable to their country's situation. Their decision to alter treatment based solely on the abstract's conclusions may have resulted in increased prenatal HIV transmission¹."

The very unethical aspect of the closed model of access to knowledge will undoubtedly prevent science and medicine from effectively advancing. Indeed, the spirit of science is in contradiction to restricted access. As Anthony Costello and David Osrin stated, we should not confirm the closed-access policy by

submitting research results to traditional restricted access journals.

"The issue of open-access or closed-access electronic publication presents us with a new ethical dilemma. Our priority for submission of articles is steadily shifting from a consideration of impact factor to the assurance of broad dissemination. Free and full text internet access to research findings for scientists, policy makers, and health professionals is preferable, particularly in poor countries where access to most journals is denied. Faced with the option of submitting to an open-access or closed-access journal, we now wonder whether it is ethical for us to opt for closed-access on the grounds of impact factor or preferred specialist audience²."

Mankind is confronted with many problems such as AIDS, global warming, etc. Open-access to knowledge will promote the communication between scientist and as John Willinsky, the founder of Public Knowledge Project³ believes:

"has the potential to change the public presence of science and scholarship³."

Then, he proposes an important question:

"How are we to ensure the university's contribution to a fairer world, if access to the research it produces about the world is itself a source of inequality³?"

An increasing number of institutions mandate that the results of their funded research project must eventually be accessible to the public, free of charge⁴⁻⁶. One important factor in favor of open-access publishing is the fact that the internet technology has resulted in a dramatic decrease in publishing costs.

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It seems that global acceptance of the open-access principle has resulted in a significant increase in submission and citation to open-access journals. As a result, the impact factor of open-access journals in the Public Library of Sciences (PLOS Journals, <http://www.plos.org>) like PLoS Biology (www.plosbiology.org), PLoS Medicine (www.plosmedicine.org) and PubMed Central journals (www.pubmedcentral.com) have increased significantly during the last two years. Since closed-access models of publishing prevent public availability of knowledge, it seems to be more ethical to submit research results to journals with an open model of publishing. Indeed, it is time to redefine the criteria of good research, from one that ap-

pears in renowned closed-access journals and those openly available to the scientist who needs it. Currently considerable proportions of university granted researches in Iran appear in closed-access international journals. Increasingly, this pattern of publishing distribution is considered unethical worldwide. It must be replaced by a policy which mandates submitting the research results to journals with an open-access model of publishing. Now is the time for university officials to encourage researchers to move toward an ethical model of submission to the open-access journals. This will certainly lead to a fairer contribution of our universities to the world's public knowledge.

References

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