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Hello Jamal, again, thank you for joining us at “Research and Beyond”. Today's topic will be about the future of open access and what are we expecting for it to be a sustainable publishing model.

Right. So open access, as we all know, is where academic research is freely available to the public online and it can be traced back to the Budapest Open Access initiative, the BOAI, in 2002, which called for the establishment of an alternative system for scholarly publishing that would remove barriers to access. We recently conducted a survey and found that around 46% of researchers think that all scholarly work should be open access.

What do you think about that? Do you think all of the scholarly work should be open access or some of it should be underpaid? Yeah. Thank you. Thank you very much for this new episode.

So, yeah, open, open access, that's a big topic, really interesting topic. I'm very much interested in everything related to publishing. And open access is, as you mentioned, gaining big momentum.

We've seen some big trends in terms of the proportion of papers. This is something you can measure in any scientific databases. The proportion of publications being published under open access, regardless of the type of open access, is growing.

So I think this is good development for science, but also for the general public. I think there are several elements. You mentioned the so very early initiative around open access in Budapest, but we've got many others following that.

Very recently, last month there was the launch of the Barcelona Declaration around Open Science. And it's not only open access publications, it's really around the whole system. There might be several reasons explaining such movements.

We live in digital age. So when you look at scientific publishing or scientific publications going back, I think the first journal is 300 years old. So the way journals have evolved, it hasn't really changed.

So it was printing, so getting manuscripts, printing them, distributing them, the journals in series or volumes. Right. And with the Internet moving into a digital era, we typically took the same system, which is you get manuscript, they get published.

People subscribe to those journals on a weekly or monthly basis or yearly basis, and then you have access to the information. I think the things that change is really that information now can be shared within like a simple click, right? Having a website where we share content and we become a journal, right. Funny enough, those journals that are online still publish on a regular basis, right? Which is on a weekly basis or a monthly basis.

And some only few journals publish on, I would say real time. You get the manuscript, manuscript is accepted, it's being published. You don't wait for a journal to have an issue number.

So that the article is linked to that issue. The good thing is that now we have the doi, where the manuscript, the paper, as soon as it's accepted for publication, it gets a doi. It's available on the website as early access.

But the fact that we still have early access for me is quite funny because it should be just accessed, it's been published, right? So you don't have to wait for a specific issue number to consider the paper as published. So in terms of future of open access, but also the potential growth, it will definitely increase because it's easier to publish. It is also cheaper to share knowledge widely.

And there's also a growing expectation from growing expectations for research to be publicly available or freely available to anyone with an Internet connection. And we've seen that with many platforms where, you know, search engines and you get access to information. And that demand is likely to drive the expansion of open access, which is going to make research more accessible and potentially also more impactful because you would have potential more readers, right, that don't hit a paywall to access your publication.

So, more people want research they can access freely and that demand will make open access grow. That doesn't mean that the traditional publishing will go away. Back to your question.

I think there is still room for such journals to exist and they might probably offer. And we've seen that journals offering both options. Do you want to pay and your manuscript or your paper, your article, your publication is freely available because someone has to pay, right? Or you don't pay and the reader is paying.

So we might still have flexibility there where the journal acts as, still acts as a publisher body in a traditional way, where you submit content and the journals share or communicate that content to readers through subscription. But looking at the numbers, the open access is definitely growing. That doesn't mean it's perfect.

We might talk about that later on. But yeah, that's my take on the open access movement and initiatives. Yes, I agree with the points that you made, Jamal.

And I believe that with digitization coming into place and Internet accessibility being everywhere around the world, open access publishing is poised for a significant growth in the coming years, driven by an increasing global demand for, for open and accessible research. But as the world becomes more interconnected and collaborative, the need for knowledge sharing and dissemination will become paramount for all of us. Right here when we talk about open access, there are several research papers that are under paywalls even in today's time with following the traditional and the conventional mode of publishing.

However, certain policies and mandates have come into place, especially from funding agencies, let's be it from the US or the other part of the world. Now, policy changes and mandates from major funding agencies are playing quite a pivotal role in propelling the growth of open access. If I would say, like I think in 2022, the United States White House's Office of Science and Technology came out with a policy mandating that federally funded researcher be published with green or gold open access by 2026.

That is a statement that the White House gave in 2022. I think somewhere at the end of 2022. After that, this mandate, you know, represents a significant step towards ensuring public access to research funded by taxpayer dollars.

Right. What is your opinion on that? Should more such interventions from federal bodies or government bodies be taken from the rest of the world as well? Because this will definitely and it's only about federally funded research. So I think if the tax is paying for the research to be funded, then they should also know what the research is about.

Your outlook on that? Yeah, so you mentioned the US but this is also something that we see in other territories, regions. So I work mainly in the Europe, Middle east and Africa territory and we see that. So I think the logic is quite what the, and it's quite easy to understand.

So you get public funding, the work that you produce needs to be publicly available. Right. So you do research with public money.

The public or general public needs to be able to, should be able to read your work. Right. So I think very easy concept.

So what we see that in many territories and you know, governments, you know, federal agencies, but funding agencies in general, they provide funding, think of it as like, you know, return on investment. They want to know about what have you done, what you've done with, with the money that we, we gave you. So they recognize the importance of open access and they implement policies to support it.

So that is something that we see. You apply for a grant, you get the money, but then there is terms and conditions where you have to allocate a portion of that funding that you receive for publishing in open access. So you need to be aware of the article processing charges or APCs that you're going to pay and you need to budget for that.

And I think even before getting the funding, you need to budget that where you ask for a certain amount, you need to mention that a portion of that amount will be dedicated to publishing in open access venues, journals. So there is a certain also democratization of the access to research. So of course governments play a big role behind that.

They support them, they support those Policies, they make those policies. And there is also the promotion of transparency where like in any working government or country, you would have the Ministry of Scientific Research, higher Education or a funding body would say we used or we had that budget for that specific year. Right.

So there is accountability as well in the scientific community where public society at large. So this should also be seen from the perspective of societal impact. Right.

So the impact that you have on society, a funder or a government or a country in general funds activities for the well being of its citizens. Right. So this is also something that they want to have visibility on, they want to track, they want to monitor.

And if you work on local social issues, but the general public cannot access your work, what's the point of doing that research? Right. So you try to address some issues in your society, some, you know, some local problems, but then your paper itself, the result of your work can only be accessed by people who subscribe to the journal that you publish in. So there's like I would say something broken in the, in the loop, right.

In the communication of your, of your own work. So yeah, I think it's not only public money, we see funding as well. Funding agencies, private funding agencies also having those policies where the papers, the projects you work on should be made public somehow.

And open access is one way of doing that. Sure thing there. And as you mentioned, similar initiatives are being implemented by funding agencies and government bodies across the world, reflecting a global consensus on the importance of open access and accessible research altogether.

And speaking of the European countries, I think somewhere in 2021, in the United Kingdom as well, it mandated with its research excellence framework that open access should be mandated for journal articles and conference proceedings typically. So that's also one of the measures that governments worldwide are doing, which is all the more rising interest from researchers, particularly early career researchers who want their research to be out there, who want to create networks, who are just, you know, dived into the pool and are wanting to make connections, are wanting to collaborate with more researchers and you know, try to have their impact in the industry. So again, speaking of the survey that we conducted, we saw that there is a predominantly positive outlook on open science, emphasizing global visibility of around 65% of the respondents.

And they also mentioned that it also increases their citations, okay, by around 30 to 40% if they publish in an open science journal. However, it also underscores the need for caution, acknowledging concerns related to predatory publishing and potential biases crisis, thereby emphasizing the importance of responsible practices in the pursuit of openness while gaining traction from researchers Particularly early career scholars who recognize the benefits of increased visibility, citation rates and broader impact. There are certain repercussions, as I just mentioned.

What other things that you think that researchers should be more careful when they are first finding an open access journal or looking out for an open access journal or an open platform. What are certain things that they must be definitely like a checklist that they should follow. Yeah.

So yeah, you mentioned some interesting points. So it's quite well known that of course if your paper is easy to find and easy to read, you might have potentially more readers and get more citations. So there is, there are many studies about that which compare the citation impact of open access versus non open access publications.

So there is an open access advantage on that. I might say that that advantage might disappear when we reach 100% of open access publications where every paper would be open access. But we haven't reached that yet.

I think there are many, many different points that I want to mention here. We talked about the positive aspects of open access, but it's not perfect and it comes with several challenges. The first thing is obviously traditional or conventional publishing, they might have a certain resistance from established publishers.

And there is also, there are some concerns about the quality and sustainability of open access platforms. So once there was a researcher told me that open access has the following reputation. If you pay, you get published.

Right? And that's typically what predatory journals do. They don't really care about your work. Their main goal is to make money.

They want profit, they want submissions, they want manuscripts. But in return you need to pay to get published. So this is something to take into account.

And some researchers would say, yeah, okay, it's an open access journal. I don't want to have the reputation of if you just pay, you get published. I still want to go for traditional publishing.

So I think it's a difficult point. That's also where you see journals that offer both options. You pay, your manuscript is open access, you cannot pay or you don't want to pay.

Your paper will be accessed through subscription or paywall. Right. So I think the predatory journals, and this is also something, a trend that we've seen where the number of predatory journals or journals that are considered as predatory journals that have questionable publishing practices, that number is growing.

So we need to be careful. There is something that we could do in terms of checklist publish. And that's basic.

I do provide this type of advice on choosing the best venue for your manuscript. Of course you want to be relevant, so you want your manuscript to be available for people in your field. So start from journals in your field and start from journals that you read.

Right. And you might see some patterns there. So I would say journals that you read cover to cover.

Right. Journals that are very well known in your field and then you're not alone in your institution with colleagues. There are some discussions and researchers they're fully aware of.

Yeah, okay. This is a journal that has a high reputation or a low reputation or. Oh, okay.

This is how the peer review works in this journal. Or the peer review process is quite loose there or it's quite strong and oh yeah, we know those researchers. Very impactful, influential and very well respected researchers.

They publish in those journals. Oh yeah, I know this editorial board. Very important, Right.

They do an important work to maintain this journal. This journal has a big reputation. Right.

So these are different points to evaluate. Look at the journals that you read, ask colleagues, Then have a look at the editorial board. Look at who publishes in that journal, but also who's citing.

Right. And have a look at the website itself. Does it look professional or is it just like a very fresh, you know, website that doesn't look professional at all? It doesn't have a submission system.

Right. Sometimes you get some emails from journals that ask you to submit your manuscript through email. Right.

Or the communication is only via WhatsApp. Right. And obviously that doesn't look professional to me.

You don't have like a system where you can track your submission. So these are different points that need to, that need to be evaluated. So these are, I would say, a few tips on, you know, as a, as a checklist, if you want to go beyond.

There are obviously other data points that might be useful. Something that I also like is the question, is that journal indexed in major databases like the Web of Science? Because if it is, then you know that that journal has been carefully evaluated by journal editors. So the indexation in major databases and then you have citation metrics that you might be interested in.

So obviously a journal that is not indexed will not have an impact factor, for example, and it would be difficult to compare journals to journals based on citation metrics or citation indicators. But these are additional elements that can be useful in trying to get a better idea of the journal. And you would do that especially when you know nothing about the journal.

If you focus on the journals that you read, journals recommended by colleagues or journals very well known in the field, or then you're already, I would say, in a good position in terms of journals to target. So these are different elements that I also look at and Then in some fields the list of journals, active journals is relatively small. So.

And this is also where you can speak with colleagues and check with their publish their papers. Yeah, okay. I find a paper, let me have a look.

If someone hasn't maybe published a similar paper and that paper where it is published. And then I would check the scope and the mission of the journal. Is it a journal that might be interested in my work because they focus on that type of research? Is it experimental or is it, you know, theories or.

And all of that are, I would say my checklist. These are the different elements I would check before submitting a manuscript to a journal. Very well.

And these are some of the main key points that we must consider when we're selecting a journal and wanting to publish in there. Other than that with there are certain already available AI tools as well that help you in finding open access journals which are reliable. A few of those tools are, you know, the reads journal finder feature plus DOAJ which is the directory of open access journals as well as Rhode as well.

So these tools also is something that researchers quick on time can, you know, select their subject matter expertise and you know, the discipline that they would want to publish in the kind of impact factor that they're looking for. All of these information is readily available on such tools. So while we speak of, you know, these, the open access becoming a sustainable model and you just mentioned in your previous segment that there are several hindrances.

One being that journals ask you to publish in an open access journal, which can be one of the factors that could potentially hinder the growth of open access and open science in totality. And also, you know, probably not make it a sustainable model. While the future of open access looks promising, the factors that I would like to mention could be a challenges.

The financial challenges and sustainability concerns like certain publishing models often rely on article processing charges like you mentioned earlier, which are the APCs or institutional memberships, which can be a financial burden on researchers, especially those in less resourced institutions or regions. Finding sustainable and equitable funding models remains a challenge for such regions. So when it comes to having to publish in a journal which has a high impact factor, has a very good reach is an open access journal.

However, just because you can not odd to pay the article processing charges, you are refrained from publishing in a journal which could actually take your research to the right audience and also make an impact in the society. So that is one of the responses. What do you think about the entire article processing charges in its in itself difficult Question.

I think there are some historical reasons and also there is a traditional publishing model, right? It's a huge industry, scientific publishing and with huge numbers, high profits, high margin. My point is that we need the right funding models to sustain open access publishing. So as you mentioned, in general you need to pay APCs article processing charges to publishing open access.

So that's a common source of revenue for journals and publishers. But these can represent financial barriers. So you mentioned people, researchers with less resources, but also researchers from low income countries.

It's very common to see APCs of several hundred or several thousand dollars and, and that's massive. And that may represent multiple monthly salaries for some researchers. So and, and sometimes you, you mentioned, you know, it's very well known that publish or perish, you don't publish, then you don't get your PhD or you don't get your promotion.

Right? And so I think there's a dilemma there where you cannot afford typically so some publishers, what they do is the following. Sometimes they would provide discounts to researchers from specific countries and you get a good discount. Always good to have some discounts.

But the amount to be paid is still quite high. So this is definitely a challenge. There's one way to perhaps overcome this challenge, which is you don't.

And I think that comes back to the education need, raising awareness around the publishing system. Something that can be done is that you still publish in a traditional way. You don't publish in open access, but you have the published version of the manuscript.

So your manuscript, the latest version of your manuscript in an Open repository like archive.org or MED Archive. So that is one way to have your work out there publicly available.

Because when you, when you hear journals, publishers, someone has to pay, right? That journal does a work of maintaining your record. The website, it offers some services in terms of peer review, perhaps editing services as well, making sure that the journal is also published like print version. So there is a, some, some, there are some costs associated with, with that work.

So my, the way that I do it, the same day I submit a manuscript to a journal, I drop that manuscript in in a preprint server like archive or preprints.org. so there are plenty of options available out there. It goes through revision, first revision, I take the new version, put it in the preprint server and so on until I get the accepted version, which is obviously not formatted as the published version, but the content is the same.

There are some. There was a study done last year called Preprint or not preprint. And the there are some clear cultural differences between regions.

So there are some comparison between the contribution to preprints by country, by region. And we see emerging countries preprinting their manuscript less than North America or Europe, for example. So again, I think that's a solution to go beyond those financial challenges.

That works. And I'm personally a big fan of preference. This is something that I like a lot because I do believe the traditional or the scientific publishing process is quite, I wouldn't say broken, but it is expensive, slow and in some fields that's fine because your work can wait.

But in some fields we've seen that during COVID 19 where you cannot wait to have your paper available after one year, one year and a half so that everyone can read it somehow your work needs to be publicly available as soon as possible or as fast as possible. But I'm not saying preprints are perfect because you might have a preprint or manuscript that is full of mistakes and you know, fake science and so on. So I think we need to find a balance between peer review, which takes time and, which takes time and then the publishing process.

I can mention one of my manuscript has been accepted for publication towards end of March, but it's still not published. So. And it's still not available as an early access.

I wonder why? Because it went through revision, it went through proofreading, it has the doi, but the doi, you cannot access the article yet and it's been several weeks. Right, but the preprint is there, so you can go and read the preprint. So yeah, that's my take on that.

Of course some challenges around the publishing process, but I do see preference playing a more and more important role in the near, the near future. Most definitely, Jamal. And yes, the turnaround time for journals sometimes can be much.

It can be ages, it can take you ages. And especially when it is a time sensitive research, it is very important for us to, you know, get it out there and put the word out there. So, so preprints definitely work in that case.

However, as you mentioned, because preprints do not go peer review process, there could be certain mistakes or certain gaps in the peer review in the preprints. However, it can always be subjected to open peer review in the pre print section and you know, when researchers or other peers can reach out to the authors and you know, kind of mention the kind of gaps that they are wanting to address. Other than that, when it, especially as we were speaking about APCs developing a sustainable and equitable funding model is also necessary when it comes to publication funding so that we ensure access to high quality open access research and it becomes a priority for the continued growth and success of open access.

This may involve exploring alternative revenue streams such as institutional subsidies, maybe collective funding models or public private partnerships, let's say. And when I speak of institutional initiatives being taken place when it comes to open promotion of open access, because even institutions would want that exposure from their students or their researchers that the kind of institutional rankings also depend on the kind of research that they have worked on. Right.

So many academic institutions are actively promoting open access these days by establishing certain institutional repositories, providing funding for APCs as well departmental fundings, as they call it, and developing policies that would encourage or mandate open access publishing also. Now, these institutional initiatives play a very crucial role in fostering a culture of open scholarship and ensuring that research outputs from their institutions are widely accessible. Furthermore, when we are to recognize the importance of open access in terms of increasing the visibility for an institution in terms of transparency and knowledge dissemination, what one key thing do you think that the current institutions are not really focusing focusing on when it comes to open access? And they should just one thing that they should definitely put their energies on.

Yeah, that's interesting. I think, I mean, I agree on the points that you mentioned. I think institutional repositories to host research outputs and also, you know, that helps to access the content or provide funding support and I think the awareness, you know, because researchers, they might not be comfortable with those technical terms like, you know, publishing an article is publishing an article.

I know some researchers, they still compare, you know, the university journal and an international journal, or a journal that has a long history which gets paper from all over the world. I'm not saying university journals are bad, but they're completely different because you often find university journals, people who read and publish in these journals are people from the university and only from the university. I think there is something that can be done maybe not at the university level or the institutional level.

And this is something that we've seen in some countries, like in the Netherlands, where you have agreements with publishers, it's called transformative agreements, and it's basically read and publish. So because if you think about it, the paper that or the journal that you ask, that the publisher is asking the institution to subscribe to is actually or exists based on the work that we produced and published in the journal. Right? That's how the journal is working.

So something that could be done is instead of subscribing to A journal to read the papers and paying fees to publish. In a journal, you have typically one agreement where researchers are allowed to read and publish. So such agreements, they exist even at the country level, like in the Netherlands, these agreement between Springer and participating institutions.

And the same with IOP publishing company, right? Where when you submit a manuscript to a journal published by that publisher, at the time of publication, there is a check where are you affiliated with an institution that participates in such agreement. So this is something that could be negotiated at the institutional level or at the country level. If you take a huge country like India with so many researchers, right? So many research institutions, they subscribe to so many journals, but at the same time, researchers they have or librarians, they have to subscribe to journals so that researchers can read even the papers they publish.

There might be some work to be done and might be done already. So I think that requires some collective efforts because it's always easier to negotiate with publishers where you have a mass and not just like one single institution or a single department. So this is something that could be done on top of that, really educating the researchers, especially Master students, PhD candidates on how scientific publishing works.

And I think that also comes back to how research is done. We know that very often the PhD students will publish where the supervisors or the professors in the department or in the lab are publishing. Right? So I think there is a whole culture to work on and that goes through awareness.

We see some institutions doing that. I've seen, I do that myself. We do that in terms of publishing workshops, companies like Enago as well.

You mentioned a tool where you can find journals. You know, we also provide a similar tool. You put your title abstract, you get a list of journals.

So all of that you need to raise awareness about those tools that exist. And, you know, conversations that we have right now, like podcasts like this help to raise awareness across, you know, academies, institutional academies, you know, learning centers. Librarians have a big role to play.

It's not just people who manage collections and subscription and, you know, borrowing books. They're real information specialists. So people who you can ask and consult about where to publish your paper in the best possible way.

So, yeah, there's a lot of education to be done and awareness to be raised. And I think all together we can achieve, I would say, or contribute to better science system. Yes, absolutely, Jamal.

And now as we are nearing the end of this podcast as well, I would like to address one of the most important point at the end, and we can quickly wrap this up, that is the integration of Open access and AI that is raising a lot of ethical and legal considerations, such as issues related to data privacy, intellectual property rights and the potential misuse of AI technologies. Now, addressing these challenges could be crucial for leveraging the synergies between open access and AI in a very responsible and equitable manner. Could you quickly just address this point? Yes, I think AI, I see AI generation tools as tools that have the potential to help or the potential to reduce costs and streamline processes.

And I guess with tools like tools that can help you to improve the structure, the language and all of that, the peer reviewers and also the editing services or the publishing or the publisher of the, of the journal might reduce the cost and as a result you would have to pay less money to publish. I would say you would have less or lower APCs on the other, on the other end, I think something that AI can help is to improve the discoverability of publications. So I'm not sure on how AI tools are trained, which databases they look at, but I guess they use open access publications and we've seen that research or AI assistance where you struggle to find relevant papers, AI can help you to discover those publications faster, so you can write your manuscript faster, but also help you to facilitate knowledge dissemination, which is actually a goal of Open Access.

Right. If your initial goal is to have or was to have a paper that can be, you know, freely accessible by everyone, then perhaps people can use that tool to get to know more about your, your paper because at least the title and abstract is there. So this way maybe we may reach long term, long term sustainability open access publishing.

But again, I think it might be too early to speak about how AI can help, but it can definitely help in some of the publishing process or at least in some steps of the publishing process. Absolutely. Jamal, I completely agree with the points that you've made and thank you once again.

Thank you so much for joining us Research and Beyond today and the strong points that I take from this discussion of ours is addressing financial sustainability concerns, maintaining quality standards, resorting to preprints and repositories, and fostering a culture of open scholarship and also integrating AI the right way will be crucial for continued growth and success of Open Access publishing. Thank you once again so much for joining today and we hope to connect again soon. Most welcome.

Thank you very much. Thank you so much.