

**BARRIERS AND DRIVERS
OF OPEN ACCESS
SCHOLARLY
COMMUNICATION: A
REVIEW OF FACTORS
INFLUENCING ITS
ADOPTION**

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Abstract

This article examines the factors driving the adoption of Open Access (OA) scholarly communication and the persistent challenges that hinder its universal adoption. Using a narrative review methodology, relevant academic literature was retrieved from databases such as Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus, and analyzed to explore the evolution of diverse OA publishing models, and role of institutional policies, technological advancements, and researchers' motivations in promoting OA adoption. Based on the review, three key themes and eleven sub-themes were identified. Findings reveal that OA scholarly communication democratizes access to knowledge by enhancing research visibility and fostering collaboration. However, significant challenges persist, such as the financial burden of Article Processing Charges, the proliferation of predatory journals, and resistance from stakeholder's dependent on subscription revenues. The review also highlights policy-level interventions, including Plan S and transformative agreements, as effective in addressing some barriers. The article concludes that while OA has immense potential to transform scholarly communication, achieving its full benefits requires overcoming financial, quality, and policy standardization challenges to ensure equitable global access to knowledge.

Keywords

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Open Access Scholarly Communication, Open Access Publishing, Barriers and Drivers of Open Access Adoption, Gold Open Access, Green Open Access, Article Processing Charges

Introduction

Scholarly communication refers to the creation, evaluation, dissemination, and preservation of academic knowledge within and beyond the academic community (Borgman, 2007). Scholarly communication is defined as “the system through which research and other scholarly writings are created, evaluated for quality, disseminated to the scholarly community, and preserved for future use. The system includes both formal means of communication (such as publication in peer-reviewed journals), and informal channels, such as electronic listservs” (Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), 2017). Historically, scholarly publishing was dominated by subscription-based models, where access to journals required institutional or individual subscriptions. While this model facilitated revenue generation for publishers and ensured peer-reviewed quality, it significantly restricted access for researchers and institutions unable to afford the high subscription costs. The traditional "paywall" publishing system created substantial disparities in knowledge access, particularly affecting individuals and organizations in low- and middle-income countries (Björk & Solomon, 2012).

Over the last two decades, the open access (OA) movement has emerged as a solution to these limitations, aiming to make scholarly outputs freely available to anyone with internet access. The transformation of scholarly communication from a traditional subscription-based model to OA has significantly altered the landscape of academic publishing, research dissemination, and knowledge sharing. Thus, OA scholarly communication has emerged as an alternative scholarly publishing system, aiming to enhance the dissemination of scientific research without cost or copyright restrictions. Its emergence has been driven by two critical factors:

1. The escalating costs of journal subscriptions, often referred to as the "serials crisis," and
2. The advent and widespread adoption of advanced information and communication technologies, which have

enabled efficient dissemination of scholarly content (Björk, 2004).

The transformation towards OA began with the Budapest Open Access Initiative (2001), which called for the removal of barriers to accessing academic literature. This initiative, launched by the Open Society Institute, aimed to eliminate the obstacles hindering access to scientific information. In the Budapest Declaration, OA is defined as “making scientific literature available online, freely and without restrictions.” Since its inception, the OA movement has gained significant momentum, garnering support from policymakers, funding agencies, and academic institutions worldwide. Its scope extends to a wide range of scholarly outputs, including peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, theses, and other academic materials. The dissemination of these works is facilitated by digital platforms and governed by permissive copyright licenses that promote unrestricted sharing and reuse (Suber, 2012; Tennant et al., 2016).

OA publishing offers multiple routes tailored to diverse scholarly needs, including Gold, Green, Hybrid, Bronze, and Diamond OA. Gold OA involves publishing articles in OA journals, where authors are required to pay Article Processing Charges (APCs) to ensure free access for readers. Examples include journals indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) like PLOS ONE (Piwowar et al., 2018). Green OA enables authors to self-archive manuscripts in institutional or disciplinary repositories, such as arXiv or PubMed Central. However, access may be delayed due to embargo periods imposed by publishers (Harnad et al., 2008). Hybrid OA combines traditional subscription-based publishing with optional OA for individual articles if authors pay APCs, while the rest of the content remains behind a paywall. This model is seen as a transitional phase towards fully OA publishing (Björk, 2017). Bronze OA offers free access to articles published in subscription-based journals after a delay or embargo period but typically lacks clear licensing terms, limiting reuse (Laakso & Björk, 2013). Diamond OA provides free access without fees for authors or readers, relying on institutional or consortial funding and widely adopted by platforms like SciELO and Redalyc, especially in Latin America (Becerril-García & Aguado-López, 2019).

The transition to OA has been driven by the recognition of its benefits for research visibility, impact, and collaboration. Studies show that OA articles are downloaded and cited more frequently than subscription-based articles, enhancing their academic and societal impact (Piwowar et al., 2018). OA also fosters interdisciplinary and international collaboration by removing access barriers, which is particularly critical for addressing global challenges such as pandemics and climate change. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of OA as researchers, policymakers, and clinicians required immediate access to up-to-date scientific findings. Many publishers responded by temporarily making COVID-19-related articles freely accessible, demonstrating the potential of OA in accelerating scientific progress (Tennant et al., 2016).

Despite these benefits, the transition from subscription-based models to OA is not without challenges. The reliance on APCs for Gold OA has raised concerns about affordability, particularly for researchers from underfunded institutions or LMICs. The rise of predatory journals exploiting the OA model further complicates the landscape, as these journals lack rigorous peer review and undermines trust in OA publishing (Beall, 2016). Additionally, resistance from some stakeholders, including publishers reliant on subscription revenues, has slowed the pace of change. However, policy interventions such as Plan S, which mandates OA for publicly funded research, and the adoption of transformative agreements between libraries and publishers are accelerating the shift (Chan, Arunachalam & Kirsop, 2009).

Objective

This article critically examines the drivers and barriers influencing the adoption of OA scholarly communication. It reviews the evolution and development of OA, its growing prevalence, and its transformative impact on the scholarly publishing landscape. By analyzing factors that promote or hinder OA adoption, the article underscores its role in democratizing access to knowledge while addressing key challenges such as affordability, quality, and policy standardization. The aim is to provide an understanding of OA's

contributions to scholarly communication and to identify persistent barriers to its universal implementation.

Methods

This study adopts a narrative review methodology to analyze the factors driving and impeding the adoption of OA scholarly communication. Academic literature was systematically reviewed from various databases, including Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus, to explore the emergence and development of OA and its diverse publishing models, such as Gold, Green, Hybrid, Bronze, and Diamond OA. Key themes—such as the influence of institutional policies, advancements in information and communication technologies, and researchers' motivations—were identified to understand the dynamics of OA adoption. Challenges, including APCs, predatory publishing practices, and resistance from key stakeholders, were also critically evaluated. The study incorporates insights from global initiatives, such as Plan S and transformative agreements, to assess the effectiveness of policy interventions in addressing these challenges and advancing the adoption of OA publishing.

Findings

Prevalence of OA publishing across disciplines and countries

The prevalence of OA publishing across disciplines and countries reflects a complex interplay of economic, cultural, and infrastructural factors, resulting in significant variations in adoption rates. Globally, OA publishing has seen remarkable growth, with over 50 percent of newly published articles now freely accessible through OA journals or repositories (Piwowar et al., 2018). However, this growth is unevenly distributed across disciplines. STEM fields, particularly biomedical sciences and physics, have emerged as pioneers in OA adoption. Repositories like PubMed Central and arXiv have facilitated OA publishing in these fields, driven by the need for rapid dissemination of research findings. This trend became particularly evident during public health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where OA enabled quick access to critical research for addressing global challenges (Tennant et al., 2016). Conversely, humanities and social sciences

lag behind, hindered by limited funding and smaller research budgets, which make APCs a significant barrier (Björk& Solomon, 2012b).

Geographic differences in OA prevalence further highlight disparities. High-income countries lead in OA adoption due to robust funding mechanisms, institutional mandates, and advanced digital infrastructures. In Europe, initiatives like Plan S require publicly funded research to be made openly accessible, driving widespread compliance. Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands have achieved near-universal OA adoption through transformative agreements with publishers (Schiltz, 2018). Similarly, North America has high OA prevalence, supported by mandates from funding agencies like the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which require researchers to deposit work in OA repositories.

In contrast, low- and middle-income countries face unique challenges in OA adoption but also exhibit innovative approaches. Limited funding often restricts participation in Gold OA, which requires APCs, but Green OA through institutional repositories provides an alternative. Latin America has emerged as a global leader in Diamond OA, a model that charges neither authors nor readers. Platforms like SciELO and Redalyc prioritize regional scholarship and multilingual dissemination, ensuring equitable access to knowledge (Becerril-García & Aguado-López, 2019). African countries are increasingly engaging in OA through initiatives such as the African Journals Online (AJOL) platform, designed to enhance the visibility of African research outputs.

India has shown significant progress in OA publishing, driven by government-backed repositories like Shodhganga, which houses theses and dissertations. Studies have revealed consistent growth in the proportion of OA publications from Indian universities, surpassing global averages in some cases. For example, Nazim (2021) noted that about 23 percent of publications from Indian academic institutions are openly accessible, with Green OA being the most prevalent route. India also contributes significantly to global OA literature through platforms like PubMed Central and the DOAJ, reflecting its growing engagement in OA initiatives (Das, 2015).

Factors influencing OA adoption***Increased research visibility and citations***

OA publishing has significantly enhanced the visibility and citation rates of scholarly works by eliminating access barriers and ensuring global availability. Studies consistently demonstrate that OA articles receive higher citation counts than subscription-based publications. For example, Piwowar et al. (2018) reported an 18 percent citation advantage for OA articles, attributing this to their unrestricted accessibility and discoverability through platforms like PubMed Central and Google Scholar. This increased visibility facilitates the dissemination of research to diverse audiences, including researchers in resource-constrained regions, policymakers, and interdisciplinary scholars (Gargouri et al., 2010; Tennant et al., 2016).

Langham-Putrow, Bakker, and Riegelman (2021) systematically reviewed 134 studies to evaluate the OA citation advantage. They found that 47.8 percent of the studies confirmed the existence of this advantage, with variations across disciplines and OA models. STEM fields, particularly biomedical sciences, showed stronger correlations between OA status and increased citations due to the rapid dissemination of high-demand research findings. Gold OA, in particular, demonstrated the highest citation benefit, as articles in established OA journals are immediately accessible and widely circulated. Green OA also showed substantial citation gains, particularly when hosted on institutional or disciplinary repositories. However, Hybrid OA exhibited a less pronounced advantage due to its partial paywall model.

Further research corroborates these findings. Huang et al. (2024) highlighted that OA enhances citation diversity, with repositories offering broader citation sources than publisher-hosted platforms. Studies in specific fields, such as anatomy (Miller et al., 2020) and library and information science (Nazim & Ali, 2023), confirmed higher average citations for OA articles. For instance, OA anatomy papers received an average of 18.95 citations, compared to 15.14 for non-OA papers, underscoring the broader reach of OA publications.

Role of institutional policies

Policy support from governments and funding agencies is a key driver in the advancement and promotion of OA publishing, significantly influencing adoption rates. Initiatives such as the NIH Public Access Policy and Plan S in Europe have demonstrated the transformative potential of mandates requiring publicly funded research to be freely accessible. These policies have notably increased compliance among researchers, particularly in well-funded disciplines like biomedical sciences, where repositories such as PubMed Central have become central to research dissemination (Tennant et al., 2016; Azadbakht et al., 2023). Such frameworks not only enhance research accessibility but also foster global scholarly communication by setting standards for OA practices.

However, challenges persist in ensuring the equitable implementation of these policies worldwide. While high-income countries benefit from advanced infrastructure and funding mechanisms to support compliance, low- and middle-income countries often face significant barriers, including inadequate infrastructure and financial constraints. Additionally, APCs associated with Gold OA models can exclude underfunded researchers and institutions, further exacerbating global disparities (Azadbakht et al., 2023). Concerns about predatory OA journals and uneven enforcement of mandates also risk undermining trust and policy effectiveness (Beall, 2016).

To fully realize the potential of OA mandates, strategies must prioritize equitable funding mechanisms, strengthen repository infrastructure, and promote reputable OA journals. Addressing researcher resistance and raising awareness of OA benefits are equally critical. While policy support has made substantial progress, its success ultimately hinges on inclusive, adaptable, and globally aligned approaches to ensure the sustainability and accessibility of OA publishing.

Institutional incentives

Universities and research institutions are instrumental in promoting OA by providing financial support and creating institutional repositories. Many institutions offer to cover APCs for

researchers wishing to publish in Gold OA journals and include OA publications in tenure and promotion evaluations (Björk et al., 2014). This institutional support helps mitigate financial and career barriers that may discourage OA adoption.

However, institutional incentives are not universally available. A study by Dulle et al. (2010) highlights that while universities in developed countries offer substantial financial support for OA, many institutions, especially in LMICs, face financial constraints or lack of clear policies to encourage OA publishing. Furthermore, while institutional repositories are widely adopted for Green OA, their effectiveness is often limited by researchers' reluctance to deposit their work due to concerns about visibility or the continued dominance of traditional, high-impact journals (Piwowar et al., 2018). This discrepancy in institutional support reflects a significant barrier in achieving global equity in OA adoption.

Researchers' awareness and motivation

Researchers' awareness and motivation are crucial factors in the adoption of OA publishing, as evidenced by multiple studies. Intrinsic motivations, such as contributing to scientific knowledge and societal development, often drive researchers' publication efforts (Zain et al., 2011). Awareness of the benefits of OA, including increased visibility, accessibility, and impact of their work, further incentivizes researchers. OA articles generally receive more downloads and citations than subscription-based articles, making OA formats particularly attractive (Piwowar et al., 2018). Fields addressing global challenges, such as health or climate change, benefit significantly from the broader societal impact enabled by OA (Tennant et al., 2016).

However, extrinsic factors such as institutional mandates and funding requirements also play a pivotal role in shaping researchers' decisions. Policies promoting OA publishing often encourage compliance but do not fully address persistent barriers. Key challenges include APCs, which pose financial burdens, particularly for underfunded researchers and institutions (Schroter, Tite, & Smith, 2005). Additionally, researchers in disciplines emphasizing high-impact journals for career

advancement often perceive OA journals as less prestigious (Björk & Solomon, 2012b). Concerns about journal quality, including predatory publishing practices, further contribute to skepticism (Wakeling et al., 2019).

To enhance OA adoption, institutional and policy-level support is essential. Efforts should include educating researchers about OA benefits, subsidizing APCs, and aligning OA contributions with career advancement metrics (Lambovska & Yordanov, 2020). Addressing misconceptions about OA journal quality and fostering incentives for academic recognition can help bridge the gap between awareness and motivation. By aligning intrinsic and extrinsic motivators with robust institutional support, the adoption of OA publishing can be significantly advanced, contributing to equitable and widespread access to knowledge.

Technological advancements

Technological advancements have played a crucial role in facilitating OA adoption. Digital platforms and repositories have streamlined the submission, review, and dissemination processes for OA articles. Preprint servers such as arXiv and bioRxiv enable researchers to share their work quickly before formal peer review, accelerating the dissemination of scientific knowledge (Tennant et al., 2016). These platforms have become particularly important in fields such as physics, biology, and medicine, where early dissemination is critical for scientific progress.

However, technological challenges persist, particularly in LMICs, where the infrastructure necessary for participating in OA publishing may be lacking. Additionally, the exponential growth of OA content has led to information overload, making it difficult for researchers to navigate and identify high-quality research. The proliferation of low-quality OA journals and the rise of predatory publishers further complicate the situation, undermining the credibility of OA publishing (Beall, 2016). While technology has enabled the growth of OA, it has also created challenges related to content quality and access.

Global collaboration and equity

OA publishing fosters global collaboration by eliminating access barriers to research, which is essential for addressing complex,

global challenges like climate change and pandemics. By ensuring that research is freely accessible, OA allows researchers from different regions to collaborate without financial constraints. This is particularly significant for researchers in LMICs, where access to subscription-based journals is often prohibitively expensive (Tennant et al., 2016).

OA is also seen as a means to promote equity in research by ensuring that publicly funded knowledge is accessible to all, regardless of geographical location or financial resources (Tennant et al., 2016). However, the distribution of OA infrastructure and funding remains uneven, limiting participation from many regions. While platforms like SciELO and Redalyc have been instrumental in fostering OA in Latin America, other regions continue to be underrepresented in the global OA landscape (Becerril-García & Aguado-López, 2019). To achieve true global collaboration and equity, OA must be more inclusive and accessible to researchers in all regions.

Barriers to adoption of OA publishing

Financial barriers

One of the most prominent barriers to OA adoption is the financial burden associated with Article APCs, particularly for the Gold OA model. APCs, which are paid by authors to make their articles freely available, can be prohibitively expensive, especially for researchers from low- and middle-income countries. Björk and Solomon (2012) argue that while Diamond OA models, which do not require APCs, offer a solution, the implementation of such models is constrained by limited funding sources. The lack of institutional or governmental support for covering APCs further exacerbates this issue, making it difficult for researchers in developing and underdeveloped countries to participate in OA publishing. Consequently, the financial burden imposed by APCs remains a significant deterrent for researchers who might otherwise wish to adopt OA publishing.

Predatory publishing

The rise of predatory publishing represents another substantial barrier to the credibility of OA. Predatory journals exploit the OA

model by charging authors fees without providing proper editorial services or peer review. Beall's (2016) work on predatory publishers has highlighted the detrimental impact these journals have on the reputation of OA publishing. Researchers, particularly those in the early stages of their careers, may be vulnerable to these exploitative practices, which not only damage the quality of published research but also undermine trust in OA outlets. This concern over the reliability of OA journals, compounded by the proliferation of such predatory publishers, discourages researchers from submitting their work to OA journals. As a result, the presence of predatory publishing undermines the overall growth of OA by diminishing its perceived credibility.

Institutional resistance

Institutional resistance is another barrier to OA adoption, with many academic institutions hesitant to fully embrace OA publishing. A study by Dulle et al. (2010) reveals that while some universities, particularly in developed countries, have made significant strides in supporting OA, many institutions still lack clear policies to incentivize OA publishing. Concerns over the financial cost of APCs, as well as the preference for traditional subscription-based models of publishing, contribute to this resistance. Furthermore, researchers in these institutions may be reluctant to publish in OA journals due to concerns about career advancement, as high-impact, subscription-based journals continue to be the primary metric for academic success (Björk& Solomon, 2012). Therefore, institutional policies that do not support OA can act as significant barriers to its adoption, particularly in environments where publishing in traditional journals is prioritized.

Issues of quality and perceptions

The perceived lower quality of OA journals is a significant factor inhibiting broader adoption. OA journals are often seen as less rigorous or less prestigious than traditional, subscription-based journals, despite many OA outlets maintaining high standards of peer review. This perception is fueled by the presence of predatory journals and a lack of widely accepted quality control mechanisms

(Björk et al., 2014). As a result, researchers, particularly those in disciplines where journal prestige is critical for career progression, may be hesitant to publish in OA outlets. This concern is particularly prevalent among senior researchers and established academics, who view publishing in high-impact, traditional journals as more prestigious and more likely to advance their careers.

Lack of uniform policies

The lack of uniformity in OA policies across countries and institutions also creates a fragmented adoption landscape. While some countries, particularly in Europe, have adopted strong OA mandates, others lack policies or sufficient funding for OA initiatives (Chan, Kirsop & Arunachalam, 2005). Inconsistent policy enforcement means that researchers in certain regions may not have access to the same opportunities or resources to publish OA. Furthermore, in countries with weaker policy frameworks, researchers may not be incentivized to adopt OA publishing practices, which slows the global adoption of OA.

Conclusion

The paper highlights the transformative potential of OA in scholarly communication, emphasizing its ability to democratize access to knowledge, enhance research visibility, and foster global collaboration. The findings reveal that OA adoption is driven by factors such as institutional policies, funding agency mandates, and researchers' motivations for wider dissemination and societal impact. However, significant barriers persist, including the high cost of APCs, concerns over the quality of peer review in OA journals, and the proliferation of predatory publishing practices. Resistance from stakeholders reliant on subscription-based models further complicates the transition to OA.

The implications of these findings underscore the need for strategies to address these challenges. Institutions and policymakers must focus on reducing financial barriers through subsidized APCs and funding mechanisms, particularly for researchers in low- and middle-income countries. Efforts to promote reputable OA journals and enhance quality assurance

mechanisms are essential to build trust in OA publishing. The study recommends that global initiatives, such as Plan S and other national funding agencies, continue to enforce policies mandating OA for publicly funded research. Academic institutions should integrate OA contributions into evaluation metrics to incentivize researchers. Additionally, awareness campaigns and capacity-building programs are needed to educate researchers about OA benefits and practices. Addressing these issues holistically can ensure that OA achieves its goal of equitable, sustainable, and universal access to knowledge, ultimately advancing scientific progress and societal development.

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