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Are high gold open access article processing charges an exploitative or predatory trait?

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Are high gold open access article processing charges an exploitative or predatory trait?

¿Son las elevadas tasas de procesamiento de artículos de acceso abierto de tipo «gold» una práctica abusiva o depredadora?

As altas taxas de processamento de artigos de acesso aberto "gold" constituem uma prática abusiva ou depredadora?

Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva ¹

ABSTRACT

The recent editorial in [this journal](#) debates a recurring issue which year-upon year, academics are reflectively responding to, namely whether existing article processing charges (APCs) in the gold open access model—especially in ranked and indexed journals of for-profit publishers—are high or excessive. Ultimately, the research community needs to determine whether such pricing—set by the publishers who negotiate deals with universities, often using tax-payers' money—is merited, and whether high APCs constitute a form of greed, exploitation, or predatory behavior, or whether this is “normal”.

KEY WORDS: APC, funding, open access, transparency.

RESUMEN

El reciente editorial de [esta revista](#) aborda una cuestión recurrente a la que, año tras año, los académicos responden de forma reflexiva: a saber, si las tasas de procesamiento de artículos (APC) existentes en el modelo de acceso abierto «gold» —especialmente en revistas clasificadas e indexadas de editoriales con ánimo de lucro — son elevadas o excesivas. En última instancia, la comunidad investigadora debe determinar si dichos precios — fijados por las editoriales que negocian acuerdos con las universidades, a menudo utilizando el dinero de los contribuyentes — están justificados, y si los APC elevados constituyen una forma de codicia, explotación o comportamiento depredador, o si se trata de algo «normal».

PALABRAS CLAVE: APC, financiamiento, acceso abierto, transparencia.

RESUMO

O editorial recente [desta revista](#) aborda uma questão recorrente que os acadêmicos respondem cuidadosamente ano após ano: ou seja, se as taxas de processamento de artigos (APCs) no modelo de acesso aberto "gold" — especialmente em periódicos indexados e classificados pertencentes a editoras com fins lucrativos — são altas ou excessivas. Em última análise, a

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comunidad científica deve determinar se esses preços — definidos por editoras que negociam acordos com universidades, muitas vezes usando dinheiro do contribuinte — são justificados, e se as APCs constituem uma forma de ganância, exploração ou comportamento depredador, ou se são simplesmente "normais".

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: APC, financiamento, acesso aberto, transparência.

Dear *Pensar en Movimiento* Editors,

The recent editorial by Aragón Vargas ([2026](#)) reflects on the issue of the article processing charge (APC), which serves as the financial lifeline of gold open access (GOA) journals. I wish to expand on that reflection because an informal personal observation of subscription journals among mainstream for-profit publishers (e.g., Springer Nature) is that they may be increasingly switching to the profitable GOA model, often linking the cost of the APC to journal metrics (e.g., Clarivate Impact Factor), rather than adopting an unprofitable diamond OA model. In contrast, if trends at the DOAJ are to be believed (DOAJ, [2026](#)), the opposite may appear true, where the majority—i.e., 14,102 of the 22,663 journals indexed in the DOAJ, or 62%—are cost-free, i.e., without APCs.

In part of his description of publisher model fatigue, Aragón Vargas—while taking aim at the issue of uncontrolled profitability induced by the unaccountable and unregulated rise in APCs while referring to it as “an uncontrolled escalation” (p. 3)—correctly wonders about the “destination of the money collected”. Curiously, the answer to that question was partially responded to by another article that was published—also in December 2025 and in a diamond OA journal—noting that the APC-based revenue of the top eight for-profit publishers between 2015 and 2023 exceeded US\$ 5 billion (Correa et al., [2025](#)). The real answer may lie in the financials of these publishers. As one example (publicly traded Springer Nature, since October 2024), the salaries and financial bonuses of the executive and management offer one response (Yahoo Finance, [2026](#)).

Whereas funders or research institutes in high-income countries (HICs) might be in a strong financial position to cover high APCs (defined here as \$US 2000–3000 or more), those from low and middle-income countries (LMICs) might find it difficult or impossible to cover such APCs, even if discounts and partial waivers exist, placing a tremendous financial strain on them and on tax-payers (Kendall, [2024](#)) who might fund such costs.

What Aragón Vargas is ultimately suggesting is that when the APC is high, it is not merely the journal’s financial support or lifeline, but a highly profitable source. Importantly, those APCs can be easily and automatically tapped, especially where there are APC agreements with research institutes and universities that have formalized contracts between that publisher’s journals and all researchers within those institutes. In such agreements, have the researchers who benefit from institutional (or tax payer) coverage of the APC, taken part in the negotiations between their research institutes and the journal or publisher to determine the value of the APC? Likely not. This then suggests that high APCs—or excessively high from the perspective of a



LMIC—amount to greed or exploitation because researchers' voices and opinions are not considered.

The issue of the APC as a form of exploitation or predation forms part of a curious debate in the field of academic publishing, with the predominant view being that low APCs (generally less than \$US 1000) tend to be associated with predatory publishing, while high APCs are either dismissed as a natural form of capitalism, or are rarely criticized as anything beyond that. Over a decade ago, Xia (2015) already warned us of the risks of using the APC as a measure of predatoriness. Thus, the issue of high—or excessively high—APCs needs to be revisited, to determine whether they are exploitative, or some form of predation (Teixeira da Silva et al., 2019). Unfortunately, in the predominant publishing model, both subscription and OA journals—even while touting highly-refined ethical principles—oddly fail to demand accountability from authors regarding the APC, namely which author paid the APC, the APC value (including if it was discounted), and proof or certification of APC payment (Teixeira da Silva, 2020). Why would any journal claiming high ethical publishing principles and integrity not be transparent regarding the source of the APC in its published articles?

In the current post-truth age, it is not unreasonable to reflect on this issue, focusing on common sense. Is the publication cost of a single article in open access that exceeds \$US 1000 merited? Is the premium on “open”—as determined by the APC in the GOA model—realistic? Finally, do academics consider high APCs to be normal, greedy, exploitative, or predatory?

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