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Academic Quality or Commercial Concern? The Role of APCs in Open-Access Communication Studies Journals

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Abstract: Despite the positive effects of the open access (OA) movement on academic publishing, commercial publishers' profit-driven policies continue to prevail, making the publishing process increasingly difficult for many researchers, particularly those from developing countries. This study critically examines open-access Q1 and Q2 journals listed in the Scimago Journal & Country Rank (SJR) within the field of Media and Communication Studies. Despite the OA movement's goal of increasing access to information, the capitalist academic publishing model transforms knowledge production into a commercial activity through article processing charges (APCs). The research reveals that high APCs demanded by high-impact journals represent a significant barrier, especially for researchers with limited financial and institutional support. This situation underscores the urgent need for institutional reform in the structure of academic publishing, particularly within the field of Media and Communication Studies. The proposed reforms should focus on critical areas such as increased support for OA models, freeing journals and editorial boards from Western monopolies, fairly compensating the labour of reviewers and editors, and offering greater language support. Steps taken in this direction will contribute to the creation of a more transparent, fair, and inclusive structure for academic production and sharing processes.

Keywords: open access (OA), academic publishing, article processing charges (APCs), Media and Communication Studies, Scimago journal rank, journal impact factor (JIF)

1. Introduction

Academic publishing, while a fundamental part of research, has increasingly become an industry in its own right. The growing number of researchers and the necessity of publishing have led to uncontrollable growth in the number of journals, publishers, and publications. With the advent of digitalisation, traditional publishing practices have changed, and many publishers have transitioned to online publishing. As a result, the publishing process has become less complex and more efficient. The need for physical copies has become obsolete, and the marketing and distribution of articles worldwide can now be accomplished at near-zero cost (Armstrong 2015). However, global trends towards paying for research publication seem to be more dependent on the dynamics of the commercial publishing market rather than national OA policies (Sivertsen & Zhang 2022). In this context, APCs are rapidly becoming a widespread publishing policy. Today, only a limited number of journals accept article submissions without charges. While this may not pose a significant problem in developed countries, in developing countries, particularly, publication fees represent a major barrier to academic productivity and motivation. These barriers can lead to discouragement, unproductive ideas, lost creativity, and a decline in scientific curiosity, ultimately resulting in exclusion from scientific visibility (Bakkaloğlu 2023, 2507).

Universities' faculty selection processes increasingly require academics and prospective academics to publish articles in journals that are often referred to as "prestigious journals". There is a widespread perception that more expensive and selective journals inherently generate more prestige and impact globally. However, in

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a study conducted by Maddi and Sapinho (2021) it was found that large publishers with high impact factors do not always charge the highest APC fees. Furthermore, it was discovered that publishers demanding the highest APCs do not necessarily rank highest in terms of scientific impact. The well-known “publish or perish” notion has become a reality even in developing and underdeveloped countries (Paul 2024). However, the process of publishing in a high-impact or prestigious journal involves multiple challenges. When considering publishing in OA journals, researchers must take into account various factors such as citation rates, APC, and copyright issues (Agrawal 2014).

In OA publishing, researchers typically pay an APC, after which their articles become freely accessible online. However, these fees are often far from affordable for most researchers. Today, academic publishing generally targets a narrow group rather than ensuring broad access, and it has an unjust and exclusionary structure. Approximately 70% of articles in academic journals include charges, which not only complicates access to information for researchers but also creates a model that allows publishers to pursue profit. As a result, academic literature has been commodified, distancing it from the rest of society (Ahmed et al. 2023). High APCs and transformative agreements aim to ensure that academic publishing remains a highly profitable business model for a few companies, rather than making it sustainable and accessible (Butler et al. 2023). Academic publishing, by using capitalist strategies, limits the sharing of knowledge while exploiting free labour. Although the OA movement offers alternatives, the current OA models remain vulnerable to capitalist exploitation (Peekhaus 2017, 13).

In recent years, the OA model has become a significant part of scholarly publishing, and the advantages and challenges it offers to researchers have begun to be discussed. In particular, the difficulties faced by researchers with limited financial resources in accessing publications and the financial burdens involved in the article publishing process are among the key issues in this field. This study responds to Knoche’s (2020, 530) call for researchers in the field of Critical Media and Communication Studies to focus on science policies and to advocate for struggles aimed at radically transforming current conditions. This research seeks to answer the question of whether high-impact open-access journals in the field of Media and Communication Studies prioritise academic quality or whether commercial concerns dominate.

2. Academic Publishing and Journal Impact Factors (JIF)

Academic journals have existed as the primary medium for scientific communication since the 17th century. These journals emerged from the necessity for researchers to share their scientific findings with other members of the academic community (Björk 2017). The publication of academic journals requires the existence of appropriate institutional conditions, such as professional qualifications and sustainable financing (Jokić et al. 2018, 1374). Globally, scholars are increasingly directing their research articles to international and high-impact factor journals, often with the goals of academic promotion, gaining prestige, or obtaining financial rewards. However, alongside low fees, the appeal of exploitative or ‘predatory’ publishing, which offers rapid peer review and publication processes, has become a significant problem. Predatory publishing can be defined as an unethical practice that damages the quality of scientific research by disseminating false information and misleading content to the public (Tiwari 2020). Such publishing exploits researchers' trust while jeopardising the accuracy and reliability of the scientific literature. The demand for dubious journals in

academia is not limited to young and inexperienced researchers; conversely, even experienced scholars often prefer such publications before appointments or promotion processes. This situation undermines the principle of merit and calls into question academic ethical standards (Özkaya 2023). Such a trend diminishes the quality of scientific production and creates significant structural problems within the academic world.

Journal Impact Factor (JIF) is a metric that reflects the average number of citations for articles published in a journal (Brito & Rodríguez-Navarro 2019). This metric is used to assess a journal's scientific impact and visibility and is often regarded as a key criterion for determining a journal's quality and influence. Citation impact indicators play a critical role in the evaluation of contemporary scientific research (Waltman 2016). Researchers now take into account Journal Impact Factor (JIF) values when selecting the journals in which they will publish. JIF is calculated annually by Clarivate Analytics and has become the most important quantitative measure of journal quality (Archambault & Larivière 2009). Studies have shown that journals with higher JIF values generally receive more citations (Larivière & Gingras 2010). The calculation of the impact factor is based on the performance of the journal over the past three years (Garfield 2000). Journal editors develop and implement clearly defined strategies to increase their journals' Impact Factor (IF). Additionally, publishers promote their IFs on their websites to highlight their journals' impact and prestige within the academic field (Lozano et al. 2012).

Since the 1980s, university libraries have struggled to cope with the increasing number and costs of academic journals and books. Academics are dedicating more labour to peer review and editorial work for the growing number of publications. Meanwhile, publishers continue to explore new ways of profiting from the copyrights of academic publications. As the prices of academic publications rise, these resources become less accessible and available (Fyfe et al. 2017, 17). A study by Estakhr et al. (2021) indicates that paid articles receive more citations in various countries compared to non-OA articles. Furthermore, these articles exhibit higher relative cost-effectiveness across most countries in all scientific fields. In this context, OA publishing facilitates wider dissemination of knowledge; however, the rise in APC has become a significant issue that deepens financial inequalities. All these dynamics highlight the need for new regulations to ensure transparency, quality, and accessibility in academic publishing.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 3 provides an overview of Open Access (OA) publishing and Article Processing Charges (APCs), discussing their role and implications in academic publishing. Section 4 examines Q1 and Q2 Open Access journals in Media and Communication Studies based on data from Scimago, analysing their distribution and key characteristics. Section 5 explores the concept of capitalist academic publishing, critically assessing its effects on knowledge production and dissemination. Finally, Section 6 delves into the platformisation of academic publishing and its relationship with knowledge capitalism, highlighting the broader structural transformations in the field.

3. Open Access (OA) and Article Processing Charges (APCs)

OA is a concept that refers to the free and unrestricted online availability of academic literature to any reader (Guerrero & Piqueras 2004, 157). OA is a significant approach aimed at ensuring equality in access to information and facilitating the wider dissemination of academic research to a broader audience. This model not only benefits readers but also provides a system that promotes opportunities for

collaboration among researchers by increasing the global circulation of scientific knowledge. Journals with OA make articles freely available to readers, while in this model, authors are required to pay APCs to publishers (Asai 2020).

Academic publishers adopt different business models for OA implementations (Laakso et al. 2016). Current OA publishing models can be divided into two main categories: gold OA articles in traditional journals (hybrid journals) and fully OA journals (gold OA journals). Additionally, the green OA model, where researchers self-archive, is also available as an alternative (Björk et al. 2014). “Diamond” OA journals do not charge publication fees, while “Gold” OA journals require authors to pay an APC to have their articles published. The diamond OA model is an approach that not only transforms academic knowledge into a common good but also restores the collective character of the academic system and encourages researchers as a nonprofit academic publishing model (Fuchs & Sandoval 2013). The use of the Diamond OA model is gaining importance as an alternative that questions the capitalist structure of academic publishing and provides more equitable access. However, the widespread applicability of this model faces some challenges. First, Diamond OA requires a shift in the revenue models of publishers and research institutions, which may conflict with the existing economic structures of the traditional publishing industry. As a result, for the Diamond OA model to gain broader acceptance in the academic field, economic models, stakeholder collaborations, and publishing approaches will need to be restructured. APCs are typically paid by the authors, their affiliated research institutions, or funders, and these fees vary across publishers. In many cases, authors are required to cover the APC from their own budgets (Okagbue et al. 2020).

Europe’s largest academic publishing countries strongly support the OA initiative and have taken significant steps in this field (Butler 2016). However, the landscape of OA publishing is quite complex, and the academic publishing market is shaped by an oligopoly created by a few large profit-driven companies. Giants such as Elsevier, SAGE, Springer Nature, Taylor & Francis, and Wiley have controlled a significant portion of academic journal publishing by acquiring smaller publishers since the dawn of the digital age (Larivière et al. 2015). The rise of OA publishing has brought about a significant shift in the incentives and opportunities for researchers and publishers. However, these changes have sometimes led to the emergence of journals with questionable peer-review processes and business models, often referred to as “predatory publishing”. Such journals can be exploited by malicious academic publishers who bypass valid peer review or other quality control processes (Siler 2020).

A significant share of OA models is financed through APCs. In OA publishing, once a journal article is published, it is made freely accessible online to everyone by the publisher. However, this results in a cost for the author. In the author-pay model of OA-APCs, authors are required to pay an APC to have their work published, and this fee can range from hundreds to thousands of US dollars (Jain et al. 2021). APCs cover the costs of journal production and enable the operation of processes such as article production, editorial management, and peer review systems (Rodrigues et al. 2022). For-profit APC-based OA journals in addition make significant profits from charging APCs that go beyond the actual publishing costs of an article.

The global estimated annual revenue from APCs for major publishers currently exceeds 2 billion US dollars (Zhang et al. 2022). Many publishers have adopted a hybrid subscription/OA model, offering the option to pay APCs to make a specific article available OA in a subscription-based journal (Pavan & Barbosa 2018). The sustainability of this model depends on the interest of authors and sponsors in OA, as

authors typically prioritise journal quality and publication speed (Solomon & Björk 2012). However, the significant variations in APCs from publisher to publisher and journal to journal are increasingly concerning researchers (Ellers et al. 2017). One of the key reasons for these discrepancies is the reputation and impact factors of journals and publishers (Budzinski et al. 2020). APCs paid by authors or research institutions to journals present a significant challenge, particularly for researchers with limited budgets. Although APCs are implemented to ensure the sustainability of journals, the high costs can deepen research inequalities, making scholarly publishing more expensive and exclusive. This issue raises important concerns about the accessibility and equity of the OA model.

4. Open Access (OA) Q1 and Q2 Journals in Media and Communication Studies at Scimago

Publications provide researchers with a “quality stamp” that helps them achieve their goals. The quality of this stamp is often determined by prestige metrics at the journal level, such as the Clarivate Journal Impact Factor (IF) or the Scopus Scimago Journal Rank (SJR) (Garfield 2006). Scimago assigns scores to journals based on a formula that considers citations of articles published in historically prestigious journals. The Q score expression is derived from the English word “quartile”, representing a quarter. To calculate a journal’s Q score, it is necessary to know the number of journals in the specified category. The Q scores of academic journals serve as an analytical tool to rank journals according to their scientific groups and impact factors. This score indicates the ranking of the journal within its group. The first quartile (Q1) covers the top 25% of journals, the second quartile (Q2) represents the second 25%, the third quartile (Q3) encompasses the third 25%, and the fourth quartile (Q4) includes the final 25% (Asan and Aslan, 2020). Q scores are typically accessed from databases such as Scimago and Web of Science (WoS).

In the field of Media and Communication Studies, according to the Scimago Journal & Country Ranking, there are 147 journals with OA, while the total number of journals in the field of Media and Communication Studies, including other publishing options, is 493. Of these, 64 are evaluated as Q1 and Q2 journals.

Ranking	*Journal*	*SJR Quartile*	*Country*	*Publisher*	*APC*
1	Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics	Q1	United States	MIT Press Journals	✓
2	Big Data and Society	Q1	United Kingdom	SAGE Publications Ltd	✓
3	Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication	Q1	United States	Oxford University Press	X
4	Social Media and Society	Q1	United Kingdom	SAGE Publications Ltd	✓
5	Digital Communications and Networks	Q1	China	KeAi Communications Co.	X
6	Human-Machine Communication	Q1	United States	Communication and Social Robotics Labs	X
7	Comunicar	Q1	Spain	Oxbridge Publishing House Ltd	✓
8	Internet Policy Review	Q1	Germany	Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society	X
9	Review of Communication Research	Q1	Spain	Review of Communication Research	✓
10	Media and Communication	Q1	Portugal	Cogitatio Press	✓
11	Global Media and China	Q1	United Kingdom	SAGE Publications Ltd	✓
12	Informatics in Education	Q1	Lithuania	Vilnius University Institute of Data Science and Digital Technologies	X
13	Publications	Q1	Switzerland	Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute (MDPI)	✓
14	Journal of Interactive Media in Education	Q1	United Kingdom	Ubiquity Press	X
15	Revista Latina de Comunicacion Social	Q1	Spain	Laboratorio de Tecnologías de la Información y Nuevas Análisis de la Comunicación Social (LATINA)	✓

16	International Journal of Communication	Q1	United States	USC Annenberg Press	X
17	Cyberpsychology	Q1	Czech Republic	Masaryk University	X
18	Nordicom Review	Q1	Sweden	Nordicom	X
19	Scholarly Assessment Reports	Q1	United States	Levy Library Press	✓
20	Informatics	Q1	Switzerland	Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute (MDPI)	✓
21	Communication Studies	Q1	United Kingdom	Taylor and Francis Ltd.	✓
22	tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique	Q1	Germany	Paderborn University: Media Systems and Media Organisation Research Group	X
23	Communication and Society	Q1	Spain	Universidad de Navarra	✓
24	Frontiers in Communication	Q1	Switzerland	Frontiers Media SA	✓
25	Revista de Comunicacion	Q1	Peru	University of Piura	X
26	Journal of Science Communication	Q2	Italy	Scuola Internazionale Superiore di Studi Avanzati (SISSA)	X
27	European Science Editing	Q2	Finland	European Association of Science Editors	X
28	Geoscience Communication	Q2	Germany	Copernicus Publications	✓
29	Journal of Media Literacy Education	Q2	United States	National Association for Media Literacy Education	X
30	Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication	Q2	United States	Iowa State University Digital Press	X
31	Science Editing	Q2	South Korea	Korean Council of Science Editors	X
32	Human Technology	Q2	Finland	Centre of Sociological Research	✓
33	International Journal of Data and Network Science	Q2	Canada	Growing Science	X
34	Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research	Q2	United States	The Netherlands Press	✓
35	TESL-EJ	Q2	United States	Editorial Board TESL - EJ	X
36	Estudios Sobre el Mensaje Periodistico	Q2	Spain	Universidad Complutense Madrid	X
37	World of Media	Q2	Russian Federation	Lomonosov Moscow State University, Faculty of Journalism	X
38	Journal of Social Computing	Q2	China	Tsinghua University Press	X
39	MedieKultur	Q2	Denmark	Society of Media Researchers In Denmark	X
40	South African Journal of Communication Disorders	Q2	South Africa	OpenJournals Publishing AOSIS (Pty) Ltd	✓
41	Revista Mediterranea de Comunicacion	Q2	Spain	Universidad de Alicante	X
42	Cuadernos.info	Q2	Chile	Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile	X
43	Icono14	Q2	Spain	Scientific Association Icono14	X
44	Palabra Clave	Q2	Colombia	Universidad de La Sabana	X
45	Educar	Q2	Spain	Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona	X
46	I-Com	Q2	Germany	De Gruyter	✓
47	Index.comunicacion	Q2	Spain	Rey Juan Carlos University	X
48	Digital Humanities Quarterly	Q2	United States	Alliance of Digital Humanities Organisations	X
49	Studies in Communication and Media	Q2	Germany	Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH und Co	X
50	Asian Journal for Public Opinion Research	Q2	South Korea	Center for Asian Public Opinion Research and Collaboration Initiative	X
51	Analisi	Q2	Spain	Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona	X
52	Journal of Social Ontology	Q2	Australia	International Social Ontology Society	X
53	Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture	Q2	United Kingdom	University of Westminster Press	X
54	Indo-European Linguistics	Q2	Netherlands	Brill Academic Publishers	✓
55	Comunicacion y Sociedad (Mexico)	Q2	Mexico	Universidad de Guadalajara	X
56	Dialogue and Discourse	Q2	Germany	The Dialogue & Discourse	X
57	Historia y Comunicacion Social	Q2	Spain	Universidad Complutense Madrid	X
58	Cultura, Lenguaje y Representacion	Q2	Spain	Universitat Jaume I	X
59	Brumal	Q2	Spain	Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona	X
60	Journal of Information Policy	Q2	United States	Penn State University Press	X
61	IC Revista Cientifica de Informacion y Comunicacion	Q2	Spain	Universidad de Sevilla	X
62	Church, Communication and Culture	Q2	United States	Routledge	✓
63	Medien und Kommunikationswissenschaft	Q2	Germany	Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH und Co	X

64	Hermes (Denmark)	Q2	Denmark	Department of Business Communication, Aarhus School of Business	**X**

Table 1: Q1 and Q2 Journals in Media and Communication Studies at Scimago

The table presents a total of 64 journals ranked in the Q1 and Q2 categories. Among these, 25 journals are classified as Q1, while the remaining 39 fall under the Q2 category. It was found that 14 out of the 25 Q1-ranked journals with the highest impact factor require APCs. In contrast, among the 39 Q2-ranked journals, only 7 charge APCs, whereas 32 do not impose any fees on authors. This finding indicates that prestigious Q1 journals tend to require higher APCs to ensure financial sustainability in their publication processes, with a strong presence of commercial publishers. Conversely, the majority of Q2 journals provide free access to authors and are predominantly affiliated with university-based publishers or publicly funded institutions.

The data presented in the table reveal a distinct bipolarity in the publishing models of open-access journals. Some of these journals are published by major commercial publishers and require authors to pay APCs. For instance, publishers such as SAGE Publications, Taylor & Francis, MDPI, Routledge, Frontiers Media, and Cogitatio Press use APCs for journals such as *Big Data and Society, Social Media and Society*, *Publications*, *Communication Studies*, *Frontiers in Communication*, and *Church, Communication and Culture,* respectively. Through this model, the production and distribution of academic knowledge becomes an economic instrument that increases researchers' dependence on financial resources while enabling publishers to operate in line with capital accumulation and profit-maximization objectives. At the same time, some nonprofit institutions have adopted the logic of commercial publishing by implementing APC-based economic models. For example, *Human Technology*, published by the Centre of Sociological Research, and *Communication and Society*, published by Universidad de Navarra, are affiliated with nonprofit institutions and university presses but charge APCs to ensure financial sustainability. On the other hand, some journals listed in the table do not require APCs and are typically published by universities, research institutes, or nonprofit organisations. Examples include *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* (Oxford University Press), *Internet Policy Review* (Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society), and *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* (Paderborn University: Media Systems and Media Organisation Research Group). These journals are managed by academic communities and prioritise open access as a means of freely disseminating and debating knowledge rather than as a commercial model. This distinction highlights the presence of more independent and critical publishing models that resist the commercialisation of academic knowledge production.

This distinction between the two approaches reflects the dilemma between the capitalist publishing model and academic independence. Journals published by major commercial publishers that require APCs operate within the framework of neoliberal economic policies, commodifying access to knowledge and placing financial pressures on scholars throughout the publication process. In contrast, journals that do not charge APCs offer an alternative model that allows the products of academic labour to be freely shared and knowledge to reach broader audiences without financial barriers. In this context, the data presented in the table illustrate how academic publishing is shaped by capitalist dynamics, highlighting the extent to which knowledge production and dissemination have been commercialised under economic imperatives.

Based on the data presented in the table, it is possible to distinguish between capitalist and non-capitalist journals within the scope of open access academic publishing in the field of Media and Communication Studies. The capitalist publishing model refers to a structure controlled by commercial publishers, where academic production is shaped by financial processes, while the non-capitalist model encompasses a non-profit publishing process usually carried out by university presses, academic associations, or publicly funded institutions. Prominent examples of capitalist OA publishing include commercial publishers such as SAGE Publications, Taylor & Francis, MDPI, Routledge, and Frontiers Media. For instance, SAGE Publications is publishing OA journals like *Big Data and Society*, *Social Media and Society*, and *Global Media and Chin*a MDPI, based in Switzerland, practices a capitalist OA model with journals like *Publications* and *Informatics.* Publishers such as Cogitatio Press and Frontiers Media also offer academic publications under an income-based model, charging APCs. While the journals of these publishers publish open access, they create a structure that forces scholars to pay high APCs, thus contributing to the accumulation of capital. This illustrates how the capitalist publishing model shapes the production and accessibility of academic knowledge. Academic publishing has become a market controlled primarily by large commercial publishers. Access to knowledge is increasingly turning into an economic issue. High APCs heighten scholars' dependency on financial resources during the publication process and reinforce structures that serve profit maximisation. In this way, academic knowledge production has been commercialised within the framework of neoliberal economic policies, contributing to the commodification of academic knowledge.

Moreover, the fact that the majority of journal editors and peer review committees are composed of Western (U.S. and European) experts supports the view that global diversity is not reflected, and academic voices from developing regions are underrepresented. This situation could lead to the neglect of different cultural and academic perspectives and the evaluation of research from a purely Western viewpoint. Furthermore, in the Elcano Royal Institute report (Badillo 2021), it has been found that, despite the existence of over 850 million Portuguese or Spanish speakers, only 1% of the world's indexed academic output is published in these languages. The dominance of English in academic publications reflects the dominance of English in the academic world.

The hierarchies in global knowledge production are not only a result of economic or political factors but also stem from epistemological and ideological processes. Therefore, the dominance of English in academic publishing should not merely be seen as a practical language choice, but as a structure that prioritises certain worldviews and knowledge systems. This monopolisation of academic knowledge production leads to the insufficient representation of local knowledge in international contexts. While the dominance of English in academic publishing is often justified through discourses of democratising global knowledge production, it actually functions to reinforce the hegemony of a specific intellectual center (Western academia) (Žižek 2014). The predominance of English in academic publishing can also be interpreted through Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) concept of "symbolic capital." Publishing in English has become a tool that grants international prestige to academics, while marginalising knowledge forms that fall outside a specific epistemological and methodological framework. For instance, when examining how English in academic publishing deepens global inequalities, it becomes clear that knowledge produced in languages other than English is less accessible and visible to international academic communities. In this context, considering that academic production and publishing are

shaped within capitalist dynamics, the dominance of English can be understood not only as a linguistic hegemony but also as part of the process of reducing knowledge to its market value (Curry & Lillis, 2018). From this perspective, the dominance of English in academic publishing can be read as one of the fundamental components of neo-liberal academic capitalism.

Approximately a quarter of the Q1 and Q2 journals listed in the Scimago ranking are university/institute journals, indicating that publishing is predominantly company-based. It has been observed that there are not so many journals specifically dedicated to Media and Communication Studies. Many journals combine Media and Communication Studies perspectives with approaches from other disciplines such as Linguistics, Computer Science, Arts and Humanities, History, Politics, Sociology, and Psychology. This can be linked to the findings in Günther and Domahidi's (2017, 3052) research, which points to the lack of clear boundaries in the field of Media and Communication Studies (as an interdisciplinary area) and the continuous updating of new developments and concepts. However, the need for journals directly focused on Media and Communication Studies is becoming increasingly evident. Media and Communication Studies, by its nature, is an interdisciplinary field that is continuously engaged with other scientific disciplines. This interaction not only enriches the theoretical framework of the field but also allows for multifaceted solutions to contemporary issues. Media and Communication Studies draws from various disciplines such as Sociology, Psychology, Political Science, Anthropology, Computer Science, and Cultural Studies (Couldry 2012; Fuchs 2015).

Universities in developing countries often make decisions about which professors to hire or promote based on the number of their publications in prestigious journals (Demeter et al. 2023). Such practices reinforce a system that evaluates academic success solely through publications in Western journals and may overlook local academic productivity. Furthermore, high-quality journals in communication research are typically published in developed countries, while few authors from developing countries are featured in these journals. It has been observed that lower-ranked journals tend to be located in developing countries and feature more authors from these regions (Demeter et al. 2018). In his study of editorial boards selected from communication science journals, Goyanes (2019) found that these boards were predominantly composed of members from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Germany. This dominance of Western perspectives not only narrows the scope of knowledge production but also leads to the neglect of diverse cultural and academic approaches. For academic fields to become more just and inclusive, it is clear that editorial boards should better reflect global diversity.

5. Capitalist Academic Publishing

Academic institutions are the primary agents of global capital, which forms the foundation of knowledge production in the current world system (Demeter 2020, 98). Academic research production and communication practices are shaped by capitalist mechanisms Academics, by losing control over their works, are increasingly exposed to external influences in the publication process. This situation becomes more pronounced as academic journal publishing becomes further integrated into capitalist production relations (Peekhaus 2012, 596). The academic labour market and academic work are increasingly gaining an international dimension and rapidly evolving. Researchers seeking to compete in the global academic labour and knowledge production market actively participate in this change and attempt to adopt the values and practices of global capitalism (Kremakova 2016, 31).

The publication pressure on academics and researchers has become increasingly visible in recent years. The productivity of academics and universities in terms of publications and citations has become a determinant of individual and institutional rewards (Walker et al. 2010). Many researchers tend to submit their work to more prestigious journals in order to gain recognition within the academic community (Ding & Li 2021, 205). Databases such as Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus play a significant role in the evaluation of research, as publishing in journals indexed in Scopus or WoS is seen as an expression of research quality and internationalisation (Siversten 2016, 357).

Visibility has become an important factor in determining academic success (Colander 2007). In achieving this visibility, the content of publications seems to have become less important in the academic world. The message conveyed to researchers has shifted from focusing on what you write to how often, where, and with whom you write (van Dalen & Henkens 2012, 1283). However, today academic knowledge has evolved into a structure that contributes to the power of capital and strengthens the monopolisation of publishers. The competition between journals and articles cannot replace each other due to overlapping topics, which further increases the control and monopolistic power of publishers. In particular, publishers who hold the highest-ranking journals exert strong influence over academic library collection development policies (Bergman 2006).

The platformisation of universities, publishing, and evaluation ecosystems is an inevitable reflection of the dominant logic of knowledge capitalism (Cohen 2019). However, the shift of academic production and sharing processes to commercial platforms further privatises the sharing and access to knowledge, while hindering academic freedom and societal benefit. As Tennant (2020) expressed, commercial publishers continue to exploit researchers' unpaid labour through peer review, generating unlimited profits. If publishers are financially compensated for the value they add in a capitalist system, then all other stakeholders – authors, reviewers, editors – should similarly be compensated for their contributions.

The academic capitalist regime primarily serves commercial interests, privatising knowledge production and making profit generation its core objective (Slaughter & Rhoades 2004). As increasing oversight and capitalist logic prioritise financial concerns over traditional academic professional values, this sets the stage for the normalisation of exploitative practices (Vican et al. 2020). Furthermore, the exclusion of perspectives or phenomena that reflect the intellectual landscape of developing regions hinders the progress of knowledge production (Comel et al. 2023). The decolonisation of academia seeks to weaken the influence of capitalism, democratise academia, and foster collective governance with self-management (Fuchs 2022, 103). In other words, the processes of knowledge production, governance, and resource distribution in academia must be shaped not by capitalist interests but by societal needs and principles of justice. Breaking free from academic capitalism's chains is only possible with a more equitable and just approach to knowledge production and academic governance.

Capitalism exploits and commodifies (digital) common spaces and (digital) public spheres. In contrast, alternative models emerge outside the boundaries of capitalism, reshaping the public sphere and civil society (Fuchs 2021). Capitalist academic publishing is a structure that subjects the knowledge produced by academic institutions such as universities and research institutes to the control and profit motives of large commercial publishers. In this system, researchers are forced to pay high fees to publish their research, while publishers receive intellectual labour, such as the peer

review process, for free and use this labour for profit. Academic publishers convert academic knowledge into a commodity, generating substantial income from universities and researchers, while often exacerbating inequalities, particularly for academics in developing countries. Under the influence of neoliberal policies, publishers commercialise research findings, turning knowledge into a commodity. This reinforces a dynamic that threatens the independence of academia, serving the interests of profit-driven actors who control knowledge.

6. Platformisation and Knowledge Capitalism in the Context of Academic Publishing

Platforms are increasingly shaping labour and employment relations worldwide. Platform capitalism is a digital version of capitalism built upon online platforms that facilitate the trade of goods and services with the aim of profit maximisation (Papadimitropoulos 2021, 246). While platformisation can enhance the accessibility to academic knowledge, increase transparency, and improve the pace of discovery, it also poses significant challenges to the values and autonomy of science (Fecher et al. 2024, 14).

In recent years, the vertical integration of publishers and other service providers throughout the research cycle has led to platformisation. As some publishers become platform owners, they prioritise increasing the volume of academic knowledge while keeping concerns about quality information at a minimum. This is because a higher number of publications and interactions generates more publication and citation data. Today, the dominance of the gold open-access model, particularly in traditional journals with the highest APCs, restricts access to the work of authors who cannot afford to pay. At the same time, universities, libraries, researchers, and the general public should be alarmed by the fact that research funded by public resources is increasingly becoming the property of private companies, which then charge for access or subscriptions. This concern is further exacerbated by the fact that most publishing agreements require either the transfer of copyright or the granting of an exclusive license for publication (Ma 2023, 8).

The platformisation of academic knowledge, however, weakens libraries' bargaining power in providing and negotiating access to scholarly information. Furthermore, it entails the tracking and collection of data related to research activities, which can later be shared with or sold to third parties (Lamdan 2023). This shift has led some academic publishers to evolve from merely connecting content with readers to becoming vast, profit-driven entities that control the entire research lifecycle through business models built on digital platforms (Chen et al. 2019). The academic publishing sector can be seen as one of the testing grounds for platform capitalism (Srnicek 2017), as it relies on thousands of academics worldwide who voluntarily produce content and conduct peer review. This "free labor" (Terranova 2000), performed by academics solely to gain recognition within the scholarly community and advance their careers, constitutes one of the system's fundamental pillars.

Most academic journals are published by commercial publishers. Over the years, many of these publishers have increased subscription fees and/or APCs at rates far exceeding inflation (DFG 2021). Through platformisation, the value of knowledge can be shaped not by academic principles but by commercial interests under the control of capital owners. The processes of digitalisation and platformisation have further strengthened the influence of these companies in academic publishing, consolidating their dominance. Their lack of transparency, the extent to which their operations align with research ethics, and the high profit margins generated through the unpaid labour

of academics have placed them at the center of intense debate (Pirie 2009). Publishers develop control technologies to create a competitive environment driven by the goal of increasing publication volume. As the number of publications rises, more data can be collected, which can then be monetized through data products and consulting services sold to research institutions. At the same time, less privileged researchers – particularly those not affiliated with well-funded research institutions – are excluded from these opportunities. The open-access movement cannot succeed in cases where platforms not only control academic knowledge but also hold power over data concerning researchers and their research activities. The struggle against the platformisation of academic knowledge is therefore crucial, alongside efforts to uphold ethical principles regarding access to knowledge and data privacy (Ma 2023, 15).

Academic studies and research outputs have increasingly become commodified (Bauwens et al. 2023). The global neoliberal academy, in collaboration with profit-driven publishers, has transformed publicly funded research and voluntary academic labor into a commercial model. In this model, academic works are packaged into expensive books and journals and then resold to their producers and the academic community (Jandrić & Hayes 2019, 385). This shift has led to the transformation of knowledge from a public good into a commercialised commodity. In particular, the subscription fees set by major publishers and the high APCs demanded for open access further restrict the accessibility of academic knowledge, exacerbating academic inequalities.

The production of academic knowledge has become increasingly commodified, shifting from a “science for science’s sake”-approach to a “science for the market”-paradigm. As knowledge production becomes dependent on profit generation, its dissemination has also turned into a tool for commercial transactions (Eren 2025, 297). The commodification of knowledge and its trade in markets lead to the concentration of ownership among specific actors. Scholars in the Political Economy of Communiation have demonstrated that knowledge markets encourage the formation of monopolies and oligopolies (Fuchs 2016; Hardy 2014). The dominant position of large commercial publishers is often perceived as a natural phenomenon in countries where English is the primary language or where Anglo-Saxon influence is strong. In contrast, countries that have traditionally conducted academic work in their national languages (other than English) may be more reluctant to collaborate with commercial publishers. Eastern European countries and Russia serve as notable examples of this trend (van Bellen et al. 2024).

7. Conclusion

With the development of OA, APCs have increased, becoming a burden for researchers, particularly in developing countries (Wang 2024). Excessive APCs seem to hinder efforts to make academic publishing sustainable and accessible. The model, where authors pay fees, excludes a significant portion of the academic community from the opportunity to publish. Authors with more financial resources, those in advanced stages of their careers, specific disciplines, and countries, along with marginalised communities, gain more priority in this system, while disadvantaged groups are left behind (Chan et al. 2020; Olejniczak & Wilson 2020). This research aligns with Limaye's (2022) view that the current APC model is unsustainable and presents a significant barrier to research productivity. Furthermore, the profit-driven approach of global publishers and the exploitative nature of predatory journals undermine the egalitarian structure of the OA movement (Frank et al. 2023). While the benefits of OA for readers are clear, it is evident that the advantages it offers researchers need further

development. In this regard, steps such as improving publisher and journal oversight mechanisms, limiting cost increases, and providing support and incentives for researchers are considered beneficial for both researchers and OA policies.

One of the most effective ways for academics to demonstrate their academic competence to their peers is through frequent publishing. Successfully published research increases the visibility of both the individual and the institution to which they are affiliated. This can contribute to securing additional funding for the institution and advancing the individual's expertise in their field. Academic institutions and universities often evaluate the number of publications as a criterion for individual competence (Rawat & Meena 2014, 87). While researchers are encouraged to publish a large number of works (quantity), they are also expected to generate a broad impact with these works (quality) (Romić & Mitrović 2021). Payment demands imposed by commercial publishers (De Oliveira et al. 2021) and the requirement for articles to be submitted in English (Cheruiyot 2021) can isolate researchers from developing countries.

The commodification of academic knowledge has led to academic publishing being described as "a marketplace" (Puehringer et al. 2021, 17-18). While publishers aim to make a profit, researchers seek to gain reputation. In this context, APC demands of approximately U$2000 are well above the salaries of many academics, especially in developing countries. Authors unable to pay high APCs may turn to those predatory journals that offer lower fees and fast publication times (typically one to two weeks). To address this issue, adopting strict policies regarding the initial decision and publication timeline is seen as a necessary step. Additionally, factors such as long peer review and editorial processes, article processing fees, paid language support and editing services, low acceptance rates, and requests for authors to add citations to their own journals or for editors to cite their own articles continue to pose significant challenges for the academic community, particularly for researchers in developing countries.

Despite the positive impacts of the OA movement on the publishing field, it is noteworthy that the profit-maximising practices of commercial publishers continue to persist. The fact that critical academic contributions such as peer review and editing are often carried out without compensation leads to the devaluation of academic labour and the alignment of this labour with commercial interests. This raises significant concerns regarding academic freedom and ethical principles. Furthermore, the platformisation of publishing and evaluation systems has further strengthened the effects of knowledge capitalism. The increasing influence of commercial platforms not only creates serious barriers to access to information but also disregards the social benefits of academic knowledge. This highlights the need for a publishing model that aligns with the values of the academic community and serves the public good.

Researchers often encounter numerous challenges, primarily stemming from financial difficulties, resource shortages, and lack of support. These obstacles can prevent them from focusing on producing high-quality research or work that contributes to societal welfare, as they are instead driven by the pressures of publishing. However, the primary responsibility of researchers should go beyond the mere production of knowledge. They should follow the aim of making lasting and valuable contributions to humanity. In this context, it is clear that the publishing industry should be restructured to provide necessary alternatives, ensuring that research serves academia and society independently of commercial concerns. As it stands, it is hard to accept a situation in which academics, in line with their intellectual productions, are required not only to pay fees but also to donate almost all of their rights to publishers. This model does not align

with the fundamental purpose of research and knowledge production, which should ultimately be for the public good, not merely profit.

Within the scope of this research, it has been revealed that while some open-access Media and Communication Studies journals prioritise academic quality, others are predominantly driven by commercial concerns. Many major publishers have transformed academic publishing into a significant revenue model by imposing high APC fees under the guise of open access, demonstrating how academic publishing is increasingly shaped by a capitalist framework. On the other hand, some university presses and nonprofit organisations have adopted similar economic models, further contributing to the commercialisation of academic labour. This dynamic renders the production and accessibility of academic knowledge increasingly dependent on market forces, tying publication opportunities to financial resources and exacerbating global academic inequalities. In response to this structure, expanding independent university presses and nonprofit academic platforms emerges as a crucial solution to enhance academic quality and detach academic publishing from commercial imperatives. Furthermore, establishing new communication journals across diverse geographical regions is of great importance in decentralising academic knowledge production and fostering a more balanced global academic landscape.

This research argues for the necessity of deep institutional reform in the field of academic publishing within the discipline of Media and Communication Studies. Such reforms should focus on areas critical to ensuring fairness, including greater support for OA models, liberating journals and editorial boards from monopolistic structures, fairly compensating the labour of peer reviewers and editors, and providing more language support. The academic publishing system should shift from a profit-driven model to one that prioritizes the multifaceted social benefits of knowledge sharing. Steps taken in this direction will contribute to creating a more transparent, fair, and inclusive academic production and sharing process. Finally, this research encourages future scholars to explore the answers to questions like: Is it true that more money equals more science? Does a higher impact factor lead to more citations? Or does more citation equate to greater success?

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