



CARTA AL EDITOR

**¿Cobrar o no cobrar por publicar? ¿Pagar o no pagar  
por revisar?**

*To charge or not to charge for publication? to pay or not  
to pay for review?*

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### **¿Cobrar o no cobrar por publicar? ¿Pagar o no pagar por revisar?**

#### **To charge or not to charge for publication? to pay or not to pay for review?**

Mr. Editor, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute with this letter to the editor. I am writing as I am concerned about the relativization of the issue of the associated charges for publishing in scientific journals, which now seems to be returned as a kind of boomerang to the reviewers, and this, without the latter having participated with the appropriate presence and magnitude in the debate as it would seem to be fair.

There is a whole debate about an issue that is perhaps misunderstood, i.e., the charge associated with the publication of an article in scientific journals. Who pays the cost for the work done by the journal team? Generally, editors and their teams start doing it for free because they believe in altruism in science. In fact, it is difficult to convince, in some cases, the authorities of universities, institutes and other research centers when they have not made a profuse academic life. Obviously, the notion of suitability in the choice or election of authorities comes into play here, but that, which is not relevant to the subject, is a different matter. What happens is that, as the journal is convincing to all and sundry, gaining a position, then they begin to assign hours of work that are paid by the institution, and even then, this is not enough, because as those who work in this field know, the workload always exceeds institutional conventions, which, in many cases (not few), are reluctant to rely on their own scientific publications (until these give them institutional prestige, then they seem to be relevant), unless they are publications of their own academics that help for the rankings. Finally, the value and monetization of the work of editing a journal far exceeds what the institutions are investing, in a good proportion of cases.

This seems to justify, in some way, the publication fee. And that payment is made by the institution that funds the researcher. This issue arises because a group of publishers seem to defend these arguments to the hilt, and it seems fair and appropriate to us. However, when it comes to reviewers, they do have to do the work for free, invoking altruism in science. And not only this, if the reviewers make any allusion to the compensation mechanism by the journal, it ends up being considered a 'pessimist'. But why does it seem to be okay for the journal to charge for publishing, but wrong for it to compensate the reviewers? If science should be altruistic for some, it should also be altruistic for others.

Moreover, reviewers are researchers who also publish, and if they happen to submit an article to the journal for which they have previously reviewed, the charge also applies to the same extent. At the end of the day, the work done by the reviewer is settled with a 'thank you', while their previous work is not considered at the time of submitting a paper to the same journal. This does not mean to relativize the issue from a moral point of view as expressed in the edition of *Información Tecnológica* (2016), on the contrary, it means recognition of the work of a reviewer who serves your journal. You are not giving him the publication as a gift, because it turns out that he has to go through the same refereeing process, and if his work is accepted for publication, he would then have to run the benefit that has been historically denied to him.

It would seem to be fair that, if a journal charges for publication, it should compensate the reviewers in some way, either in monetary proportion to the work performed, or with a proportional remission of the publication fee in the case of submitting a paper to the same journal, or with access to institutional databases for the time stipulated in the review bases. If a journal charges readers, it must also compensate reviewers in the same way as explained above. If a journal does not compensate the reviewers, then it should not charge the authors, and should seek financing by other means that may exist. However, beyond considering compensation by a

¿Cobrar o no cobrar por publicar? ¿Pagar o no pagar por revisar?

journal, university institutions, ministries of science, accrediting agencies, could consider within their evaluation standards, the allocation of benefits for those who serve as vehicles of science, because if we agree with many editors, it is that without scientific referees, there would be no science (Gómez, 2021).

The edition of *Información Tecnológica* (2016), speaking of possible perversions in scientific publications, points out:

Publishers, editors, authors and also reviewers are responsible for this process. Publishers and editors for being the main ideologists of perverse procedures such as agreements to maintain high impact indices; authors who through unethical aspects such as duplicity of publications or undeserved authorship inflate their curriculum vitae to gain in hierarchy and economic incentives; evaluators who make light reviews without considering the tremendous damage done to the dissemination of new knowledge, or others who become moral critics of the system because they are not paid to evaluate (p. 1).

Curiously, the evaluators or reviewers are scorned, considering that some may make light evaluations, as may occur in many cases, but also branding as moral critics of the system those who, as reviewers, ask to be compensated in some way in the context of journals that charge for publication. Why, because they are working, just like the others who are part of the journal process. It is epistemic justice, not moralism. Contrary to such remarks, I rely on Aguaded (2021), who:

Starting from the premise that peer review -especially blind peer review- is the structural basis on which the quality of scientific publications of excellence pivots, the clarification of the protagonism of the academic reviewer should not be in question, but should be recognized and prestigious in all self-respecting evaluation systems (sec. 1/1).

According to Ruano-Raviña and Álvarez (2014):

The review of scientific articles is currently a totally altruistic activity. Very few scientific journals offer any kind of payment or consideration in kind to reviewers. A few pay for the performance of a review (British Medical Journal, Lancet Oncology) and others pay for "express review" requests. Some Elsevier journals offer free access to Scopus to reviewers for a limited time. However, the review process is fundamentally altruistic, as these payments or considerations do not usually compensate for the time spent on a good review. A good reviewer may accept as many as four or five reviews a year, so these "benefits" may come to him or her in an overlapping manner and therefore not be such benefits. For the good reviewer, payment is implicit in the possibility of collaborating with the editorial decisions of a journal he or she admires, and for the privilege of access to unpublished information (p. 354).

Research by Aczel et al. (2021) showed that reviewers of scientific articles in the United States worked more than 100 million hours in 2020, with an estimated value of USD 1.5 billion, while in China for the same year, the estimate reached USD 600 million, and in the United Kingdom, about USD 400 million. In other words, these three countries alone accounted for a value of USD 2.5 billion that the publishing industry did not pay. This does not include the rest of the world.

It would seem then that the issue of peer review should continue to be reviewed, especially the role of the reviewer and his or her contribution to the journals, but more than being reviewed, practices should be incorporated in the journals that imply recognition of the work of a reviewer. Although it is true that the reviewer continues to learn as he/she participates in this circuit, it is

still a job to which he/she dedicates time and effort for the qualification of the publication and of the journal itself.

Compensation should not necessarily be financial, but mechanisms of approach should be generated, because for many journals that charge for publishing without recognizing the reviewers, the work does not seem to be so altruistic, or at least, as has been said above, it seems that it should be altruistic for some, but not for others.

For Vines and Mudditt (2021), incorporating a practice in which a financial compensation is generated to the reviewer, would bring more bureaucracy for journal editors, in addition to, according to them, increasing the costs for publication of articles, both for authors and for those who wish, subsequently, to have access to them. It seems to us that it need not necessarily be one or the other. If the cost associated with publication increases, it is because there are those who are not willing to compensate reviewers without altering what the journal receives. Because one thing is clear, the funds that a journal receives do not go to a secret account, but to pay for services and for those who are working on the journal. However, it is not the purpose of this letter to dwell on financial compensation in a precise way, but to explore new forms of compensation that recognize the work of the reviewer, and that does not pass for showmanship [even though, as Vines and Mudditt (2021) argue, that is what it would be about].

## Referencias

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