



Letter to the Editor

Mirror journals: What do they reflect?

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Gold open access (OA) journals are scholarly publications which follow the Findable, Accessible, Interpretable, and Reusable policy immediately after publication without any cost and embargo period. OA has always been preferred oversubscribed and hybrid journals. However, certain renowned journals are available in subscription and hybrid model mainly. In 2019, there were an estimated 2.2 million subscription and 0.6 million open access articles published worldwide.^[1]

Finch report (2012) and Plan S (2018) suggested that to increase pace, efficiency, efficacy and quality of research (especially by recipients of research funding from cOAlition S organizations), publications should be freely accessible.^[1,2] Two options were available for this. One was transition from subscribed and hybrid journals to full OA. But here, the concern was that they may not receive sufficient papers for a journal from the small number of funding agencies signed on to Plan S. Another option was to create “mirror journals.” This concept was taken up as pilot project by Elsevier in 2018. Although, Elsevier insisted that mirror journals were only a way to “split out previously hybrid content.”

Hence, “Mirror journals”^[2-4] are essentially new journals that share the accomplishments of existing journals for the sole purpose of offering a fully OA option while maintaining already existing subscription or hybrid journal. It means that mirror journals have the same name, editorial board, aims, scope, peer-review policies and even indexing as the parent journal. Although parent and mirror journals are separate publications with separate international standard serial numbers, authors submit their manuscripts through one shared system for peer review. On acceptance only, the authors are required to submit their final choice of publishing the paper in either title. It checks the prejudice of economic influences on editorial decision process. Mirror journals are represented by letter X after the name of journal.^[4] More than 40 mirror journals across a range of subject areas in life, health, and physical sciences have been included in the pilot project. The fully gold OA mirror journals have their own homepages on elsevier.com, and the parent journal homepages also link to their respective OA mirror journal homepages.^[1] Thus, concept of mirror journals gives researchers free access to latest knowledge, authors the maximum amount of choice, widely share their quality work, and increase impact of publication. The publishers of hybrid journals also escape from the occasional charges of double dipping and do not need to launch brand new OA journals. However, policy regarding impact factor of mirror journals is not clear till date. As per one rule of splitting journals by Thomson Reuters in 2015, the journal as a single title keeps its IF in year 1. In year 2, parts A (parent) and B (mirror) both get impact factors based on 1 year of citation and source counts. Parts A and B get full 2-year impact factors in year 3. In other words, by year 2 of the split, the journals will go their separate ways in terms of impact factor. The other rule for splitting says that since the content and scope of the two new journals (parts A and B) come from

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the original title, they would share identical factor too.^[5] Whatever the authorities decide finally, it is clear that the evolving concept of mirror journals may widely change the model of publishing journals. To further promote OA concrete actions like OA2020, initiative has been launched by the Max Planck Society and the Leibniz Association's Science 2.0 Research Alliance.^[1] Only pivotal affair is that the predatory publishers might take advantage and create confusion for the researchers and the organizations. Diligence while selection of journals during submission of manuscript is the need of the hour.

Declaration of patient consent

Patient's consent not required as there are no patients in this study.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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