

# The Case for Open Access in Tourism and Hospitality Research

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One major problem that plagues the tourism and hospitality research field these days is that the scholar community is separated from that of practitioners, and there is little knowledge transfer from the former to the latter [1]. Practitioners largely consider tourism and hospitality research neither relevant nor timely [2]. The traditional academic publishing model is partially to blame. The “publish or perish” model, plus the lengthy turnaround time of publication cycles, have successfully forced many scholars to focus on short-term projects and traditional research methodologies, rather than ask significant and meaningful questions lying in real industries. Many papers published will never be read by a hotel manager or a convention and visitors bureau marketer; most of the time, we scholars read and cite each other’s work in a closed circle [3]. The fate of those research articles ends up either on a physical or a virtual shelf. Publishing in journals, a means to facilitating knowledge growth and providing guidance for the industry, has become a goal in itself. The institutionalization of publishing has mostly alienated the hospitality and tourism industry it should serve, as well as its original goal of knowledge creation.

The printed publication model is part of this established institution. It started when paper was invented back in the 1600s [4]. It opened up scholarly communication from a closed circle to a wider community, bypassing institutional and geographical barriers. It served its purpose of facilitating scholarly communication and knowledge creation when the costs of publishing and transportation are high [5]. However, with the fast evolution of information technology, the democratization of knowledge creation and dissemination and the expansion of scholar communities, printed journals may have become a barrier for scholarly communication, rather than a facilitator.

The problems of the traditional academic publishing model are not specific to the tourism and hospitality research field. There exists a scholarly publishing paradox in most fields: taxpayers’ money goes to research and educational institutions to support their faculty’s research; the faculty prepare, review, and publish research results without any financial compensation from commercial publishers; the institutions need to pay intolerable subscription fees to gain access to the research results their own faculty produced. Essentially the taxpayers need to pay twice for the research, while the commercial publisher sits in the middle and reaps the benefit. With the rising subscription costs of academic journals and the limited budget of many institutional libraries, this model is not sustainable [6]. In particular, many developing countries are deprived of access to state-of-art research due to even more limited financial situations.

With the fast development of information technology, especially the Internet, an open source model is not only possible, but has become more and more necessary. Open source journals are not only faster, cheaper, and widely accessible, but also facilitate quicker scholarly communication and knowledge creation. The printing of journals actually slows down this process. The content can be made more interactive, and it can easily capture more informal communication, such as reviews, comments, or emails. It could also allow multimedia content such as audio, video, or even data.

However, the opponents of open access groups argue that the practice will lead to the infringement of intellectual property and, thus, may prohibit innovation; commercial publishers also contribute to the scholarly process by acting as information gatekeepers [7]. However,

many open access journals have flourished; several studies have demonstrated that open access research articles attracted more citations and had a larger impact than articles published in traditional journals [8,9]. The algorithms taking advantages of citation patterns gave Google the ability to discover quality web pages [10]; similar algorithms based on citation and download patterns can also be used to discover quality research results and manuscripts. Information gatekeepers are not necessary; often, they act as a flawed filtering mechanism, which favors well-established methodologies and ideologies.

In conclusion, open access journals could help facilitate faster scholarly communication and knowledge creation. They can bring down legal and access barriers and make knowledge truly accessible to any layperson and industrial practitioners. Open access journals will help the academic community to publish more timely and relevant research and bridge the gap between academia and industry. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality* has made a laudable step in this direction.

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