

Peer Review

Review of: "Publishing Test-Ready Hypotheses When Experiments Are Out of Reach"

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Overall Assessment

This is a **timely and innovative commentary** that proposes a structured editorial pathway for publishing “test-ready hypotheses” when immediate experimentation is not feasible. The manuscript is equity-focused, particularly relevant for researchers in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), and offers practical suggestions for integrating preprints, defensive publication, and generative AI into scientific workflows. The contribution is significant, but the paper would benefit from additional detail on implementation, reviewer incentives, and communication safeguards.

Major Comments

1. Conceptual Framework and Implementation

- The proposal is compelling, but more concrete examples of how journals might operationalize this format are needed. For instance, what would the submission workflow look like, and how would triage criteria be applied in practice?

2. Equity and APC Waivers

- The discussion of APC inequalities is important, but the solutions remain abstract. The paper should outline specific models (e.g., tiered fee structures, partnerships with LMIC institutions) to ensure sustainability and transparency of waivers.

3. Reviewer Capacity

- Reviewer fatigue is acknowledged, but solutions are limited. More detail on how journals could incentivize reviewers (e.g., recognition, credits, or reduced APCs) for hypothesis-only submissions would strengthen feasibility.

4. Risk of Misinterpretation

- Explicit labeling (“Hypothesis” or “Concept”) is useful, but stronger safeguards are needed to prevent non-specialists from misinterpreting these articles as evidence. Mandatory disclaimers in abstracts and press releases could help.

5. Role of Generative AI

- The discussion of AI as a democratizing tool is timely, but safeguards could be expanded. How should journals verify AI-assisted novelty scans or prevent inequitable access to advanced AI tools? More detail would enhance credibility.

Minor Comments

1. Terminology Consistency

- The manuscript alternates between “test-ready hypotheses,” “idea-centered articles,” and “conceptual contributions.” Standardizing terminology would improve clarity.

2. Examples Section

- Historical examples are compelling, but adding one or two recent case studies of hypothesis-only publications would make the argument more persuasive.

3. Formatting

- The checklist for defensive publication could be presented as a table for easier readability.

4. References

- Some references (e.g., on APC inequalities and altmetrics) could be updated with more recent data to strengthen the evidence base.

5. Language and Readability

- Certain sections (especially on equity and reviewer capacity) are dense and could be streamlined for clarity.

Recommendation

This is a **thought-provoking and equity-focused manuscript** that makes a valuable contribution to debates on scientific publishing reform. With revisions to clarify implementation details, strengthen safeguards against misinterpretation, and improve readability, it could be an excellent addition to the literature.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.