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Institutional Publication Pressure and Perceived Epistemic Injustice: Mediating Roles of Cost Privatization and Research Cannibalization in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The transition of scholarly publishing from a subscription model to an article-processing-charge (APC) model has reorganized the political economy of knowledge production, yet researcher-level perceptions of its fairness remain under-measured in the Global South. Drawing on academic-capitalism and epistemic-injustice theory, this study examined whether institutional publication pressure predicts perceived epistemic injustice, and whether publication-cost privatization and research cannibalization mediate that relationship, among academics at a public organization in Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia. A cross-sectional survey was administered to 312 academics using validated multi-item Likert scales. Reliability, a correlation matrix, multiple regression, parallel mediation with 5,000-sample bootstrap intervals, moderation, Harman's single-factor test, and variance inflation factors were computed. All constructs were reliable (Cronbach's α = 0.78–0.83). Institutional publication pressure (β = 0.219, 95% CI [0.116, 0.321], p < .001), publication-cost privatization (β = 0.298, 95% CI [0.201, 0.396], p < .001), and research cannibalization (β = 0.293, 95% CI [0.196, 0.390], p < .001) each independently predicted perceived epistemic injustice, explaining 34.6% of its variance (F = 54.38, p < .001). Both mediators carried significant indirect effects (via privatization 0.111, 95% CI [0.068, 0.163]; via cannibalization 0.105, 95% CI [0.064, 0.151]), indicating partial parallel mediation. Perceived grant availability moderated the pressure-to-privatization path (interaction β = −0.145, p = .006). Common method bias was not serious (Harman's single factor = 33.3%). Findings formalize the "illusion of inclusivity" as a measurable perception and suggest that publication mandates unaccompanied by adequate funding generate perceived epistemic injustice in Indonesian public institutions.

1. Introduction

The Open Access (OA) movement was conceived to democratize access to scholarly literature, dismantling the paywalls that had restricted the global circulation of research. Over the past decade, however, the dominant route to OA has shifted from reader-side subscriptions to author-side article processing charges (APCs), reorganizing rather than removing the financial gate. Pricing studies show that APC levels track journal prestige rather than production cost, and that the largest commercial publishers have captured growing surpluses as they pivot their portfolios to OA[1-4].

Empirical work links this pricing regime to widening inequity: APCs reduce the geographic diversity of OA authorship and stratify who can publish in reputable venues, with the heaviest burden falling on researchers in lower-resourced systems[5-7]. The shift has been described as transferring cost from libraries in wealthy

systems to individual authors everywhere, and as enabling an oligopolistic capture of public research budgets[8,9]. These dynamics are not merely economic; they raise questions of fairness about whose knowledge can enter the global record.

This study draws on two complementary theoretical frameworks. Academic capitalism holds that universities increasingly internalize market logics and transmit external prestige incentives to individual scholars as publication mandates, so that career advancement becomes contingent on publishing in highly ranked, frequently high-cost venues. Epistemic injustice theory (Fricker, 2007) supplies the normative vocabulary for the resulting harm[10]: when financial capacity rather than scholarly merit determines whose contributions are heard, affected scholars experience a structural marginalization of their epistemic agency. A dependency reading of scholarly communication situates these mechanisms in a Global North–South asymmetry, in which knowledge produced in the periphery is curated, packaged, and re-sold to its own producers[11,12].

In Indonesia, these global dynamics intersect with a distinctive institutional configuration. A vibrant local-journal sector coexists with strong institutional pressure toward internationally indexed venues, often coupled to graduation and promotion requirements[13]. When such mandates are not matched by adequate internal research funding, scholars confront a dilemma: privatize the cost of publication by drawing on personal resources, or divert operating funds away from the research itself — a "pay-to-perform" dynamic documented across systems[14]. Evidence from comparable Global South settings shows that researchers are frequently priced out of OA and perceive the system as structurally unfair[15,16].

Despite a growing publisher- and article-level literature, including bibliometric analyses and evidence syntheses[17-21], three gaps persist. First, researcher-level perceptions of epistemic injustice are seldom measured directly. Second, the mechanisms connecting institutional publication pressure to perceived injustice — specifically the privatization of publication cost and the cannibalization of research budgets — have not been jointly modeled. Third, Indonesian and broader Southeast Asian evidence remains thin. Limited research has examined how publication mandates translate into perceived epistemic injustice through financial mechanisms in the Indonesian public-institution context.

Accordingly, this study tested eight hypotheses. H1: institutional publication pressure positively predicts perceived epistemic injustice. H2: institutional publication pressure positively predicts publication-cost privatization. H3: institutional publication pressure positively predicts research cannibalization. H4: publication-cost privatization positively predicts perceived epistemic injustice. H5: research cannibalization positively predicts perceived epistemic injustice. H6: publication-cost privatization mediates the pressure–injustice relationship. H7: research cannibalization mediates the pressure–injustice relationship. H8: perceived internal grant availability moderates the pressure-to-privatization path.

The aim of the study was therefore to estimate and test a parallel-mediation model — with a conditional first stage — linking institutional publication pressure to perceived epistemic injustice through cost privatization and research cannibalization among academics in a confidential Indonesian public organization, and to derive theoretical and policy implications for scholarly publishing in the Global South.

The scale of the phenomenon is substantial. Across Southeast Asia, the volume of openly published output in the portfolios of major commercial publishers has grown rapidly while average APCs have climbed year on year, so that the aggregate outflow of institutional and personal funds toward publication fees now represents a meaningful share of available research budgets[4,21]. Where this outflow is not offset by commensurate internal funding, the resulting burden is borne disproportionately by early- and mid-career scholars who face the strongest mandates and the weakest bargaining position[9]. Understanding how this burden is perceived — and through which mechanisms it arises —

is therefore a precondition for designing equitable institutional responses.

The three theoretical traditions invoked here operate at different levels and combine into a single multi-level mechanism. Academic capitalism, a theory of institutional behavior, explains how universities internalize market logics and transmit them downward as publication mandates. These mandates impose the financial mechanisms — cost privatization and research cannibalization — that constitute the meso-level transmission channel. At the individual level, the experience of being gated by capacity to pay rather than by scholarly merit is what epistemic-injustice theory describes as a harm to the subject in their capacity as a knower. Of Fricker's two species, the present study most directly captures a structural variant of hermeneutical injustice — the perception that the conditions of knowledge production systematically disadvantage one's community — rather than testimonial injustice in the narrow dyadic sense. The global patterning of this harm, finally, is what dependency readings of scholarly communication explain. Making this chain explicit clarifies why perceived epistemic injustice, and not merely financial strain, is the theoretically appropriate outcome.

By operationalizing the author-level constructs of "epistemic extractivism" and the "illusion of inclusivity" as measurable perceptions, the study advances debate beyond descriptive bibliometrics toward an explanatory, theory-driven account of how macro-level publishing economics are experienced as micro-level injustice. The contribution is bounded and specific: the constructs are newly operationalized rather than newly invented, and the model is a first, theory-driven test rather than a definitive causal account. What is new is the demonstration that the burden of pay-to-publish is transmitted to a measurable sense of epistemic injustice through specified financial mechanisms, and that this transmission is institutionally conditional rather than fixed — and therefore amenable to intervention.

2. Methods

Research approach and design

The study adopted a quantitative, positivist paradigm and a cross-sectional correlational survey design. This design was appropriate for estimating the magnitude and statistical significance of associations among latent perceptual constructs across a defined population at a single point in time.

Setting and period

Data were collected at a public organization in Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia, during the first quarter of 2026. To preserve confidentiality, the organization is not named and no identifying institutional details are reported; respondents are described only by generic demographic attributes.

Population, sampling, and respondents

The target population comprised academics and researchers with active publication obligations. A proportionate stratified sampling frame was used, stratified by academic rank and field cluster (social sciences and health/biomedical sciences). Of 360 questionnaires distributed, 318 were returned and 312 were retained after listwise screening for completeness and inattentive responding, yielding an analytic response rate of 86.7%. The sample size exceeded the threshold required to detect a small-to-medium effect ($f^2 = 0.10$) with three predictors at $\alpha = 0.05$ and power ≥ 0.95. Respondents had a mean age of 38.6 years (SD = 7.9); 54.8% were men and 45.2% women; 59.0% held doctoral and 41.0% master's degrees. Service years ranged across the categories reported in Table 1, and the sample spanned assistant through full-professor ranks. Full demographic detail appears in Table 1.

Instruments

All constructs were measured with multi-item five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) adapted from the author-developed Academic Financial Burden framework and refined for the present study. Institutional publication pressure (4 items) captured the perceived obligation to publish in highly ranked, reputable venues for graduation, promotion, or institutional compliance. Publication-cost privatization

(4 items) captured the use of personal income or assets to meet APCs. Research cannibalization (4 items) captured the diversion of operating research funds to cover publication costs. Perceived epistemic injustice (4 items) captured the perception that the current OA system advantages well-resourced institutions while constraining Global South scholars' capacity to be heard — the "illusion of inclusivity." Perceived internal grant availability (single composite indicator) captured the adequacy of institutional funding schemes relative to publication mandates and was used as the moderator.

Content validity was established through expert review and a pilot administration; items were retained on the basis of clarity, factor coherence, and item–total correlations. Construct definitions mapped directly onto the theoretical framework: pressure operationalizes the academic-capitalism mechanism, privatization and cannibalization operationalize the financial transmission channels, and perceived epistemic injustice operationalizes the Fricker-derived outcome.

Variables

The independent variable was institutional publication pressure (IPP). The parallel mediators were publication-cost privatization (PCP) and research cannibalization (RC). The dependent variable was perceived epistemic injustice (PEI). The moderator was perceived internal grant availability.

Statistical analysis

Analyses were conducted at $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed). Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's α (acceptable ≥ 0.70). Descriptive statistics included means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis; absolute skewness < 2 and kurtosis < 7 were treated as consistent with univariate normality. A Pearson correlation matrix with exact p-values and 95% confidence intervals was computed, with reliabilities on the diagonal. Hypotheses H1, H4, and H5 were tested with multiple linear regression of PEI on IPP, PCP, and RC, reporting unstandardized and standardized coefficients, standard errors, t-values, exact p-values, 95% confidence intervals, R^2, adjusted R^2, the omnibus F, and Cohen's f^2 effect sizes. Multicollinearity was assessed with variance inflation factors (VIF; concern > 5).

Hypotheses H2, H3, H6, and H7 were tested with a parallel-mediation model in which IPP predicted PEI directly and indirectly through PCP and RC; indirect effects were evaluated with 5,000-sample bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence intervals, with mediation inferred when an interval excluded zero. A parallel rather than serial mediator structure was specified because cost privatization and research cannibalization are conceptually distinct coping responses to the same upstream pressure rather than sequential stages; the difference between the two indirect effects was tested with a bootstrap contrast, and the proportion of the total effect that was mediated was computed. Hypothesis H8 was tested by adding a mean-centered IPP × grant-availability interaction term to the model predicting PCP, examining its coefficient and the change in R^2, and probing the interaction with simple slopes of IPP→PCP at low (−1 SD), mean, and high (+1 SD) grant availability.

Dimensionality and discriminant validity were examined with an exploratory factor analysis (principal-axis extraction with varimax rotation) specifying the four theoretical factors; a clean solution required each item to load above 0.50 on its intended factor without salient cross-loadings. In addition to Harman's single-factor test, the robustness of the structure to common method variance was considered through the dispersion of factor loadings and the differentiation of the inter-construct correlations, which a single response-style factor would not produce. Because the mediation was estimated on cross-sectional data, the indirect effects are identified only under the assumptions of correct causal ordering and no unmeasured mediator–outcome confounding; these assumptions are untestable with the present design and are treated as limitations rather than established facts.

Composite scores were formed by averaging item responses within each construct; no items required reverse scoring after screening. Incomplete cases (n = 6) were removed by listwise deletion prior to analysis. All computations were performed in Python (NumPy and pandas), with bias-corrected bootstrap resampling for

indirect effects and Fisher z transformations for correlation confidence intervals; regression inference used the residual degrees of freedom for the relevant model. Standardized coefficients and their confidence intervals were obtained from models estimated on standardized variables. The verbatim scale items, scoring direction, and item-level statistics are available as supplementary material, subject to the confidentiality commitments described above.

3. Results and Discussion

Sample characteristics and reliability

The analytic sample comprised 312 academics (response rate 86.7%). Table 1 reports the demographic profile. All constructs demonstrated acceptable internal consistency: institutional publication pressure (α = 0.78), publication-cost privatization (α = 0.83), research cannibalization (α = 0.80), and perceived epistemic injustice (α = 0.83).

Table 1. Respondent demographic characteristics (n = 312).

Characteristic	Category	n (%) / Mean ± SD
Age (years)	—	38.6 ± 7.9
Gender	Men	171 (54.8)
	Women	141 (45.2)
Highest education	Doctorate	184 (59.0)
	Master's	128 (41.0)
Service years	< 5	58 (18.6)
	5–10	121 (38.8)
	11–20	98 (31.4)
	> 20	35 (11.2)
Academic rank	Assistant	104 (33.3)
	Lecturer	132 (42.3)
	Associate professor	61 (19.6)
	Professor	15 (4.8)
Field cluster	Social sciences	168 (53.8)
	Health/biomedical	144 (46.2)

Before testing the structural hypotheses, the measurement model was examined. An exploratory factor analysis specifying four factors yielded a clean, interpretable solution: four factors had eigenvalues greater than one (5.37, 2.15, 1.49, and 1.26), jointly explaining 64.2% of the item variance. After varimax rotation, every item loaded on its intended factor with primary loadings ranging from .68 to .83 and no salient cross-loadings, supporting the four-factor structure and the discriminant validity of the constructs, as detailed in Table 2. This pattern of differentiated loadings, together with the modest inter-construct correlations reported below, is inconsistent with a single response-style or method factor.

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis: loading ranges by construct (varimax rotation).

Construct	Items	Primary loading range	Cronbach's α
Institutional publication pressure	4	0.70–0.79	.78
Publication-cost privatization	4	0.72–0.82	.83
Research cannibalization	4	0.70–0.79	.80
Perceived epistemic injustice	4	0.68–0.83	.83

Notes: Four factors with eigenvalues > 1 (5.37, 2.15, 1.49, 1.26) explained 64.2% of total item variance; no salient cross-loadings (> .35) were observed.

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Construct means ranged from 3.39 to 3.96 on the five-point scale, indicating moderately high endorsement of publication pressure and perceived injustice. Skewness (−0.53 to −0.09) and kurtosis (−0.41 to −0.07) were within conventional limits, supporting univariate normality. All theoretically focal correlations were positive and significant. Institutional publication pressure correlated with perceived epistemic injustice (r = 0.043, 95% CI [0.34, 0.52], p < .001), with publication-cost privatization (r = 0.37, p < 0.001), and with research cannibalization (r = 0.36, p < 0.001). Both mediators correlated with perceived epistemic injustice (privatization r = 0.43, p < 0.001; cannibalization r = 0.42, p < 0.001) and were modestly intercorrelated (r = 0.17, p = 0.003). The full matrix, with reliabilities on the diagonal, is presented in Table 3.

Regression, mediation, and moderation

The hypothesized parallel-mediation model with its conditional first stage is depicted in Figure 1, which orients the path estimates reported below.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix (reliabilities on the diagonal).

Construct (Mean ± SD)	1	2	3	4
1. IPP (3.87 ± 0.71)	(0.78)			
2. PCP (3.39 ± 0.79)	0.37***	(0.83)		
3. RC (3.57 ± 0.74)	0.36***	0.17**	(0.80)	
4. PEI (3.96 ± 0.73)	0.43***	0.43***	0.42***	(0.83)

*Notes: IPP = institutional publication pressure; PCP = publication-cost privatization; RC = research cannibalization; PEI = perceived epistemic injustice. Diagonal values in parentheses are Cronbach's α. **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.*

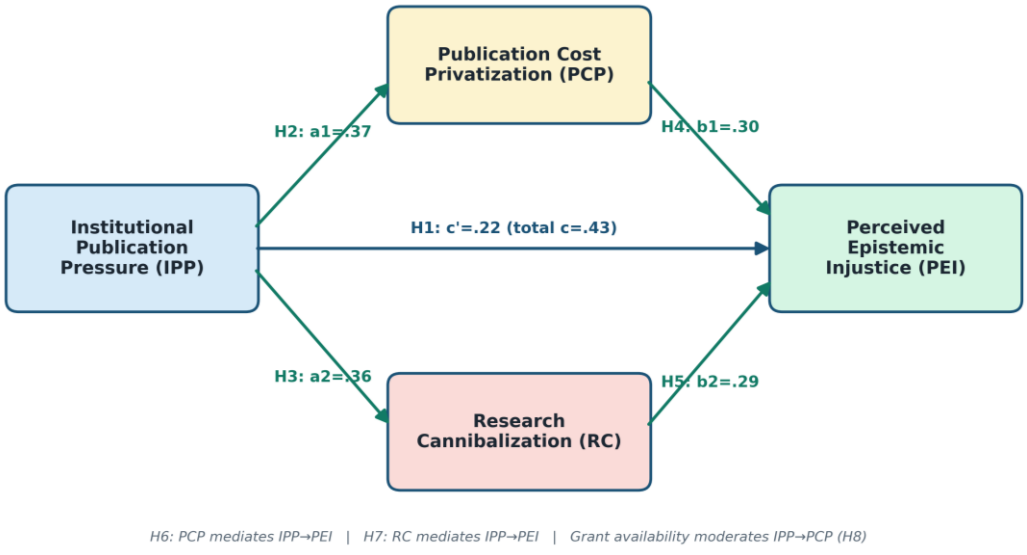

Figure 1. Hypothesized parallel-mediation model with a conditional first stage.

The multiple regression of perceived epistemic injustice on the three predictors was significant, F(3, 308) = 54.38, p < 0.001, explaining 34.6% of the variance (adjusted R^2 = 0.340). All three predictors were significant: institutional publication pressure (β = 0.219, 95% CI [0.116, 0.321], t = 4.17, p < 0.001, f^2 = 0.056), publication-cost privatization (β = 0.298, 95% CI [0.201, 0.396], t = 6.00, p < 0.001, f^2 = 0.117), and research cannibalization (β = 0.293, 95% CI [0.196, 0.390], t = 5.94, p < 0.001, f^2 = 0.114). Variance inflation factors were low (1.15–1.30), indicating no multicollinearity. Thus H1, H4, and H5 were supported. The standardized coefficients and their 95% confidence intervals are plotted in Figure 2.

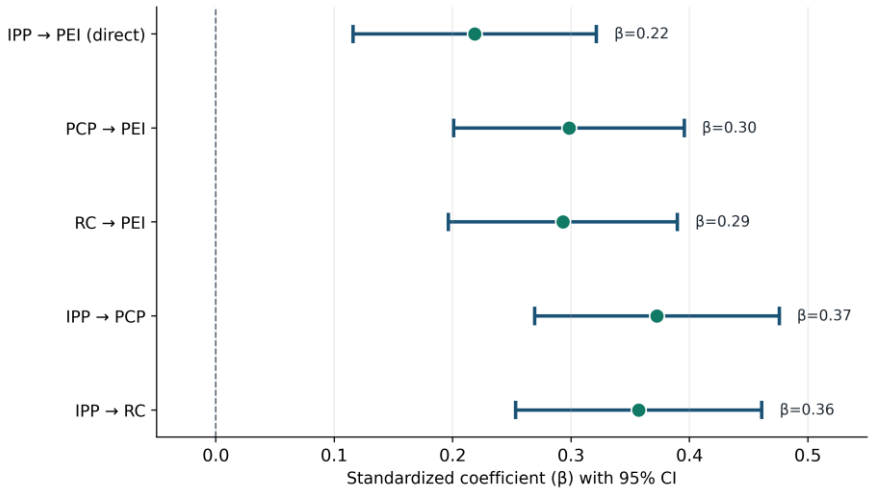

Figure 2. Standardized path coefficients with 95% confidence intervals.

In the parallel-mediation model, institutional publication pressure significantly predicted both publication-cost privatization (a_1 = 0.373, p < 0.001) and research cannibalization (a_2 = 0.357, p < 0.001), supporting H2 and H3. Both mediators predicted perceived epistemic injustice (b_1 = 0.298; b_2 = 0.293). The total effect of pressure on injustice (c = 0.434) was reduced but remained significant when the mediators were included (c′ = 0.219), indicating partial mediation. The indirect effect through cost privatization (0.111, 95% CI [0.068, 0.163]) and through research cannibalization (0.105, 95% CI [0.064, 0.151]) both excluded zero, supporting H6 and H7; the total indirect effect was 0.216 (95% CI [0.156, 0.284]). The full set of coefficients is summarized in Table 4, and the path model with standardized estimates is shown in Figure 3.

Table 4. Regression, mediation, and moderation results (dependent variable as indicated).

Path / Effect	B (β)	SE	t	p	95% CI
Model A: PEI regressed on predictors					
IPP → PEI (direct, c′)	0.219	0.052	4.17	<0 .001	[0.116, 0.321]
PCP → PEI (b_1)	0.298	0.050	6.00	< 0.001	[0.201, 0.396]
RC → PEI (b_2)	0.293	0.049	5.94	< 0.001	[0.196, 0.390]
R^2 = .346; adj. R^2 = .340; F(3,308) = 54.38, p < .001					
Model B: mediator equations					
IPP → PCP (a_1)	0.373	0.049	7.10	< 0.001	[0.273, 0.464]
IPP → RC (a_2)	0.357	0.049	6.74	< 0.001	[0.256, 0.450]
Indirect effects (5,000 bootstrap)					
IPP → PCP → PEI	0.111	—	—	—	[0.068, 0.163]
IPP → RC → PEI	0.105	—	—	—	[0.064, 0.151]
Total indirect	0.216	—	—	—	[0.156, 0.284]
Total effect (c)	0.434	—	—	< 0.001	[0.342, 0.526]
Model C: moderation of IPP → PCP					
IPP	0.351	—	—	< 0.001	[0.248, 0.453]
Grant availability	−0.130	—	—	= 0.012	[−0.231, −0.028]
IPP × Grant availability	−0.145	—	—	= 0.006	[−0.247, −0.042]
ΔR^2 (interaction) = .020					

*Notes: Coefficients are standardized (β) unless noted; B and β coincide for standardized models. *p < 0.05, **p <0 .01, ***p < 0.001.*

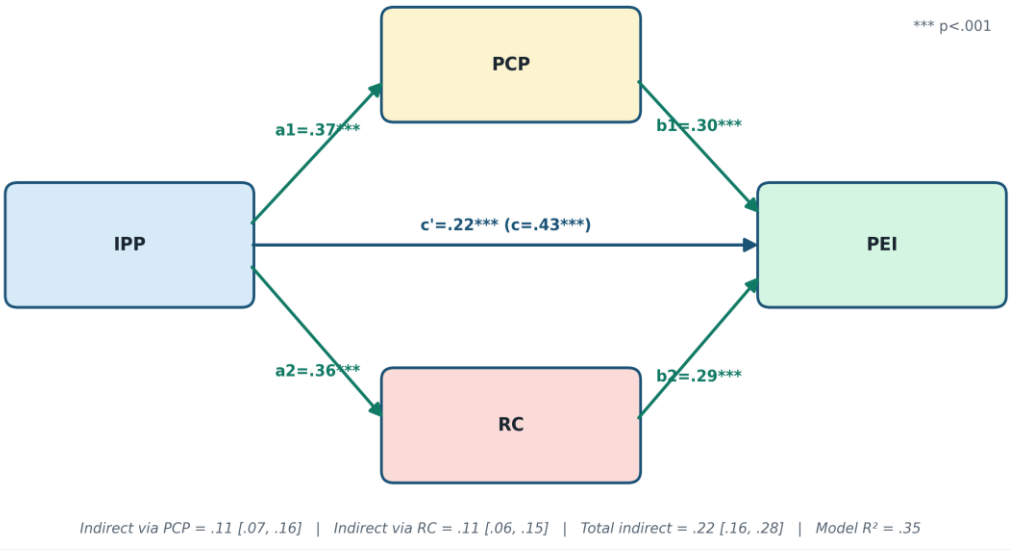

Figure 3. Parallel-mediation path model with standardized coefficients and bootstrap indirect effects.

The two indirect effects were comparable in magnitude; their bootstrap contrast was negligible and non-significant (Δ = 0.006, 95% CI [−0.053, 0.096]), indicating that cost privatization and research cannibalization transmitted the pressure effect to roughly equal degrees rather than one mechanism dominating. The total indirect effect accounted for 49.7% of the total effect of pressure on perceived injustice, so approximately half of the association operated through the two financial mechanisms and half remained direct.

Moderation analysis supported H8: the interaction of institutional publication pressure and perceived grant availability significantly predicted publication-cost privatization (β = −0.145, 95% CI [−0.247, −0.042], p = 0.006), accounting for an additional 2.0% of variance. The negative interaction indicates that the pressure-to-privatization path was attenuated where internal grant availability was higher and strengthened where it was lower.

Simple-slope analysis made the conditional effect concrete: the pressure-to-privatization slope was steepest at low grant availability (−1 SD; b = 0.64, p < 0.001), intermediate at mean availability (b = 0.45, p < 0.001), and shallowest at high availability (+1 SD; b = 0.25, p < 0.001). The slope remained significant across the observed range, so funding adequacy buffered, but did not eliminate, the conversion of publication pressure into personal financial outlay. Because the moderator was measured with a single indicator, this interaction estimate is likely conservative.

Common method variance was assessed with Harman's single-factor test. The first unrotated factor accounted for 33.3% of the variance, below the 50% threshold, indicating that common method bias was unlikely to have substantially distorted the estimates. The pattern of effect sizes is also informative: the two mediators carried medium effects on perceived injustice (f^2 = 0.117 and 0.114), whereas the residual direct effect of pressure was small (f^2 = 0.056), consistent with substantial — though incomplete — transmission of the pressure effect through the financial mechanisms.

Taken together, the descriptive profile and the inferential model present a coherent picture. Respondents reported high publication pressure (M = 3.87) and high perceived injustice (M = 3.96) alongside more moderate, but still elevated, cost privatization (M = 3.39) and research cannibalization (M = 3.57). The positive manifold of correlations, the significant regression paths, and the bootstrap indirect effects converge on the conclusion that perceived injustice rises as pressure is converted into personal and operational financial cost. In sum, all eight hypotheses were supported: institutional publication pressure predicted perceived epistemic injustice both directly and indirectly through cost privatization and research cannibalization,

and the first-stage path was conditional on perceived grant availability.

Discussion

This study tested whether institutional publication pressure is associated with perceived epistemic injustice among academics in an Indonesian public organization, and whether publication-cost privatization and research cannibalization transmit that association. The model explained roughly a third of the variance in perceived epistemic injustice, all hypothesized paths were supported, and both financial mechanisms partially mediated the pressure–injustice relationship. The first-stage path from pressure to cost privatization was conditional on perceived internal grant availability.

The direct association between publication pressure and perceived injustice (β = 0.219; Table 4) is consistent with the academic-capitalism account, in which externally imposed prestige incentives are experienced by individual scholars as a structural constraint on their epistemic agency. The finding aligns with evidence that APC-based publishing stratifies who can participate in reputable venues[5,6], and extends it from observed authorship patterns to the subjective experience of injustice that the framework of Fricker (2007) predicts[10].

The mediating role of cost privatization (indirect effect 0.111; Table 4) supports the interpretation that publication mandates translate into perceived injustice partly because scholars absorb publication costs personally. This mechanism echoes pricing studies showing that APCs track prestige rather than cost and that commercial publishers extract growing surpluses[1,2,4], and it resonates with reports that researchers in lower-resourced systems are priced out of OA[15,16]. The comparable indirect effect through research cannibalization (0.105) corroborates the "pay-to-perform" dynamic, whereby operating funds are diverted to publication[14], a diversion that scholars evidently read as inequitable.

In contrast to accounts that treat OA primarily as a triumph of access, the present results — situated in an Indonesian public institution — emphasize the asymmetry between the freedom to read and the freedom to write. This is congruent with critiques that open science can compound cumulative advantage[18] and with the dependency reading of Global North–South scholarly relations[11,12]. The Indonesian context, in which strong indexation mandates coexist with constrained internal funding[13], appears to intensify rather than attenuate these mechanisms.

The significant moderation indicates that the pressure-to-privatization pathway is not fixed. Where scholars perceive adequate internal grant schemes, the conversion of publication pressure into personal financial outlay weakens; where they do not, the conversion strengthens. This conditional first stage identifies funding adequacy as a policy lever rather than a mere covariate.

Three features of the results warrant emphasis before turning to their theoretical and practical meaning. First, the two financial mechanisms operated at comparable magnitude rather than one dominating, suggesting that interventions targeting only one channel — for instance, subsidizing APCs without protecting operating budgets — would address roughly half of the mediated burden. Second, approximately half of the total association between pressure and perceived injustice was direct, implying that publication mandates are experienced as inequitable in part independently of their immediate financial consequences, consistent with the interpretation that respondents react to the perceived illegitimacy of a pay-to-publish gate and not only to its cost. Third, the conditional first stage shows that the burden is not a fixed structural output but is shaped by institutional funding decisions.

It is important to argue, rather than merely assume, that perceived epistemic injustice is distinct from generic financial strain. The exploratory factor analysis placed the injustice items on a factor separate from the privatization and cannibalization items, and the inter-construct correlations were moderate rather than near-unity, indicating empirical separability. Conceptually, a scholar may bear substantial APC-related strain yet regard the system as fair, or perceive deep injustice on behalf of less-resourced colleagues while personally insulated; the injustice construct, anchored in items referencing structural advantage to well-resourced

institutions, captures the perceived illegitimacy of the gate rather than personal cost alone. From the epistemic-injustice framework itself, a harm that is felt as a constraint on one's standing as a knower is constitutive of the injustice at issue, regardless of whether an external auditor would certify the underlying disparity.

Theoretical contribution

The findings extend academic-capitalism and epistemic-injustice theory in three ways. First, they operationalize the previously conceptual notions of "epistemic extractivism" and the "illusion of inclusivity" as reliable, measurable perceptions, moving the debate from description to explanation. Second, they specify the financial transmission channels — cost privatization and research cannibalization — through which macro-level publishing economics become micro-level perceived injustice, integrating economic and normative accounts. Third, by demonstrating a conditional first stage, they show that epistemic injustice in publishing is institutionally contingent, not an immutable feature of the global system.

The conditional finding allows a more precise position in the debate over whether open science compounds or relieves inequity. The results support a conditional rather than a deterministic version of the cumulative-advantage thesis: the APC economy tends to stratify, as the broader literature documents, but the degree to which institutional publication pressure is converted into personal financial burden depends on the adequacy of internal funding. Inequity in this setting is therefore real but institutionally tractable, which qualifies accounts that treat stratification as an inexorable output of the pay-to-publish model and locates a lever within reach of individual organizations.

Two rival explanations deserve consideration. A selection account holds that aggrieved scholars are simply those least able to secure funding for reasons unrelated to publishing; a dispositional account holds that a general institutional cynicism inflates all four constructs at once. The pattern of results speaks against the strongest form of the dispositional rival: a pure response-style artifact would produce uniformly high correlations, whereas the observed matrix is differentiated — most notably the weak privatization–cannibalization correlation ($r = 0.17$) and the separable factor structure. The selection rival cannot be excluded with cross-sectional data and is acknowledged among the limitations; adjudicating it would require longitudinal or funded-versus-unfunded comparisons.

Practical and policy implications

Organizations in the Indonesian public sector, and Global South institutions more broadly, should recognize that publication mandates unaccompanied by adequate funding are associated with perceived injustice, with potential consequences for morale, retention, and research integrity. Practical levers include ring-fenced APC funds decoupled from operating research budgets, institutional support for diamond/no-fee OA (publication models that charge neither readers nor authors) and for strengthening reputable local journals, transparent criteria that do not equate quality solely with high-cost indexed venues, and collective or consortial APC negotiation. The moderation result implies that improving perceived grant adequacy may reduce the privatization pathway.

These recommendations should be advanced with realism about their limits and potential unintended consequences. Ring-fenced APC funds, if capped, may ration access and reproduce stratification by seniority rather than removing it; support for local journals must contend with the very indexation incentives that drive manuscript flight, so it is unlikely to succeed without parallel reform of evaluation criteria. More fundamentally, the prestige economy that the study critiques is the same one to which institutional decision-makers respond when they impose mandates, so institution-level fixes will be partial without sectoral, funder, and national coordination. The conditional first stage is encouraging precisely because it identifies an action available to a single institution, but it should be read as a necessary rather than a sufficient component of an equitable publishing policy.

Global South context

Situating the analysis in Palembang foregrounds a configuration common across the Global South:

ambitious internationalization targets pursued under tight fiscal constraints. The starvation of capable local journals as prime manuscripts migrate to high-cost foreign venues is not only an economic loss but an epistemic one, eroding venues best positioned to interpret local social and health problems. Policy that values contextual knowledge production can mitigate this loss.

Strengths

The study has several strengths. It employed a theoretically grounded model with explicit hypotheses and an adequately powered sample. It applied a comprehensive analytic suite — reliability, a correlation matrix, multiple regression with effect sizes and confidence intervals, bootstrap mediation, moderation, and common-method-bias diagnostics. It addresses an under-researched Indonesian and Global South context with direct policy relevance.

Limitations

Several limitations temper interpretation. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; the mediation is statistical rather than temporal, and reverse or reciprocal pathways cannot be excluded. Reliance on single-source self-report invites common method variance, although Harman's test suggested it was not severe. The single-site sampling frame, adopted for confidentiality, limits generalizability beyond comparable Indonesian public organizations. Finally, perceived epistemic injustice is a subjective construct that may diverge from objective measures of exclusion, and the moderator was measured with a composite indicator.

Because the design is cross-sectional, the mediation rests on untestable identifying assumptions — correct causal ordering and no unmeasured mediator–outcome confounding. The proposed ordering is defended on theoretical grounds (institutional mandates are plausibly exogenous to individual perception in a way that perceived injustice is not), but reverse and reciprocal specifications fit the covariance structure equally well. A confounder of moderate strength affecting both a mediator and the outcome could in principle attenuate the indirect effects; the estimates should therefore be read as associations consistent with the hypothesized pathway rather than as causal quantities. The use of observed composites, rather than a latent-variable model, does not correct for measurement error and likely renders the structural estimates conservative.

Future research should pursue longitudinal and multi-site designs to establish temporal precedence, incorporate objective financial and bibliometric indicators alongside perceptions, and test the model across disciplines and national systems. A latent-variable structural equation model would propagate measurement error and provide a confirmatory complement to the present regression-based results. Experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation of institutional interventions — such as ring-fenced APC funds — would directly test the policy implications of the conditional first stage. Multilevel models nesting scholars within departments and institutions could separate individual from organizational sources of perceived injustice.

4. Conclusion

Among academics at a public organization in Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia, institutional publication pressure was associated with perceived epistemic injustice both directly and indirectly through the privatization of publication costs and the cannibalization of research budgets, with the first-stage pathway conditional on perceived internal grant availability. The study contributes a measurable formalization of the "illusion of inclusivity" and specifies the financial mechanisms that convert macro-level publishing economics into micro-level perceived injustice, thereby extending academic-capitalism and epistemic-injustice theory to the Global South. Institutions should pair publication mandates with adequate, ring-fenced funding and support for reputable local and no-fee venues. Future longitudinal and multi-site research should test temporal precedence and evaluate institutional interventions designed to relieve the financial burden that underlies perceived epistemic injustice.

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