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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mandatory Manuscript Submission Policies and Authors' Rights and Capabilities from a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access Perspective: A Prototype Proposal

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ABSTRACT

Several academic journals have explicitly articulated goals related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA). Their mandatory online submission policies, however, introduce final structural hurdles that we believe have the potential to infringe upon authors' freedom of expression by wasting time and restricting their freedom to impart information and opinions, contrary to DEIA principles. In this case-based prototype opinion paper, we classify mandatory submission-related requirements into three categories: necessary and reasonable; burdensome, but still rationally understandable; excessive, intrusive or dubiously justified. We also examine the intersection between DEIA and authors' rights and capabilities in scholarly publishing, arguing that excessively rigid or unjustifiable submission policies may undermine equitable participation and efficiency. Finally, we advocate for an approach that prioritizes accessibility, fairness, and intellectual merit over bureaucratic formalities, proposing three alternative models that we contend could reduce unnecessary burdens on researchers during the submission process.

1 | DEIA in academic publishing is a foundational basis for authors' rights

Arguably, the end goal of academic life is human flourishing through the cultivation of intellectual virtues [1]. The ability to flourish should be available to everyone within global academia. Against a policy backdrop that assures the right of education for all, given the structural barriers that many populations face [2], diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) policies have become a model of social empowerment in academia. According to the "capabilities approach", the goal of policy is to expand people's ability to pursue what they value [3], while recognizing the risk of unintended consequences [4].

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Sen [5] discusses the relationship between rights and capabilities, distinguishing between two types of freedoms: process and opportunity. If an action is forced upon an author (such as filling out a form), regardless of whether the author would have chosen to do it anyway, they lose their process freedom. Conversely, if an author is obliged to do something they would not choose to do if they had the choice, they lose their freedom of opportunity. For authors in the academic ecosystem, time is what Sen refers to as a 'primary good', or a means to pursue a valued action [5]. Given authors' time constraints, time-wasting requirements infringe upon their right to impart information rapidly and efficiently via academic media, which is one set of motivations for publishing. The capabilities approach insists on the need for access to opportunities so that people can live in ways they value, rather than being obliged to do things they would not choose to do if they had the choice.

Increasing opportunities for all academics to publish is a reasonable goal for DEIA, serving to achieve intellectual flourishing. For instance, while talent may be prevalent at many higher education institutions worldwide, opportunities are not distributed equally within and across those institutions. This emphasizes the importance of early and extensive exposure to learning opportunities that may partly determine a person's later intellectual and career success [6-8].

In this commentary, as a subset of the extensive efforts being made in academia to increase social empowerment and the creation of fairness and opportunities, we focus exclusively on the intersection between DEIA and academic publishing. We note that DEIA principles are cited as essential for equitable global participation in publication [9] and openness to innovation [10]. Organizations such as the Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communications, whose members include some global publishing and library societies, assert that increasing DEIA in scholarly communications is a moral imperative [11]. Yet, some structural barriers persist, limiting access and reinforcing systemic inequities. The Council of Science Editors (CSE) highlights that bias in scholarly publishing, related to race, gender, institutional affiliation, or career stage, continues to constrain inclusivity and openness [12]. Publishers are actively implementing various DEIA strategies, embedding them in their strategic goals, with dedicated resources [13-14]. However, how can these principles be applied to promote equitable access to research and knowledge [15]? While DEIA initiatives within organizations such as the Society for Scholarly Publishing have expanded and become institutionalized [16], sustained commitment is required to move beyond symbolic implementation, including the meaningful inclusion of early career researchers [17].

Within that broader discussion, some have argued that overreliance on DEIA statements may inadvertently reinforce discrimination. In one case, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a private university, reconsidered its approach and discontinued the use of diversity statements in its faculty hiring processes[18]. Compounding that case, the executive order signed by US President Donald J. Trump on 20 January 2025 erased all DEI initiatives and programs from all US government departments [19], a policy that impacted higher education in the US [20]. By logical association, those US policies will have a global impact, directly pitting DEIA objectives against a meritocracy-based vision for higher education [21].

Despite its widespread use, precisely what is meant by each letter of DEIA is not entirely clear. For example, the "publication initiative between Science Editor and Preventing Chronic Disease" [12] introduced DEIA without defining any of the terms. The strategic ambiguity of generic terms like DEIA may be useful as a rallying cry. After all, who would disagree with making publishing more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible? However, conceptual clarity is essential for translating DEIA into effective governance. As Earp et al. [22] note: "Clarifying which sense is in play, and why, is essential to avoid talking past one another".

In our view, in particular, the "A" part of a DEIA approach should prioritize access in ways that may not be immediately visible at the level of formal compliance. One practical illustration concern whether journals provide low-threshold venues for participation and response, such as letters to the editor, allowing brief commentary on published work or issues relevant to a journal's readership [23]. Such formats enable authors to support, challenge, or refine DEIA-related principles and policies, while offering a platform for new or under-represented voices without compromising editorial standards [24]. At the same time, such openness requires editorial safeguards against opportunism, including abuses enabled by generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and large language models, such as GenAI-generated letters to the editor [25-29], underscoring the need for clearly defined and consistently applied authors' rights and responsibilities[30-32] within a DEIA framework.

This perspective on access provides a useful lens for examining how editorial and submission policies shape authors' rights and capabilities in practice.

2 | Mandatory journal submission requirements create tension with DEIA

Mandatory submission requirements exist in many academic journals, and some might be regularly updated [33], either in response to new and emerging threats, or to adjust to new editorial expectations. We argue that excessively rigid ones paradoxically contradict DEIA goals by introducing a layer of irrelevance or imposing unnecessary barriers on authors, thus violating some fundamental rights related to their innate right to academic freedom [34], especially those related to choice. However, many academics perceive mandatory submission requirements, as are often found in journals' instructions for authors or other pages on journals' websites [35], as inherently essential and therefore non-negotiable, for fear of ethical or procedural missteps. To better guide readers and differentiate the moral weighting of such requirements, we devised a simple three-tier classification of mandatory submission requirements, as follows:

(1) Class 1: necessary and reasonable requirements (manuscript and main files, author details, conflicts of interest, ethical statements (if necessary), basic metadata (abstract, keywords));

(2) Class 2: burdensome, but still rationally understandable requirements (e.g., complete formatting to the style of the journal

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before peer review, use of complicated or format-specific templates, cover letters, re-entering metadata that is already in the manuscript, separating elements of the article into different files, requiring each co-author to create a separate account in the system, etc.);

(3) Class 3: excessive, intrusive or dubiously justified requirements and practices:

(a) Formal submission requirements (mandatory surveys and questionnaires before submission, mandatory use of a specific type of email address (e.g., institutional), collection of authors' personal data 'by default');

(b) Post-submission editorial practices (unsubstantiated desk rejections or desk rejections due to minor formatting issues, and long-term holding of manuscripts before desk rejection for no essential reason).

Class 3 requirements would, we believe, infringe upon authors' rights while inhibiting DEIA from being fully achieved. We also argue that select mandatory requirements for academic publishing falling into class 3a are a stumbling block to authors' free expression, noting that article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that 'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers' [36]. There are two aspects of the right to free expression that we believe are infringed upon by class 3a mandatory submission requirements: the right to 'impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers' and the 'freedom to hold opinions without interference'.

Based on this prototype classification, in the next section, we put forward arguments, wherever possible supported by case studies if these have been published in academic journals, to argue how authors' rights might be at risk of infringement or violation.

3 | Potential authors' rights violations by mandatory submission requirements

As part of an ongoing debate about rights in the digital space [37], including the rights of academic authors [32, 38], this section examines publishing practices that risk eroding those rights. Mainstream ethics-related organizations have not clearly articulated what authors' rights are, nor have they abridged the wide range of situations in which these may be infringed upon or violated [32]. Against this background, we present situational case studies that illustrate how specific mandatory submission requirements may infringe upon those rights, while impeding the goals of DEIA.

3.1 | Copyright transfer before peer review

The mandatory request that authors transfer their copyright even before a paper has entered peer review erodes—as we see it—authors' rights by forcing them into an intellectual contract, having to transfer their intellectual rights to a journal or publisher even before their intellect has been scientifically or editorially evaluated or deemed acceptable for publication [39]. Even if the manuscript is desk rejected or rejected following peer review, reverting copyright back to authors, that process robs them of valuable time and resources, having to complete paperwork related to copyright transfer. When seen from this perspective, such a mandatory editorial request during—or prior to—the submission process would be classified as class 3a and thus DEIA-incompliant. Conversely, if the same request is made after peer review and editorial acceptance of a paper, it constitutes a reasonable class 1 mandatory submission requirement. In other words, the timing of the imposition of a mandatory submission requirement can influence its classification and thus imply violation (or not) of authors' rights and capabilities.

3.2 | An example from Elsevier

As an example, using a 2017 dataset, Elsevier studied 2,371 journals, 82% of which were published by Elsevier, finding a 32% average article acceptance rate across journals [40]. Thus, by their own admission, Elsevier tacitly recognized, as a crude estimate, that approximately two thirds of co-authors wasted time by having to create accounts for online submission, and more recently, by having to fill out mandatory DEIA questionnaires at the submission stage as a prerequisite to submitting to its journals [41]. For those authors, these efforts lead to no intellectual fruition. Moreover, co-authors who verify their co-authorship status also needed to create an account, i.e., this is a class 3a mandatory requirement, followed by a verification process in which obligatorily had to complete the DEIA questionnaire.

That policy only benefits journals that can automatically harvest DEIA data for their own purposes at the cost of authors' time and resources, i.e., this is a resource-wasteful set of self-serving policies that exclusively benefit the publisher, bring no tangible social benefits—at least, not to our knowledge—and deny the right of authors and co-authors to protest such choices. We argue further that such actions are not compliant with DEIA principles, such as C4DISC's Joint Statement of Principles [11] and the STM [42] Code of Conduct, both of which call for eliminating unnecessary barriers to participation and ensuring that workflows do not disproportionately disadvantage particular groups. By not serving authors, we believe that this set of Elsevier submission-related policies reinforces authors' burdens in the publication process, becoming an unintended and undesirable consequence of imposing DEIA policies, by fraying authors' rights and freedoms of choice.

3.3 | Author information and ORCID

An increasing body of literature, primarily related to and relying on auto-ethnographically recorded cases, has begun to document the exploitation of authors, in the form of wasted time, energy, resources, and patience, such as mandatory institutional emails as a prerequisite for submission [43-44], i.e., class 3a mandatory requirements infringe upon authors' rights or violate one or more of the four pillars of DEIA. In the case of a mandatory institutional email requirement for submission, this would disproportionately affect researchers in countries where non-institutional email addresses remain widely used [45].

Other classes of mandatory submission requirements that would either infringe upon authors' rights or DEIA include privacy-compromising requirements like mandatory photographs (class 3a) [46], inconsequential submission requirements like cover letters (class 2) that serve more to bias editors' positions into streamlining a paper into entering peer review [47], or mandatory Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID) to complete this process (class 1 or 3a, depending on when or how they are applied) [48].

Regarding ORCID, registration is free and relatively simple, and offers some clear and undeniable benefits, including robust author identification and name disambiguation across scholarly metadata systems, automated integration with institutional research-workflow platforms [49]. ORCID also provides an infrastructure level of linking researchers with their publications, datasets and other research outputs through persistent identifiers. However, these long-term infrastructural advantages do not necessarily translate into an immediate benefit at the point of submission. Survey evidence indicates that journal requirements are a primary reason for ORCID adoption, while adoption rates vary by discipline, academic rank, and race or ethnicity; while non-adopters also report limited awareness or perceived benefit, privacy concerns, and a lack of time[50].

Although mandatory ORCID registration is formally identical for all authors, its practical effects might not be uniform. Where a journal requires every co-author to provide an ORCID before submission can be completed [51], one author's inability or unwillingness to comply may prevent the entire team from submitting. ORCID's publisher-level implementation guidelines define the minimum requirement as an ORCID ID for corresponding authors of published papers, while stating that collection should be enabled as an option for all authors[52]. A policy that makes ORCID registration a precondition for every co-author at initial submission is therefore more stringent than this minimum standard. We would classify such a policy as a class 3a requirement.

By contrast, if ORCID becomes mandatory only after acceptance, for example at the proof stage, it constitutes a class 1 requirement. In this instance, the mandatory ORCID requirement does not inhibit access to the journal, or submission to it, but instead serves only to fortify the "integrity" of the published article, by verifying the ORCID of the corresponding author and/or all authors.

3.4 | The heterogeneity of editorial requirements and editorial delays

Mandatory formatting requirements often differ between journals (class 2), forcing authors to 'tweak' their work, devoid of any academic value to authors and peer reviewers [53-55], but incur a significant human and economic price[56]. That price is not always measurable (and there are few incentives to study it), but it wastes authors' time and resources, nor does it offer any benefits, especially when papers are desk rejected. This constitutes a further hindrance to submission and places an additional burden on authors' time, resources, and process freedom.

Some submission-related constraints become even more burdensome when they interact with other mandatory policies, entrenching the erosion of authors' rights while impinging further on DEIA. For example, most journals prohibit simultaneous submissions, thereby obliging authors to wait for an editorial decision before they can approach another venue. Although the policy is traditionally justified on several grounds, not least of which would be the risk of abuse (e.g., simultaneous submission and/or publication in dozens or hundreds of venues, making cloned copies intellectually redundant while taxing the agents involved in processing that knowledge, like peer reviewers and editors), it can lead to longer delays, reduce authors' autonomy in choosing dissemination pathways, and exacerbate inequalities in terms of who can afford to wait[57].

In such a context, even basic failures of editorial communication amplify negative consequences for submitting authors [58]. Merga et al. [59] documented cases in which journals neither acknowledged receipt nor communicated decisions, effectively immobilizing manuscripts for months without the authors' knowledge. When authors are formally barred from submitting elsewhere, such prolonged silence directly restricts their ability to impart information and undermines the competitive standing of their work, operating in practice much like a class 3b practice. Tardy desk rejections are thus not only an infringement on authors' right to speedy and efficient handling of their intellect, they harm the foundation of DEIA because such inefficient editorial actions would reduce the inspiration of would-be authors to attempt to access such journals again, or result in their loss of trust in the efficiency of the system.

Evidently, as noted briefly above, resubmission implies being subjected to different rules for different journals [60], a strategy that Tiokhin et al. [61] claimed has been purposefully put in place to filter out opportunist authors who might be tempted to flood top-ranked journals with irrelevant or scientifically weak papers, thereby wasting editors' time and burdening the submission system. However, if true, that strategic policy implies an 'exclusionary' mechanism that is contrary to the inclusivity-based DEIA principles noted above because it introduces an unnecessary layer of time and energy expenditure that is not related to the academic quality or scientific merit of an article. Time is precisely one of the resources that authors have little of, and policies that frivolously consume researchers' time are more likely to widen inequalities within academic publishing [62], thereby being counter to DEIA principles.

3.5 | Desk rejection for formatting

A limited number of academics have been protesting class 2 and 3 mandatory submission requirements and clamoring for reform for years, as evidenced by the literature cited above, apparently to little or no avail. To their credit, some editors have recognized that such changes will allow journals to have a greater number and variety of manuscripts, which will help to select higher quality research from a larger pool of options [63-65].

It is unclear to us what is preventing the academic publishing industry from adopting an across-the-board set of requests based on common sense, such as structure-free abstracts, order-free sections, style-free references, and format-free figures, tables and

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manuscripts [66]. Elsevier's 2011 'Your Paper, Your Way' initiative to simplify formatting or referencing requirements for submission purposes [67-68], despite initial positive feedback from editors, did not lead to widespread adoption, as evidenced by the low percentage of journals allowing flexible formatting. A 2017 study of 96 randomly selected journals in scientific and clinical focus areas indicated that only 4% of them offered a fully format-free initial submission [69]. A more recent 2024 analysis of 500 psychology journals found that only about 15% of them had relative flexibility with regards to formatting for initial submissions [56]. Only about a third of Taylor & Francis [70] journals accept manuscripts with no need to follow formatting rules for text and citation. When editors meet to discuss policies that are more "author-friendly", they might appreciate the logic behind moving to fairer policies [71].

In our opinion, one of the most egregious violations of authors' rights and capabilities and the 'inclusivity' principle within DEIA is when their manuscripts are desk rejected for failing to adhere to formatting requirements [72], making the rejection unfair and invalid because it is not based on fair principles [73]. For this reason, we classify it as a class 3b practice. In some journals, such as those (539) published by MDPI [74], authors must submit papers using a pre-established Word or LaTex template, which involves many fine-scale adjustments, including the positioning of figures and tables into the text, with each section requiring very specific formatting requirements, including a very specific referencing style. In such cases, we suspect that authors of MDPI journals would likely empathize or agree with the suggestion by Moore [75] that it should be the responsibility of journals and publishers to complete manuscript formatting because, in such cases, the publisher gains while the author loses [76].

By contrast, some journals have attempted to balance their formatting responsibilities by offering flexibility during the submission process, while mandating other aspects post-acceptance [77]. We support those mandatory submission-related requirements, which we classify as class 1, because they are logical, fair, and rationally applied.

3.6 | Meaningful versus meaningless mandatory requirements and respect for fair editorial decisions

As we see it, rational and meaningful class 1 mandatory requirements exist to place a barrier to suspect or unethical behavior, as a way to exclude bad actors in an initial screening procedure. We do not see it as a violation of any DEIA principle, despite the "exclusion" of some, because it is based on merit while adding a layer of integrity-based checks or verification steps to the submission process. Obviously, rational and fairly implemented mandatory requirements fortify the integrity image of a journal and increase trust and respect by the prospective author base of the editorial handling of submissions and intellect, even if those requirements take some additional time to complete.

We would be remiss not to offer a supportive word for editors, who may also encounter authors who do not comply with mandatory submission requirements, causing them to waste their own time and energy, although—from our experience across a wide range of journals and publishers—such initial tasks (e.g., technical background checks) are often assigned to a journal manager who has no editorial position or functions, or even to AI.

Conversely, we do not offer an empathetic stance to editors who mandate requirements that fall into class 3, we are somewhat reticent to offer support to editors that impose class 2 requirements, but we do fully support editors who mandate class 1 requirements. Also, in our collective personal experience over decades, we have encountered some editors, especially editors-in-chief, who are able to balance fairness with rigor [78], and who are willing to exempt class 2 mandatory clauses during the submission process, such as formatting, even though they are defined in their journals' instructions for authors. However, this process (i.e., challenging an editor or a journal's instructions for authors) takes time, energy, and patience because it requires an additional letter to be written to the editors making a formal request to waive or set aside initial redundant mandatory submission requirements, and additional time waiting for the challenge to be processed. In cases where editors make pro-active and concerted efforts to minimize resistant policies and improve authors' positive submission experience, praise is needed, and we encourage editors to publish editorials that transparently formalize such changes in their journals.

In summary, class 3 mandatory requirements for submission not only limit or restrict prospective authors' ability to access journals, i.e., they violate DEIA principles, they also inherently limit or inhibit authors' intrinsic rights of expression. In the long term, repeated episodes of inflexible implementation of class 3 mandatory submission requirements could lead to distrust in the system's efficiency, bitterness resulting from entrenched "meaningless" or redundant editorial requests, and thus an unsatisfied author base. We ask, almost rhetorically, of what benefit is DEIA if a sector of the author class is not satisfied with the efficiency of the system they are attempting to participate in?

4 | Systemic consequences of inefficient submission and editorial practices

The economic burden to comply with submission requirements was estimated at over US$1.1 billion per year, in terms of time lost [69], or estimated at about US$1,900 per researcher per year [79], and was projected to cost academics an estimated US$2.5 billion between 2022 and 2030[80]. These figures do not stand alone: in terms of time given, over US$2 billion are essentially donated worldwide on an annual basis thanks to free peer review [81], while another source of researcher's time is securing funding, making academia a high-pressure environment, with only around 10% of researchers claiming to be satisfied with submission requirements [62].

In this time-strapped system, there is hope that the competitive publishing ecosystem will evolve in ways that make the submission and publication processes more efficient, complete, and streamlined for academics who publish, such as a paper "free market" where journals would bid for a paper without conducting peer review, liberalizing publishing opportunities for authors [82]. In the case of authors who are funded by tax-payers, such wasteful policies eventually cost tax-payers [83-84]. In other words, not only do class 3

mandatory requirements infringe upon authors' rights and erode the core principles of DEIA, they indirectly cause harm to a wider circle of stakeholders, such as funders and the public (or tax-payers) through an inefficient and redundant system.

5 | Proposed alternative approaches

To address inefficiencies and inequities in current submission policies, while deemphasizing mandatory submission requirements, we propose alternative approaches that prioritize authors' rights and reduce administrative burdens. Our three key recommendations are:

(1) Centralized DEIA data collection: If publishers want to obtain feedback related to DEIA policies of a large and publisher-diverse body of authors, we recommend that they partner with another major academic profiling system's existing author identity infrastructure, such as ResearchGate, which hosts—according to its website—over 25 million researchers [85]. Alternatively, they could work with platforms to maintain comprehensive author profiles, such as ORCID, Scopus, or Web of Science researcher profiles, to provide a broader dataset on DEIA-related issues.

(2) Automatic co-author verification: Instead of requiring co-authors to create separate accounts, which would be an unrealistic and unsustainable solution when dozens or hundreds of authors co-author a paper, journals should instead notify all listed co-authors upon manuscript submission, allowing them to confirm authorship through direct communication with editors or the publisher, and requesting them to submit any objections to being listed as an author.

(3) Flexible formatting policies: Journals should eliminate non-essential formatting constraints at the submission stage, i.e., class 2 mandatory requirements, allowing structure-free abstracts, flexible section orders, and format-free references to reduce unnecessary authorial workload. Submission would imply a tacit agreement by authors that, in the case that their paper is accepted, that they would then be required to format the text and references to the journal's style before the proof is issued. We believe that this would be a fair and equitable solution for both parties, thereby satisfying all four pillars of DEIA and ensuring that this principle matches policy.

6 | Conclusions

Common sense and sensibility in journals' instructions for authors, alongside agreement with equivalent clauses on submission systems, including about the use of AI [86], should determine submission requirements at academic journals to attain fairness and efficiency [87-88]. As Willis [76], a Wiley employee, aptly stated, it should be about the content and not about the container. In other words, some editors, journals and publishers might erroneously equate superficial mandatory requirements as measures of quality [89], conflating superficiality and branding with scientific merit [90]. Clustering both together ultimately sends a negative signal to prospective authors.

While we do not have empirical evidence to support this claim, we envision that a journal with an excessive number of class 3 mandatory requirements related to submission may ultimately be harming itself since such requirements may be off-putting to a certain percentage of prospective authors. This would lead them to seek alternative publishing venues where class 1 mandatory submission-related requirements abound, or where editors make pro-active and concerted efforts to minimize resistant policies and reduce authors' positive submission experience [91-92]. Although we recognize that journals with excessively lax submission requirements also risk inviting a class of authors who may be willing to abuse the system through dishonest or fraudulent practices.

Some editors are even openly and unapologetically adamant about mandatory formatting: 'Yes, you have to. Life is not fair and neither is publishing' [93]. We disagree with this claim and advocate for a system that makes both life and publishing fairer, a single format for all scientific papers [94] would assist authors, editors, and publishers because it would introduce a simplified industry-wide standard. For example, this could be applied as standard policy across all Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) member journals and publishers [95]. Sobani et al. [96] called on the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) to advocate for more sensible submission and formatting requirements, but to this day, not all that advice has been taken into serious consideration in its "Recommendations" [97].

Some editors also seem to be misguided or confused by authors' pleas, interpreting the translation of submission requirements as a way to simplify or democratize them [98]. Although this indeed offers clarity to a wider cultural author base, it ultimately fails to remove the exploitative (time- and resource-wasteful) aspects of pedantic mandatory (classes 2 and 3) editorial requests alluded to earlier. It also offers a quick-and-easy path to DEIA, which defeats the purpose of having a strict but logically-based, as well as meritocracy-based path to DEIA, which we are advocating for in this opinion paper.

Over and above a call for the establishment of a 'common sense'-based publication system, we also advocate for one where authors' rights, grievances, and requests are respected, and enshrined as such, as a new digital right [37], within the framework of digital publishing, formally recognized by existing bodies like COPE and the ICMJE, or the International Publishers Association [99]. In achieving these simple but noble objectives, and avoiding class 3 mandatory submission requirements, the publishing sector could move towards a more efficient model of achieving DEIA. Finally, we note the need to ensure consistent information in a journal's instructions for authors and online submission system to reduce authors' exposure to misinformation related to the submission process, to which they are vulnerable [100].

7 | Limitations

Apart from the most obvious limitation, namely the considerable subjectivity that reflects our collective view and interpretation of the issues debated in this commentary, to some extent offering an auto-ethnic perspective, we have decided to limit—as much and as best as possible—views and evidence to those found in academic papers, since social media and blogs are awash with cases, but they are often not accompanied by verifiable evidence or may be excessively

radical in their expression. We have also decided to impose some thematic restrictions on our debate, and not to cover the issues of peer review and editorial functions sensu lato because these are separate topics that merit individual focus, even though they are also intricately related to authors' rights and DEIA. A future objective would be to analyze, clause by clause, the instructions for authors of a set of journals or publishers, to identify mandatory submission requirements that might fall into classes 1, 2, or 3, and thus offer our theoretical reflections a more empirical and broad-based set of fundamental proof of existence.

Finally, we recognize that the issues covered in this article may be interpreted as being related to research efficiency, academic labor, and author autonomy, and not necessarily to DEIA. However, as indicated in the article's title, this prototype reflection proposes these as DEIA-related issues based on a chain of assumptions that submission requirements waste time. And since time is a scarce resource, and scarcity disproportionately affects already-disadvantaged researchers, therefore, the requirements are DEIA issues. Typically, most formalities are dealt with by submitting (i.e., corresponding) authors, therefore concentrating the burden of compliance on them. There is greater pressure on individuals who tend to work alone as they submit all papers for which they are sole authors, or who work in fields with less collaboration (such as the humanities), as they have fewer co-authors with whom to share the burden of compliance.

As alluded to in this paper, we see good reasons for considering that all academic efficiency-related issues have the capacity to become DEIA-related problems. For this reason, in the future, we and others should provide additional evidence and rationale that explicitly links every issue or the three proposed classes of requirements to a specific DEIA component and justify the link, further developing novel categories whose borders are clearly stipulated.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All three authors conceptualized the paper, developed several drafts, contributed equally to the intellectual discussion, literature exploration, writing, reviews and editing. The third author used DeepL write to edit her written text. Other than that, no GenAI was used for any of these functions, nor was it used by the first two authors in any capacity.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Not applicable: The paper contains no data.

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