

# IEEE: IT'S TIME TO MOVE OUT OF COPYRIGHT

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Some time back I emailed the chief editor of a famous engineering journal called “IEEE Transactions on Consumer Electronics”. I inquired about a certain topic, whether it was relevant to the journal or not – so that I could format my research paper according to their template.” My humble question was replied with sentences I could have never imagined - coming from a person who held the utmost responsible post of a respected international journal. I was told that “You Pakistani’s have this weird problem – and we must explain everything. Your topic does not by any chance have any relevance to our journal. If you had read our previous publications, you could have answered your questions yourself with the little IQ you have.” In an earlier email to this guy I had explained that I had read dozens of your publications and it seems that you only publish things that are multimedia based; I can only find topics on LCDs, video codecs, compression technologies, digital camera etc, where as what I cannot understand is that there are thousands of products there that can be labeled as “consumer electronics”, so why just these multimedia things get published in your journal? Instead of replying to my logical question, the fellow pushed me against the wall for being a Pakistani, and claimed that I had an extremely low level of IQ!

Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers(IEEE) claims to have saved our generation when it comes to electronic front. It claims to be “The world’s leading professional association for the advancement of technology.”

Some two years back, I dreamt of having something published with this respected organization. I finally got to publish a few research papers with IEEE, indeed I was happy about it – but soon enough, it brought along with it a thought that made me reevaluate everything I was doing.

Let's summarize the whole process of how it works with IEEE. Take a researcher – take me for an instance - I am a researcher, I work in my lab, I use my own resources to develop a thing, I spend days and nights, blood and sweat and finally come up with a new interesting idea, something that is great. I contact IEEE, they tell me about a conference/journal deadline and give me a template. Now, I start molding my research work not in the way I like it to be, but in the form they like to see it. I send the completed documents to them, wait for a few months until it is 'peer reviewed' – a process that I honestly could not understand. I have seen practical garbage getting published and original research getting rejected in this mysterious 'peer review'. It is basically a process where you are 'judged' using some heavenly powers by a few people who are super-men, people who have the right to say "What is right and what is wrong". These are people who have the right to decide if "It is applicable or it is not", who have the right to decide "If this is needed in the world or not". Who, why and how did they achieve this right to judge infinite human intellect remains a mystery. Now, if I am lucky enough, the super-men will grant me an OK and I will be informed that my research has been accepted. Now, I am told to prepare another version of the research with some modifications as suggested by these super-men.. and then another one... and another one, until they are satisfied that it has been transformed into an orthodox academic document with fancy figures and charts. Now I am told to pay around 400-500 US dollars to them. I am even charged more bucks if the length of the document exceeds a certain limit. Finally, I submit the money and the final version of the paper. Now I am handed over a document that reads "Copyright & Consent Form". This form has 'something' to do with copyright that I think is difficult stuff because it somehow relates to law or alien science of some kind so I quickly write my name on it and sign it happily.

On the event day I can see a lot of gentlemen in expensive garments, lots of laptop machines, I am handed some posters printed on good grade paper, a fine lunch, and a nicely dressed lady for the welcome. For me, it ends here, I return happily to my home paying the taxi traveling fare from my own pocket. Its time for me to tell everyone that I just got another research work published with IEEE. Everything looks so perfect!

Now, moving out of the scenario, and looking myself from a different frame of reference, as if I am looking at my own self from another dimension. What I see down there is a fool who just came back home in a taxi. He was fooled so perfectly, gently and tactfully that he could not even feel it.

I did the research, formatted it a dozen of times, took criticism, my original ideas were challenged, then I moved on and handed it to someone else along with some 500 US dollars to print it on a 5 cent paper. The worst part – in that difficult to understand document that I signed, I surrendered my all rights of owning it. The moment I signed it, the research was no more mine, I stopped being its owner – and my work, my blood and sweat can now be used by them, in every possible manner.

Here is what the IEEE copyright form actually reads:

The undersigned hereby **assigns to IEEE all rights** under copyright that may exist in and to: (a) the above Work, **including any revised or expanded derivative works** submitted to the IEEE by the undersigned based on the Work; and (b) any **associated written or multimedia components** or other enhancements accompanying the Work.

In the consent section it reads:

In the event the undersigned makes a presentation based upon the Work at a conference hosted or sponsored in whole or in part by the IEEE, the undersigned, in consideration for his/her participation in the conference, hereby **grants the IEEE the unlimited, worldwide, irrevocable permission to use, distribute, publish, license, exhibit, record, digitize, broadcast, reproduce and archive, in any format or medium**, whether now known or hereafter developed: (a) his/her presentation and comments at the conference; (b) any written materials or multimedia files used in connection with his/her presentation; and (c) any recorded interviews of him/her

When signing this agreement, you practically declare to give UNLIMITED, worldwide permission to IEEE so that they can do ANYTHING with YOUR research.

The worst part is, after hijacking your rights and your money, that put a price tag on your research ( that is now there's ). And if anyone needs your research, he has to pay 25 US dollars to them to download it! It seems like these super-men have an unending thirst for money.

What I have understood so far from this global organization is that it basically is a global money making glutton. Conferences on the name of science and technology are mere money making fun fairs. They claim to index research work. Their web search is so bad that it can't find an author's name. It won't give you results if you wrote "taufeeq" instead of "Taufeeq"! If you put an extra space between anything while searching, it gets busted. Not just the search, the whole site is designed and maintained by the most lame web developers in the history of computer engineering using the lamest technologies. The only paper I could find till date on the famous IEEE explore website has my name written as "Elahi,T"! You would probably be thinking that it must have been quite an effort to try different combinations of my name into the lame search to display the results. No, it was easy, I googled and it led me to the exact page where they have the research paper's abstract, and if you need to read it, you have to pay for it! I myself never wanted people to pay me for the good work I did, so why should they pay to IEEE?

It is more like putting a cap on the knowledge that should have been free. Knowledge and creativity were and are meant to be free, unlimited and uncensored for the public. Creativity must be placed inside the public domain for it to grow. It is not meant to be stored in archive servers that would release it for money.

The point here is – if you publish research work it means you want to share your findings with others. If you in the first place are not willing to put a cap on your knowledge, why do you allow a 3rd party to put cap on it? You found a new way of making prosthetic arms and you want people to benefit from it, that's why you go to a conference and give a presentation. You did not ask for any money for your findings, you just wanted to help someone in some other part of the world who has lost his leg or arm. Why allow IEEE to censor your information about your prosthetic arm mechanism that could help someone in Zambia or Congo if it was available in the public domain without a price tag and was easily searchable? You found a cure for a deadly disease spreading in Bolivia, why to throw it into an archive server of some “conference proceedings” when people can make vaccine using this knowledge somewhere in Africa and save millions of lives?

In 1970s people thought that a freely distributable, free of cost, reliable, scaleable, community based operating system was impossible. It took two decades for Richard Stallman in that quest but what we have today are hundreds of flavors of GNU/Linux with unchallengeable reliability complimented by all the freedoms promised by the Free Software Foundation. In early 2000's everyone said that a community based encyclopedia could not exist because there were so many limitations. The only encyclopedia our next generation will recognize will sure be Wikipedia. Everything that is prospering these days is community based, flicker, pbase, youtube, wiki...

It's time that people start releasing scientific knowledge in the public domain – this is the only thing and the only way it makes sense – creativity must be shared for it to grow, for more inspiration to come in and to inspire others. There is no need for organizations that charge money to print your research and charge money from people who want to read it.

Do not put a cap on your knowledge, share it with your neighbor, share it with the community, write software under open source license and release the source codes, start open ended projects so that your work does not die with you – this will ensure that there are enough people working on your ideas even after you are gone! Go for Creative Common license rather than the wicked Copyright.

Its time for a change. Its time for us to see things with a new perspective.

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