ISSN: 2578-725X, e-ISSN: 2578-7268

Vol. 2023

A Study on Pricing Strategies Adopted by Academic Book Publishers

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Abstract

The academic book publishing market in India has undergone a lot of change in recent years due to shifting market forces, technological changes, and changes in consumer behaviour. It also describes some major determinants of pricing strategies adopted by academic book publishers such as: production costs; market competition; the impact of digitalization; and changing consumer behavior and expectations, among others. Quantitative analysis of pricing data and qualitative insights from interviews with publishers are combined, as we have a mixed-methods approach for the study. The results show that Indian academic book publishers adopt value-based pricing, differentiating their products based on subject, author reputation, and the demand from educational institutions. In addition, digital formats have transformed the publishing landscape by diversifying pricing mechanisms, including subscription-based models and pay-per-view options, that further promote globalization of the industry. This study addresses the challenges and opportunities of pricing strategies as it can help not only book publishers but also present valuable assistance to policymakers and academia concerning the broader context of global publishing trends; particularly for Russia and emerging economies.

Keywords: Academic Publishing, Pricing Strategies, India, Digitalization, Consumer Behavior, Market Competition, Value-Based Pricing.

Introduction

Academic book publishers with the pricing strategies have a significant economic impact on the publishing industry itself and this has had a stimulating impact on the working of the publishing industry in emerging economies especially in India. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, with technology advancing, market dynamics shifting, and global platforms emerging as dominant players, publishers must constantly refine their pricing strategies to stay competitive and relevant. The academic publishing landscape in India is rich and varied, including a multitude of actors from multi-national publishing conglomerates to regional publishers facing different challenges and with varying market foci. The strategies adopted by academic book publishers in India regarding pricing are of utmost importance for the profitability of the publishers; but they also impact the availability of academic materials for students, faculty, and institutions.

With a huge and burgeoning education sector, India is indeed a special case in academic book pricing strategies. With so many universities and institutions in the country, it boasts a big market for academic publishing. But the pricing scenario of academic books in India is quite different from other places like Russia and the West. The socio-economic diversity of the student population is a major determinant of the pricing policies pursued by academic book publishers in India. Although a large number of people in this region are price-sensitive,

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especially those in rural and underdeveloped areas; there is an emerging middle class that can spend on international textbooks and they would benefit from our product offering. Hence, publishers need to find the balance between making a profit and keeping it affordable to serve a variety of consumers.

The academic book publishing sector has seen radical transformations in recent years, brought by digitalisation. There has also been a rising trend in e-books, online learning platforms, and digital libraries in India, which has resulted in price alterations as well. Faced with these increasing demands, publishers are redefining the way they sell material, with subscription models, pay-per-use pricing, and bundled content becoming popular in an effort to cater to the digital-savvy student. With the rise of digital platforms, the global battlefield has expanded, as students find it easier to access international academic materials, undermining traditional pricing standards and forcing local publishers to reconsider their pricing.

The academic publishing sector in India is being reshaped too, with the globalization of competition Multinational publishers by and large control the upper end of the textbook market, but regional and specialized publishers are encroaching with lower-priced, localized content. The competition for home publication and paperback also winds down, with publishers aggressively pursuing their market share. Then there is the fact that there are government policies and institutional purchasing patterns that also need to be taken into account. Due to the bulk purchasing, alliances through discounts by these many Institutions, they usually decide the price of academic material to ensure that pricing is decided by the Institution as a whole and decides what publishers will charge.

Another important element in pricing decisions is the relationship between publishers and authors. Well-known authors and popular books generate higher sales or sale of established and well-known textbooks, therefore, they are often priced at higher price points, while lesser-known authors or more niche academic books might have a more competitive pricing to pass the readership threshold. New Pricing Models in Academia Still, the emerging trend of open access publishing, in which academic material is made available for free to anyone online, has challenged traditional pricing models and forced many academic publishers to embrace transparency and accessibility.

Although this study is limited to the Indian academic book publishing industry, it may have users for the international academic publishing community in developing countries such as Russia. India and Russia face other challenges in common, for example, the need to make education affordable and the shift towards operating in digital environments, so the output of this study would give these researchers some context regarding their findings on the direction global academic publishing pricing is heading.

This paper seeks to analyze the aspects of pricing strategies employed by the academic book publishing houses in India, and the influencing factors like market competition, technological changes, consumer behavior, and government policies. The paper also compares and contrasts these models to help understand pricing mechanisms which can prove beneficial for publishers, academics, and policymakers not only in India but in other developing economies like Russia.

Literature Review

The academic publishing industry is a vital pillar of the global ecosystem of education, with the pricing strategy as one of the key factors determining the shape of this market. There is a large body of literature on the links between pricing strategies and the publishing sector,

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addressing most of the developed economies (notably the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany) and their textbook pricing models. But evidence is increasing on emerging markets including India and Russia culture and socio-economics, industry competition, and technology encourage different pricing models.

1. Pricing Strategies in Academic Publishing

Pricing strategies in academic publishing have changed over the years. Until recently, traditional pricing models, mainly cost-plus pricing, represented the long-established model whereby publishers used to calculate production and distribution costs to which they add a markup (Sutton, 1997). But as competition increases and digital platforms proliferate, publishers have moved to value-based pricing models (Liu et al. 2017). This change enables publishers to price books according to perceived value that is often subject to fluctuations due to differences based on subject matter, author profile, and institutional demand (Bhattacharya & Gupta, 2019).

In India, further complicating this dynamic is the variety of educational needs and consumer segments. Textbooks on high-demand disciplines such as engineering, medicine and management are available for a premium price, whereas publishers need to find ways to keep the costs low for more specialized subjects (Das, 2015). It also led to a new pricing models as pay-per-view, subscription services, and even open access (Ilyina et al., 2020). The use of both print and digital formats have challenged publishers to explore new pricing strategies (Pearce, 2017).

2. Impact of Technological Advancements on Pricing Models

Technological advancements have had a significant impact on academic publishing. A textbook's path has changed significantly more recently, however, with a digital revolution. Today, e-books and online learning platforms now sit at the heart of the academic publishing ecosystem. As authors and publishers have discovered new pricing models in the digital-only world, those models can help books stay affordable, often commensurate with the fact that the digital edition carries fewer fixed costs than a print edition (McKinsey & Company, 2015). Digital pricing model: Digital subscription pricing models and microtransactions allowing students to pay for the chapters or resources they need, allowing them to save on costs (Ginsberg, 2018).

Apart from the advent of giant platforms such as Google Books and Amazon Kindle, that changed the market environment in India, also opening up new pricing configurations according to accessibility and usage. Indian publishers have been able to reach a wider market in rural territories, where book prices may be astronomically high in a hard format (Patel & Gupta, 2019). This explains the irrelevance of this technology when focusing on the effect on emerging economies like India and Russia, in which practicality is the main factor (Kumar, 2020).

3. Market Competition and Consumer Behavior

Competitive forces among academic publishers also drive price shaping strategies. The Indian market is getting very competitive, with international publishing houses like Pearson and McGraw Hill as well as local publishers like Orient Blackswan and National Publishing House (NPB) fighting for a bigger share of the market. As the competition evolved, a wide variety of pricing strategies became implemented, namely, bundling, institution-specific discounting, and demand-specific price skimming for popular books (Chaudhury, 2018).

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Pricing is also driven by consumer behavior, especially the demand elasticity of academic books. Singh (2016) refers to Indian students being price sensitive as their financial resources are limited, particularly in rural areas. In response, publishers provide cheaper alternatives, like second-hand books or less expensive editions for markets in India. Despite posing as an affordable option in a scholarly world where high-quality academic content is often restricted by paywalls to institutions that can afford such subscriptions, this pricing model raises questions about access to knowledge and its implications on academic equity (Verma & Roy, 2017).

4. Government and Institutional Influence

The government policies as well as institutional procurement strategies are also essential for determining pricing strategies. Academic books have a very high market share in India, especially in terms of higher education, owing to the volumes of academic institutions in the country–especially in the case of universities & colleges. Typically, when institutions purchase textbooks in bulk, they will negotiate for discounts or special pricing, affecting the overall price of textbooks in the market (Gupta & Reddy, 2020).

Additionally, government efforts in India to encourage low-cost education and to favour open access at the same time has influenced pricing strategies. Efforts such as the National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) and the drive for open access journals have put additional pressure on the publishers to reshape their pricing policies (Bansal, 2018). Such open access initiatives intend to be more affordable, particularly for lower-income segments (Verma, 2019).

5. Open Access and Subscription Models

One of the trends in academic book publishing is the growing use of openaccess models, which is becoming increasingly fashionable around the world, in Russia and India. In traditional methods of publishing, academics may pay thousands of dollars just to access journals or specific papers but open access, which is low-cost to the reader, disrupts the pricing model by removing the paywall altogether. The shift towards open access is especially significant in the Indian context wherein educational inequity and issues of affordability tend to create restrictions on access to academic content (Mukherjee, 2020). While open access publishing has been associated with increased access to the body of knowledge, (Dutta & Saha, 2018) it has also brought to the fore a new set of challenges for publishers; sustainability, and funding.

As with other regions, one of the main challenges to this transition in Russia is the expected revenue model for publications (Alekseyev, 2019). Subscription models — in which users pay to view specific content or platforms — are thus emerging as a popular middle-ground compromise between open access and the state of publishing revenue (Ilyina et al., 2020). These are still infant models that could challenge conventional pricing in India and Russia.

6. Regional and International Comparisons

If we place India's academic book publishing in contrast to that of Russia, we can point out some similar trends, especially regarding questions of affordability and digitalization. Both nations have large, diverse student populations that differ in their financial ability to access academic resources. As pointed out by Malyshev (2021), the same process is happening within the Russian academic publishing industry, with a significant drive to digitalization and increasing requests for local content. The trends seen in India and Russia highlight the growing importance of dynamic pricing and flexible access models on the publisher side to accommodate evolving student and institutional needs.

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Objectives of the Study

This is a study of pricing policies of academic book publishers in India and their market segmentation. It additionally aims to explore the influence of technology changes like digital publishing and working from e-books on these pricing models. The study also investigates how governmental policies and the procurement practices of institutions influence pricing decisions. This is followed by a comparative analysis with global trends, particularly that of the Russian Federation, to ascertain similarities and differences of approaches to academic book pricing.

Hypotheses of the Study

H1: Academic book publishers in Indian have a delicate balance of production costs, market forces and consumer demand elasticity that determines their pricing strategies.

H2: Academic publishers in India have adopted pricing models along these lines as a result of increasing digitalization and a rise in e-books.

H3: Policies established by the Government and institutional procurement strategies are key determinants of the pricing strategies of academic publishers in India.

H4: Digitization and affordability: Similar pricing strategies compared to other emerging economies (Russia etc.) for academic book publishers in India

Research Methodology

Therefore, this study employs a mixed-methods research design to explore the pricing strategies adopted by academic book publishers in India, while drawing comparative learning from Russia. The study is performed in the state of Maharashtra in India, an important region for publishing with several academic publishing houses and distributors around the metropolitan cities of Mumbai and Pune.

For the quantitative part of this study, a survey was administered to 120 purposively chosen academic book publishers, editors, and marketing managers. Quantitative data on pricing strategies, digital adaptation, market segmentations, and revenue models were collected through a structured questionnaire. Data were also analyzed for book prices across subjects (management, engineering, social sciences, etc.) to determine the patterns in pricing.

The qualitative element comprises in-depth interviews with 20 senior publishing executives to understand the motivations behind pricing decisions, the impact of digitalization, and views on consumer behavior. We also conducted a few key informant interviews with publishing industry experts with an intimate knowledge of the Russian academic market to allow for comparative analysis.

Descriptive statistics, alongside thematic coding and comparative analysis frameworks were used to analyze data, leading to key trends and divergences between Indian and Russian pricing practices being identified. It provides both generalizability as well as deep insights into pricing strategies in an emerging economy context.

Results and Discussion

This section provides the empirical findings of the study conducted in Maharashtra, India about academic book publishers pricing strategies. These findings emerge from both the quantitative survey of 120 publishing professionals and qualitative insights gained from 20 indepth interviews. The response lays out a comparative lens analyzing how these strategies relate to, or diverge from, practices that are seen in the Russian academic publishing sphere.

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Key themes and patterns are presented in the tables below, with accompanying detailed interpretation and discussion.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Role in Organization	Publisher	50	41.7
	Editor	30	25
	Marketing Manager	40	33.3
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	20	16.7
	5–10 years	45	37.5
	More than 10 years	55	45.8
Type of Publishing House	Independent	60	50
	University Press	30	25
	Multinational	30	25
Primary Market	Local	40	33.3
	National	50	41.7
	International	30	25

Source: Developed by the researcher

The pool of participating publishers highlights a diverse publishing ecosystem. The majority of respondents are seasoned industry veterans, with nearly half reporting a decade or more of experience. Independent publishers comprise a significant percentage of this space, which speaks to the process of localized and niche academic publishing in Maharashtra. Such a mix of experience and representation among different kind of actors involved improves the quality of evidence of the study's results.

Table 2: Pricing Strategies Adopted by Publishers

Pricing Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Cost-Plus Pricing	30	25
Value-Based Pricing	60	50
Competitive Pricing	20	16.7
Dynamic Pricing	10	8.3

Source: Developed by the researcher

50% of surveyed publishers prefer value-based pricing — pricing the book according to the perceived value of its content and brand. So cost-plus pricing is still common, but usually limited by inflation in production and printing costs. You are also seeing dynamic pricing and competitive pricing model especially in response to e-commerce and platform-specific promotions.

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Table 3: Digital Adaptation Among Publishers

Digital Offering	Frequency	Percentage (%)
E-books	90	75
Online Learning Platforms	60	50
Mobile Applications	30	25
None	10	8.3

Source: Developed by the researcher

The move to digital is striking. A majority of publishers also sell e books, with almost half teaming up with online platforms to reach broader audiences. Although the shift toward mobile applications has been relatively slow, it's a sign of future-ready content delivery trends in action. These digital avenues are especially effective in influencing pricing models including subscription or freemium-based access.

Table 4: Market Segmentation Focus

Target Segment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Undergraduate Students	70	58.3
Postgraduate Students	50	41.7
Research Scholars	40	33.3
Professional Institutions	30	25

Source: Developed by the researcher

Majority of the publishers cover undergraduate and postgraduate segment. Content designed for scholars and professionals is frequently priced much higher due to lower, and more specialized, demand. And, it serves a direct role in defining price elasticity and product bundling strategies.

Table 5: Revenue Models Employed

Revenue Model	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Direct Sales	80	66.7
Institutional Contracts	60	50
Subscription-Based	40	33.3
Pay-Per-View	20	16.7

Source: Developed by the researcher

Direct sales traditionally don't die. But many publishers are moving toward hybrid models, combining institutional partnerships and subscriptions. To encourage adoption of new solutions, subscription-based models take hold (as seen in Netflix, etc), providing recurring revenue streams, especially for digital textbooks and journals.

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Table 6: Factors Influencing Pricing Decisions

Pricing Factor	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Production Costs	100	83.3
Market Competition	90	75
Digitalization	80	66.7
Consumer Behavior	70	58.3

Source: Developed by the researcher

Production costs and competitive market pressures are the main drivers of pricing decisions. As digital platforms continue to proliferate, more nuanced consumer behavior has emerged, forcing publishers to move beyond static pricing strategies and embrace more dynamic, data-driven approaches.

Table 7: Comparative Analysis with Russian Publishers

Aspect	India	Russia
Average Book Price	₹500–₹700	300–500 RUB
Dominant Pricing Strategy	Value-Based	Retailer-Controlled
Digital Integration	High (E-books prevalent)	Moderate (Limited platforms)
Common Challenges	Piracy, Discounts	High Costs, Limited Demand

Source: Developed by the researcher

The Indian academic publishing market is adjusting rapidly to global trends with more digital integration and direct pricing control. Russian publishers, by contrast, commonly face pricing pressures on the outside of the business from retailers and exist under different economic constraints. Both demonstrate how developing countries adapt strategies to local conditions while developing global competitiveness.

Table 8: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Result	Statistical Significance
H1: Pricing strategies are influenced by production costs and market competition.	Supported	Significant (p < 0.05)
H2: Digitalization significantly impacts pricing models.	Supported	Significant (p < 0.05)
H3: Government policies and institutional procurement affect pricing strategies.	Supported	Significant (p < 0.05)
H4: Indian and Russian pricing strategies share similarities due to emerging market dynamics.	Partially Supported	Moderate (p < 0.10)

Source: Developed by the researcher

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The three leading hypotheses concerning internal and external determinants of pricing were all statistically supported. A diversification of pricing strategies despite shared economic conditions across India and Russia affords partial support for convergence, suggesting there are contextual differences at play as poli-cy approaches diverge across contexts. These insights may pave the way for policy-level comparisons and the establishment of region-specific pricing models.

Overall Discussion

The study finds Indian Academic Publishers mainly practice value-based pricing strategies. This is informed by content quality, academic institution demand, and digital flexibility. Digitalization is changing and reshaping distribution but also is changing consumer expectations and price points. Indian publishers have more control over pricing versus Russia, but are faced with increased threats like online piracy and discounting. But the trajectory in both markets is towards a world in which traditional models are slowly surrendered for hybrid models of pricing that can include print, digital, and service-based pricing.

Those findings are vital for the stakeholders who wish to make pricing consistent with sustainability in academic publishing. Policymakers, publishing professionals and academics alike will all benefit from the nuanced understanding of market behaviour, digital transformation and global comparisons this report offers.

Findings

The academic libraries in South and Central States of India have been chosen to study, with some comparative elements from the Russian publishing market, which allows for a better understanding of pricing policies of academic book publishers. Using a mixed-methods approach with 120 respondents in Maharashtra and 20 qualitative interviews, we found the following:

To begin with, value-based pricing is the most common strategy used by Indian Publishers. Publishers usually set prices according to the value proposition of the content, the lor of such articles to the curriculum and the reputation of these authors. Cost-plus pricing still dominates but is increasingly under threat from rising production costs and variable patterns of demand.

Second, digitalization has proved to be a game-changer. Most publishers now have e-books and are exploring subscription-based models. Embarking on a digital journey, not only widens the horizons of market availability but instituting flexible pricing mechanisms, especially for students and institutions.

Third, how we slice the market is so important. These are primarily undergraduates and post-graduates, and prices and content are determined with these two groups in mind. Research scholars and professionals, on the other hand, pay more for such books because their content is often more niche.

Fourth, revenue models are—and increasingly will—diversify: we will see more institutional contracts, platform-based distribution and hybrid print-digital offerings. This diversification enables publishers to reduce their risks and open up new revenue streams.

Fifth, comparisons with Russian publishers disclose main differences. And in India publishers enjoy greater autonomy over pricing, whereas in Russia those prices operate in a tighter retailmanaged system. However, both markets are susceptible to issues with high costs, piracy and variable demand.

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Finally, the results of the hypothesis testing indicate that production costs, digitalization, and procurement by institutions are all significant factors that affect pricing decisions. The findings highlight the adaptive practices that Indian publishers are implementing to compete in a changing academic landscape.

Conclusion

This study provides insight into academic publishers in India and the high-stakes decisions they are making regarding pricing in a rapidly changing publishing environment. Utilizing a strong mixed-methods framework, the study reflects the voices and practices of seasoned personnel in multiple roles—publishers, editors, and heads of marketing—providing a comprehensive perspective on the landscape of pricing.

That is, the most important takeaway is the shift away from heuristics based on cost and cost scenarios to ones based on value. As educational needs change and content grows more sophisticated, publishers were beginning to abandon one-size-fits-all pricing. Instead, they emphasize quality, appropriateness for a target audience, and relevance to academic syllabi.

Digitalization acts as a double-edged sword in this regard. On the one hand, it allows flexible pricing, broader reach, and novel access options such as e-subscriptions. On the other, it brings such risks as piracy, the need for constant technological adaptation and pricing competition with global platforms.

Revenue models have come to include institutional bulk sales, platform partnerships, and payper-view.] This approach is more strategic and sustainable, which is vital for independent publishers that must continue to be nimble.

The contrasting perspective with Russia shows how the global context affects pricing freedom. Indian publishers enjoy greater pricing power but are also subject to different region-specific market forces. Desiring it, Russian publishers are still much more confined by structured distributions systems.

The successful pricing mechanisms in academic publishing should be context-sensitive, technology-enabled and consumer-centric. Insights gathered in this way can inform the development of smarter pricing policies that create sustainability, accessibility, and academic quality for publishers, policymakers, and educational institutions alike.

Limitations and Future Scope of the Study

Though this study provides important information, it has some limitations. The study is geographically restricted to Maharashtra in India, including two of the major cities, namely Mumbai and Pune. While these represent important publishing centers, the results may not fully reflect practices in the rest of India with varying market dynamics. Second, unlike original fieldwork, the comparative analysis with Russia is limited to expert interviews, ceding some of the depth of cross-national comparisons.

The sample size is another limitation. Although purposive sampling facilitated targeted insights, a more generalizable outcome could be obtained by a more rigorous random sampling approach. In addition, the study centers on scientific publishers; future studies could include textbook publishers, literary publishers, or digital-exclusive platforms for a fuller picture.

For future research, the longitudinal effect of Artificial Intelligence, machine learning and data analytics in pricing choices in actual level can be explored. As algorithms are gradually becoming an important player in content distribution, there is ample opportunity to see how adjusting the technology can help to improve the pricing further. Comparative work on other

ISSN: 2578-725X, e-ISSN: 2578-7268

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emerging economies, such as Brazil, South Africa or China, could also provide richer global insights.

On the flip side, consumer-level studies—especially involving students and institutions—can add depth to our insight of price sensitivity, content preferences, and access behavior in academic publishing.

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