

Countering the rise of disreputable publishing - Integrity in academic publishing and dissemination

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Introduction

A vibrant, thriving industry of disreputable or predatory journals, publishers and conference organisers has emerged on a global scale on the back of the movement for open access publishing (de Jager et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2018). The term “predatory publisher” was coined by Jeffry Beall, a librarian at the University of Colorado Denver, USA: In his blog “Scholarly Open Access”, he listed “Potential, or Probable Predatory Scholarly Open-Access Publishers”. The websites and submission process of such journals are similar to any other modern journals; some have even managed to secure listings in reputable journal indexes (Savina & Sterligov 2016). This, together with appealing journal names, fake impact factor details, and invitations for journal article submission and conference attendance through emails, makes it difficult for a relatively new researcher to distinguish reputable from predatory journals (Shaghaei et al., 2018). The continuing success of these enterprises is indicative of the growing market for the services provided by this industry.

Technological advances and limited funds for libraries contributed to the changes with publication dimensions and towards the end of the 20th century, “open-access” publication emerged. Despite the initial aim of enabling free access to academic publications, open-access publication system also has been acting as a huge platform for predatory publishers to maintain their business. According to Patwardhan (2019), it is estimated that each year about 400,000 articles are published by approximately 8,000 predatory journals.

One reaction to this situation is *caveat emptor*: the buyer must take responsibility for the risk, but the reality is much more complex (Cobey et al., 2018). Predatory journals use “the author-pays model just for their own profit” (Beall, 2017, p. 274). Predatory publishers and journals can deceive unwitting authors into parting with money, either from hard-earned research funding or from their own pocket, by adopting names and branding that are very similar to genuine high quality journals; that is why Matumba et al. (2019, p. 84) call predatory publishing as “deceptive publishing”. They typically make false promises about peer review and make claims of listings in high impact-factor indexes, some of which are fake or inventions of the predatory industry itself (Wouters et al., 2019).

Some authors deliberately make use of these dissemination channels, to satisfy perverse targets and incentives set by the national government or their employer, including the need for evidence of publication record for continued employment, promotion, peer competitions for enhanced reputation or because cash bonuses are available for academic publications (Glendinning et al., 2019, 35-38, 67). On the other hand, many young, talented but naïve researchers are attracted towards these journals due to (a) the desire to disseminate their research and enhance their reputation, (b) tired the fact that some of these journals are listed in the reputable indexes and (c) the inability to publish in reputable journals (caused by poor writing skills and/or lack of research rigour) (Demir, 2018; Kurt, 2018).

Besides genuine predatory journals, the pressure to publish academic work in an increasingly competitive world has also led to the rise in publishers that adopt questionable editorial and peer-review practices, which lay at the edge of blatant misconduct and possibly rather constitute questionable publishing practices. Due to its novelty, the issue is still underappreciated and under-investigated. There are many reasons to worry about this emerging “sloppy publishing” industry.

It is certainly easier and quicker for an author to get a paper accepted by a journal or conference that does not discriminate on subject content or quality, compared to the process and timescale to have a paper accepted for publication in a reputable journal. For starters, there is no need to wait for peer reviewers to report back and therefore there is no need for revisions and rechecking. However, after considering the impact of these journals on scientific research, academic standards and individual careers, it becomes clear that action needs to be taken to curtail this undesirable industry (Lutay, 2019).

Some predatory journals and conference organisers use another trick to enhance their reputations, by hijacking the profiles of eminent researchers claiming these unwitting people are members of their editorial boards or on their register of reviewers. These academics are often oblivious to the fact that their names, affiliations and track records appear on the web sites of these companies. Some other predatory publishers even go one step further and hijack a complete journal by publishing the identical name of a reputable journal at a different webpage.

Given the vast scale of the predatory publishing industry, it is essential that researchers have the skills to discriminate reputable publishers from predatory ones. Developing such skills requires familiarity with how these companies operate and promote their services. It is also possible to make use of “black lists” (a list of potential, possible, or probable predatory publishers) and “white lists” (list of what is considered “legitimate and ethical” (Hunziker, 2017, p. 114)). Beall’s List is the most well-known black list, but he no longer maintains this list. White lists are maintained by the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), and the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (Matumba et al., 2019).

Objectives

Members of the working group Integrity in Academic Publishing and Dissemination (IN_A_DIP), established by the European Network for Academic Integrity (ENAI), are running this workshop. The aims and objectives of IN_A_DIP are to

- Identify, define and characterise questionable editorial, publishing and dissemination practices;
- Promote institutional academic integrity by providing checklists to identify disreputable publishers and conferences;
- Disseminate good practice;
- Highlight the threats from disreputable publishers and conferences;
- Provide support to scholars for developing knowledge and skills in distinguishing reputable from disreputable publications / journals / conferences;
- Conduct research about this phenomenon;
- Network and collaborate with institutions, working groups, other people interested in this topic.

The workshop

The workshop will provide a forum for the presenters to work with participants to help answer questions, such as: How can we know whether or not a publisher / journal / conference is reputable? Why do people use such services? What harm do these companies do? How can we distinguish publishers that are just getting established from predatory publishing companies?

The workshop will begin by presenting previous research and early findings from the working group, including evidence from literature and research focusing on this problem (including: Bagues et al 2017; Bonhannon 2013; B). Participants will then be asked to contribute their own experiences and ideas to the working group's investigations.

The workshop will be of interest to anyone who cares about the publishing process, the quality of scientific research and the well-being of researchers throughout the world.

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