

A Growing Threat for Academicians: Fake and Predatory Journals

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Abstract

Over the last few years scientists have been the targets for cybercrime in a few different ways. Hijacked or fake journals and predatory journals have emerged, and many scientists have been victimized by these journals. Those journals are trying to deceive authors and readers intentionally by not doing what they say they are doing, but still charging the authors for the services that they do not provide like peer review or editorial review. They also do not follow traditional standards for the acceptance of articles. Our goal is to disseminate knowledge and awareness about such journals and offer some basic skills to the authors so that they avoid fake or predatory publishers. One must be careful because predatory journals may take away not only your money but also, more importantly, your prestige and reputation. (*JAEM 2015; 14: 94-6*)

Keywords: Publishing, fake journal, predatory journal

Introduction

Many scientists are under pressure for publishing because of several reasons. They are forced to publish to gain promotion, reputation, pay rise, etc. The pressure to publish is often more intense in developing countries. There are many scientific journals to which authors can submit their papers; some of these journals are newly established, and some of them have been published for years.

Main publication expenses of journals are article processing (peer review, proofreading, typesetting, graphics, and quality assurance), management and investment costs to establish a journal, other costs (rights management, printing and delivery, online user management, website maintenance costs, and marketing and communication costs), and personnel costs (1). There are two types of publishing in terms of who covers these costs: the traditional model and the open access model.

In the conventional subscription based toll access model, traditional publishers earn money from the subscription of journals by libraries, databases, or individuals. In this model the readers are covering the costs.

Open access journals are accessible to the readers free of charge to access, copy, search, print, cite, and share articles with others (2). They cover their expenses in various ways; some of these journals are supported by associations or organizations or rely on advertisement fees, but most of them charge authors or institutions an author fee, now called as article processing charges, to cover publication costs.

In open access publishing, the authors generally keep the copyright of their work (3). The fees have a wide range from a few hundreds to up to thousands of US dollars.

Open access publishing officially started in 2002 with Budapest open access initiative and gained popularity in the last 10 years (4). Today, the Directory of Open Access Journals, which indexes open access journals, has over 10000 journals on its list, and 17% of scholarly journal articles are available open access (4, 5). It is a promising and exciting move to disseminate good quality work to more scientists at a lower cost. It has gained popularity and political support because its goal is to remove barriers to access information, accelerating research (6).

There are three open access publication models that publishers currently use; these include the gold model in which the author pays, the green model in which author self-archives previously published works in open-access repositories, and the platinum open-access (OA) model, which is free for both authors and readers and is charitably funded by an institution or individual (4).

At the same time, the process of submitting a paper to any journal has become much easier and faster via internet. Internet enabled the digital processing of papers and this shortened the time of paperwork and the time spent in mail as well as considerably lowered the costs. Many traditional toll access and open access journals accept submissions via their websites.

Over the last few years scientists have been the targets for cybercrime in a few different ways. Hijacked or fake journals and predatory



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journals have emerged, and many scientists have been victimized by these journals. Almost always, the authors of fake or predatory journals are young researchers who are desperate to get their research printed to enhance their CVs and career chances.

The goal of this paper is not to evaluate disadvantages of traditional or open access publishing because both models can be legitimate and also vulnerable to exploitation in different ways. Our goal is to warn, particularly inexperienced authors about fake and predatory journals so that they do not become victims.

Hijacked or Fake Journals

These websites are also called ghost publishers, and they are designed to scam researchers to pay money, although there is no journal where the work is being published in (7). They can do this in a couple of ways.

If the authentic journal has a website, cybercriminals may duplicate it. The frauds duplicate even the smallest details of original websites and use authentic journals' title, logo, impact factor, address, and international standard serial numbers on their fake websites. The fake journal websites are so convincing that they could even mislead Thomson Reuters (8).

If the journal does not have a dedicated website and is a print only journal that does not offer electronic versions, cybercriminals create a website and claim that they are the authentic journal's web site.

If the journal has a website that is in a language other than English, then the cybercriminals create a website that is a copy of the authentic site in English and claim that they are the English webpage for the authentic journal.

Researchers are fooled into submitting their work to those fake websites and into paying author fees. Victims of those fake journals sometimes contact the authentic journals' editors to ask the status of their work after they transfer the money and do not see their work published in the journals. Editors of victim journals usually cannot stop the counterfeit websites, and they are trying to warn the authors from the journal's genuine website (8).

Although many of these journals make it appear like they are located in the United States, the United Kingdom, or Canada, the vast majority is headquartered in other countries out of the reach of the western legal and regulatory systems that may monitor or limit their operations or provide recourse for disgruntled authors (3). To take legal action against these websites is not easy because the websites are usually hosted in different countries than the authentic journals, and money transfer is also done to a bank account in another country (8).

One can refer to an up-to-date list of these journals at Jeffrey Beall's website (9).

Predatory Publishers

Jeffrey Beall has first used the term predatory publishers in 2010, and thereafter he developed a list of predatory publishers that unprofessionally exploit the open access model for profit (3, 4, 10). The number of predatory journals has really risen in 2012. It is estimated that 1%-10% of all open access articles are published in those journals (10). They exploit the idea of the author paid gold model open access publishing by charging a fee but not providing the promised publishing services in return (10). They do not follow accepted scholarly publishing industry standards and seek only to profit from author fees (4).

Some of these journals claim that well known academicians are on their editorial boards, although the person has no relationship with the journal and sometimes does not even know that he is on that list.

Some predatory journals do not mention until the last minute that they require publication fees. By the time you are informed, your article has already passed a peer review process and has been accepted for publication. Sometimes they ask for the money after you have already signed the copyright transfer form and you cannot withdraw your paper from the journal anymore. Sometimes they ask for a language check from a certain company and charge you for the language check, although they have no intentions to publish your article and reject your article after language check.

These journals also aim to fool, particularly the inexperienced researchers, by publishing low quality and questionable papers (junk science) as long as they get paid. Some open access journals have very weak, if any, peer review process, and there is almost a journal for almost every article as long as the author is willing to pay. It will cost the publishers absolutely nothing to put these academic papers on their website, probably without even reading them.

Moreover, these journals may also disappear quickly, with authors losing the proof of publication and articles getting lost in cyberspace (11).

These journals can reach authors in a number of ways; mostly they send an email that promotes the journal and ask for a special work that needs to be submitted until a limited period of time by tempting the researcher with the idea that his work is very much appreciated by this "so very important" journal. Because of their method of communicating through spam emails, these journals are also called "spamnals", which is a short term for spam journals. It is not difficult to see why several people in the medical world are falling for these invitations. If your boss says that you must publish, the invitation from any journal that will publish your work within weeks looks reasonable; however, we must not forget that reputable medical journals do not ask for submissions in such a manner.

Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) are trying to regulate open access journals and make a white list of journals that fulfill their criteria for authors to decide better before submitting a manuscript to a journal.

How to Protect Our Work and Ourselves

Our goal should be to disseminate knowledge/awareness about such scams and to train authors so that they will have the basic skills required to avoid fake or predatory publishers (7). There are some suggested methods to recognize a fake or predatory journal by different authors; we have listed our top 10 list below. Researchers should be careful because fraud is an ever-changing field. Before you submit to a journal, the following must be taken into account:

1. Check Beall's list of predatory publishers and journals to see if the journal is on the list (6).
2. Search the journal in an internet search engine to see if there is any information about fraud (6).
3. On the journal site, check if the publisher's full contact information, including the address is displayed (10).
4. Check the editorial board to see if it comprises experts in the field. Contact one or two of them to see if they are aware of the journal board (6, 10).

5. Check to see if the journal's web site is transparent about author fees (6, 10).
6. Check the previously published papers and asses the quality (6, 10).
7. Be suspicious about extremely fast submission with publication periods, such as 3 weeks (12).
8. Check if the journal is a member of an association like Directory of Open Access Journals or Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (10).
9. Ignore spam mail invitations to submit your work to journals or to become the member of editorial boards (7).
10. When in doubt, ask a more experienced colleague to help you.

Conclusion

Many open access publishers are trustworthy and many are making amateurish mistakes, particularly when they are at the start of entering the publishing market. These are not predatory or fake journals. Predatory or fake journals are trying to deceive authors and readers intentionally by not doing what they say they are doing, but still they charge the authors for the services that they do not provide like peer review or editorial review. They also do not follow traditional standards for the acceptance of articles.

Scientists also need to take some of the blame; by sending their work to predatory journals they are supporting the system. To solve the problem, scientists should resist the temptation of publishing their low-quality work fast and with ease. Libraries do not buy these fake or predatory journals, but authors who are desperate for publishing their work support them by paying them to publish their articles (8, 10, 13).

Scientific and scholarly publishing literacy should also include the ability to recognize fraud and avoid scholarly publishing scams. Public and private funding agencies should avoid policies that may lead to overemphasis of quantity over quality in the reward systems for researchers (4). Researchers should avoid the temptations that predatory journals offer, such as very fast submission to publication time, because that usually means less than ideal peer review (4). Readers should resolutely ignore invitations from spamnals and advise all their colleagues to do the same (14). One must be careful because predatory journals may take away not only your money but also, more importantly, your prestige and reputation (12).

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

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