

Battling predatory publishing



EDUCATION

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THE “publish-or-perish” system and “predatory” publishing are perhaps among the most talked about but poorly understood areas of contemporary scholarly life.

On one hand, scholars and scientists are increasingly being pressured by their employers to generate publications; on the other, few succeed when it comes to academic publishing.

The lack of research and writing skills, ignorance of which journals are legitimate, and insufficient monitoring and regulation are factors leading to the proliferation of predatory publishers in recent years.

Such publishers use or publish false or misleading information, deviate from ethical editorial and publication practices, lack transparency, and/or use aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices.

As shown by Grudniewicz and colleagues (2019), and Machá ek and Srholec (2021) in Nature and Scientometrics, respectively, even the very prominent databases such as Scopus have been penetrated by predatory journals.

Countries with middle-range gross domestic product – from Kazakhstan and Albania to Indonesia and Malaysia – have been cited as leaders in publishing articles in predatory journals in areas that span from health and life sciences, to physical and social sciences, according to a study published in Scientometrics this year.

Another study by the same journal in 2017 found that authors of articles published in predatory journals are typically young and inexperienced researchers from Asia or Africa.

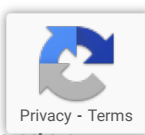
Indeed, predatory publishing is a significant global threat to public investment in research and development.

We thus offer three practical strategies – benchmarking, check-and-recheck, and avoidance (BCA) – to assist academics, higher education elites, and science policy makers in protecting themselves or their countries from predatory journals and predatory publishing.

Benchmarking

Create a standard list of “reputable” journals.

Universities and academic units should create a list of legitimate journals and rank them in pecking order



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Alternatively, they may refer to stricter established journal lists recognised by universities globally or countries with strong research performance – for example, Financial Times’ Top 50 Journals and the Australian Business Deans Council’s Journalist Quality List for business schools.

The standard list serves as a roadmap to help scholars gradually rise in the publishing “game” as they evolve.

Research grants, publication incentives and reward systems can also be linked to publication in the journal list.

Check-and-recheck

Check-and-recheck before submitting a manuscript to journals.

As the journal game keeps shifting and predatory journals or publishers change names or strategies, scholars and scientists should invest their time to check:

- > Whether a fee for publishing is an option or tradition – for example, publishing fees are a tradition in some top-tier economics and finance journals, but mandatory in predatory journals.
- > Whether a journal has passed the screening of the Beall’s and Cabell’s lists of predatory journals and publishers, posted in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and whether it abides by the guidelines provided by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).
- > The ranking status of target journals (for example, Q1, Q2 or Q3) such as using Journal Citation Reports (JCR) or the Scimago Journal Rank (SJR).

The Harzing list provides a very useful database of all of the major journals, and where they appear in the various international rankings lists.

- > The impact factor of the target journal (for example, a higher score is usually better but it varies considerably by field or discipline), and where it is indexed such as Science Citation Index (SCI) for science or Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) for social science publications.
- > Whether a journal is recognised as being legitimate by scholars collectively in a given field.

Avoidance

Create a support system to improve research skills and mitigate the temptation to publish in predatory journals.

Universities can scout well-published international scholars or scientists, and/or prestigious journal editors with a wealth of publishing experience to nurture early career local researchers and share the processes in conducting review and making editorial decisions.

International and multidisciplinary collaboration and the sharing of best practices among researchers publishing in strong or top journals will help, as well.

Predatory journals are still a taboo subject to many. The key is to acknowledge their existence and tackle them head-on.



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whole of mankind, instead of just a few.

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