

Guidelines for selecting journals that avoid fraudulent practices in scholarly publishing

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Abstract

In recent years, scholarly publishing has been faced with many distractive phenomena. Generally, most researchers are unaware of fraudulent practices now common to scholarly publishing and are at risk of becoming a victim of them. Editors also need to have sufficient knowledge about these practices. There are papers that try to increase awareness of authors about fraud in scholarly publishing, but it seems that there is no good academic resource to direct editors. In this paper, we try to present a general guideline for increasing journal quality by discussing the emerging threats to scholarly publishing and methods to avoid being victimized.

Keywords

Academic ethic, Bogus metric, Journal quality, Predatory journals, Scholarly publishing.

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Introduction

Along with its many advantages, the emerging open-access publishing model has led to problems for scholarly publishing. Some people having only a strict business view of scholarly publishing tend to dismiss academic ethics. They have created predatory journals, hijacked legitimate journal websites, and fashioned bogus metrics in support. Predatory publishers may use the open-access model, have exorbitant page charges, and publish papers with low quality or nonexistent peer review (Nolfi *et al.*, 2015). Like other internet-related swindles involving spam and phishing activities, the phenomenon is relatively new. The “predatory” term was introduced by Jeffrey Beall in 2010 (Beall, 2013), resulting in an academic sub discipline that confronts the problem.

Recent papers warn about predatory publishers and present general criteria for their detection. Some discuss misleading metrics and impact factors and provide lists of known bogus metrics (Jalalian and Mahboobi, 2013; Jalalian, 2013; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2015). Designed to make predatory journals look legitimate, these metrics generally are without merit. The distractive effects on science produced by fake publishers and journals have been studied (Jalalian and Mahboobi, 2014). There have been valuable papers directing authors on writing and selecting suitable journals for publishing manuscripts, but these did not consider emerging issues in scholarly publishing (Huth, 1986; Klingner *et al.*, 2005; Moher, 2010).

Guidelines for Authors

Our inspection of Beall’s list of predatory journals (2015b) shows that there were 67 such journals in the field of management alone. These will publish papers without satisfactory review, leading to misleading or bogus advice in management science. Although editors comprise our audience for this paper, we must be concerned with authors as well.

Also, research institutes must include emerging issues in scholarly publishing to their criteria for journal selection when advising the

authors they support. Table 1 presents steps that authors should consider before submitting a manuscript.

Table 1. Steps authors should consider before submitting a manuscript

No.	Step Name	Description
1	Checking manuscript	There are many good academic resources that present guidelines for manuscript preparation and improvement such as Huth (1986), Klingner <i>et al.</i> (2005), or Moher (2010).
2	Selecting journal	Authors must select suitable journals for their papers. Journals describe their audience and present their aim and scope. Also there are journal finder tools such as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. DOAJ journal finder: https://doaj.org/search 2. Springer Journal finder: http://www.springer.com/gp/authors-editors/journal-author/journal-author-helpdesk/preparation/1276#c6136 3. Elsevier Journal Finder; http://journalfinder.elsevier.com 4. Ednaz journal selector; https://www.edanzediting.com/journal-selector
3	Checking journal indexing	Authors can use Thomson Reuters Master list (http://science.thomsonreuters.com/cgi-bin/jrnlst/jlsearch.cgi?PC=MASTER) or SCIMAGO website (http://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php) to check journals for indexing in Thomson Reuters and Scopus.
4	Checking journal against predatory practice	Authors can use Beall's criteria (Beall, 2015a) and his updated list to prevent publishing in predatory journals (https://scholarlyoa.com/individual-journals).
5	Checking journal against possible hijacking	Hijacked journals are yet another emerging issue for scholarly publishing. Cybercriminals cheat authors by creating websites that mimic the name and ISSN of reputable journals (Jalalian and Mahboobi, 2014; Dadkhah and Borchardt, 2016). Authors can detect these journals using simple methods: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Authors can check the registration date of the journal domain in WHOIS data base (http://whois.domaintools.com) 2. Authors can check the page rank of the journal domain according to the Google page ranking algorithm (http://www.whatsmypr.net) <p>If the journal domain has been registered in the last two years and the page ranking is lower than 3 and also claims that it is indexed by Thomson Reuters, it may be a hijacked journal. This method does not always work because some journals from reputable publishers may have been recently established and others may have changed their websites, but it is a good check nonetheless. Also, authors can use the updated list of Beall (2016). Another method involves checking recent issues of the journal in citation databases such as Scopus or Web of Science. They refrain from including predatory journals, although hijacked journals cannot be detected by this method.</p>
6	Submitting manuscript	The final step.

Guidelines for Editors

In this section, we present general guidelines for increasing journals quality and protecting them against emerging issues in scholarly publishing. Our guidelines are based on Beall's criteria (Beall, 2015a; Dadkhah and Bianciardi; 2016) for predatory journal detection, but we tried to expand them and present some details based on our own observations.

Contact Address and Emails

All journals should provide email addresses or contact forms for author queries. General email addresses are insufficient because authors need to verify that they are dealing with the original website of the journal, not a hijacked one. Authors must be reassured that all editors are real and their target journal does not abuse the names of standout researchers. Without authorization, predatory and hijacked journals sometimes include the names of standout researchers on their editorial boards, being careful to avoid using official email addresses. To prevent spam, some authentic journals do not use official email addresses. We recommend that editors use official email addresses at least for the managing editor or editor in chief. Much spam email can be prevented using an image instead of text for the official email address on the journal website.

Editorial Board Affiliation

Science is becoming so specialized that journals should avoid using only board members from a single country. International advisory members can help to attract and manage papers from their respective countries. In addition to English, various languages might well be represented. Otherwise, a special language editor may be necessary for evaluating technical aspects and checking the possibility of plagiarism.

Call for Papers and Spam Emails

Fraudulent journals commonly send laudatory spam emails to receive papers from researchers. At the very least, sending such calls for papers to prospective authors without their permission is not

honorable. With the seemingly exponential growth of fraudulent journals, some researchers may be inundated with such emails. Nonetheless, reputable journals reserve the right to send calls for papers. All journal websites should allow researchers the option to subscribe to newsletters and email lists that send those calls only to those interested.

User-Friendly Websites

At minimum, journal websites should have the following:

1. They should be up to date, with the very latest information.
2. All dead links should be removed.
3. The aim and scope should be on the first page.
4. The name of the editor in chief, ISSN of the journal, current issue number, and impact factor of the journal (for indexed journals) should be on the first page.
5. The list of editorial board members, contact options, and links to published issues must be easily accessible.
6. The submission process must be explained in a detailed set of author's guidelines.

Publication Charges

The business model for fraudulent journals, of course, requires publication charges. In the past, reputable journals, especially those published by scientific societies and well-funded institutions avoided charging for publication. That would have been considered a conflict of interest. Today, with the tremendous growth in public and corporate funding for science, private businesses have gotten involved. That business model includes subscription fees, pay-wall fees, page charges, and open access fees.

Publication fees are different from open access fees. With open access (OA), authors can decide to pay the entire cost of publication, thus making their work free to all in electronic form. Some journals publish all papers in the open access model, with all authors paying the OA fees. In such OA journals, peer review is similar to other reputable journals. On the other hand, fraudulent journals abuse the OA model by publishing papers without adequate peer review. Like

many reputable journals, some charge both authors and readers (Beall, 2015a).

Impact Factors and Journal Metrics

The impact factor for evaluating scientific journals was proposed by Dr. Eugene Garfield in 1955. It was adopted by Thomson Reuters and published as the Journal Citation Reports® (Gutierrez *et al.*, 2015). SCImago Journal Rank is another metric that was created by a Spanish research group based on the Scopus database (Jalalian, 2015). Impact factors and the SCImago Journal Rank are metrics that journals use to show their degree of influence in a particular specialty. In recent years, some misleading metrics have arisen. These often use names similar to the original legitimate metrics. The express purpose of these bogus impact factors is to convince authors to submit papers to fraudulent journals (Jalalian and Mahboobi, 2013; Jalalian, 2013; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2015).

Reputable journals with inexperienced editors are at risk of misleading authors by using such phony metrics with reference to their journal. Table 2 shows some common misleading metrics. Editors tempted to use such bogus impact factors as promotional tools face possible boycotts from prominent researchers. Also, bogus metrics seldom have clear ranking methods and thus editors cannot trust the reports concerning their own journals.

Some journals use a self-calculated impact factor. For example, they might calculate their journal impact factor using Google Scholar citation. Or they might create a research ID in Thomson Reuters, subsequently claiming that their journal is indexed in Thomson Reuters research ID. These practices sometimes can lead to journals being classified as predatory.

Table 2. Popular misleading metrics
(extracted from Jalalian (2015), with some additions)

No.	Name	Website
1	International Impact Factor Services (IIFS)	http://impactfactorservice.com
2	The Journals Impact Factor (JIF)	http://jifactor.org
3	Journal Impact Factor (JIF)	http://jifactor.com

Continue Table 2. Popular misleading metrics
(extracted from Jalalian (2015), with some additions)

No.	Name	Website
4	General Impact Factor (GIF)	http://generalimpactfactor.com
5	International Scientific Indexing (ISI)	http://isindexing.com
6	The Global Impact and quality Factor (GIF)	http://globalimpactfactor.com
7	Universal Impact Factor (UIF)	http://www.uifactor.org
8	African Quality Centre for Journals (AQCJ)	http://www.aqcj.org
9	Cite Factor	http://www.citefactor.org
10	International Scientific Institute (ISI)	http://www.scijournal.org
11	Scientific Journal Impact Factor (SJIF)	http://www.sjifactor.com http://www.sjifactor.inno-space.net
12	ISRA: Journal Impact Factor (JIF)	http://www.israjif.org
13	Institute for Science Information	http://isi-thomsonreuters.com
14	Scientific Indexing Services	http://sindexs.org
15	Open Academic Journals Index	http://oaji.net
16	Advanced Science Index	http://journal-index.org
17	Journal Influence Factor	http://www.journalsconsortium.org
18	Directory of Indexing and IF	http://www.diif.org
19	Einstein Inst. for Scientific Information	http://journalimpactfactor.co.in
20	Council for Innovative Research	http://cirworld.org
21	Impact Factor (JCC)	http://www.journal-metrics.com
22	Impact Factor Journals	http://www.impactfactorjournals.com

Special Issues

To increase sales, predatory journals sometimes create special issues for publishing papers that are outside their journals' aim and scope. Normally, the main goal of a special issue is to focus on a particular subject pertinent to the aim and scope of that particular journal. This collects valuable research in one place, whereas a special issue with papers in widely varying subjects can have a negative effect on journal quality.

Author's View for Submitting Papers

Many authors in reputable institutes or universities use special criteria for selecting journals for their papers. Table 2 shows some of the criteria used by expert researchers. Editors should be aware of these criteria for improving their journals.

Table 2. Criteria for selecting the proper journal for your publication

No.	Criterion	Description
1	Specificity	Is the journal appropriate for your subject matter?
2	Review	Remember that science is an ongoing discussion about the universe. Have you read and cited the appropriate articles that have already been published in the journal you have selected?
3	Membership	Many of the most important journals are produced by membership organizations. Are you a member of the organization that represents your subject matter? If so, submit your work there. If not, become a member.
4	Impact Factor	Publishing is all about being noticed. Journals with high impact factors have the largest number of readers that are likely to cite your work in their own publications, providing you have selected the appropriate journal for your subject matter.
5	Avoid predatory journals	These scholarly publishing scams produce poorly reviewed journals that are seldom cited due to their poor quality and rightful obscurity. Page charges are exorbitant, mostly because their only concern is profit. When in doubt, check Beall's latest list (Beall, 2015b).
6	Avoid hijacked journals	These scholarly publishing scams mimic legitimate, prominent journals by copying their websites. After inadequate reviews and paying high page charges, your published paper probably will disappear after the legitimate journal threatens legal action. When in doubt, check Beall's latest list (Beall, 2016).

Emerging Problems Reviewing Papers

With the increase in fraudulent journals, a special problem arises when reviewing papers submitted to your legitimate journal. Many papers use data gathered directly from other publications. If those other publications are fraudulent, then, by association, the paper before you verges on being fraudulent also. You not only have to review the paper at hand, but you have to review its references as well. It might be easy to spot references from previously unknown journals, but hijacked journals present a particularly vexatious problem. References suspected of being from hijacked journals must be tracked down to see if they are associated with a legitimate journal or with a fake website.

Expunging Hijacked Journals

All editors of journals now must be aware of the possibility of being

hijacked (Jalalian and Mahboobi, 2014; Dadkhah and Borchardt, 2016). When this happens, your journal will lose some legitimate submissions and your journal's reputation will suffer. Most likely, you will also suffer the legal expense of putting a stop to the infringement. The sooner you find out about such fraudulent misrepresentations, the less the damage will be. Beall now has a list of hijacked journals (Beall, 2016).

Conclusion

In this paper, we presented guidelines for helping journals to improve their quality. Inexperienced editors and those journals just starting out do not have sufficient information about the emerging issues in scholarly publishing. They are particularly at risk of being victims of fraud. Also, without being aware, they actually may become predatory journals themselves. This can happen when editors use bogus metrics that were initially designed to attract authors to publish in predatory journals. As in the case of computer viruses and phishing scams, emerging fraudulent activities require all editors to be cognizant of the threat and willing to confront it.

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