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PERSPECTIVE

Predatory Journals: A New Perspective

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The origin of deceptive publishing traces back to 2008, initiated by Gunther Eysenbach¹. He believed authors are those black sheep who are at an edge of “publish or perish” as quoted by Megan O'Donnell. She defined predatory journals as “an opportunistic publishing venue that exploits the academic need to publish but offers little reward for those using their services”². The increasing spam emails for article publishing and conference participation without robust editorial services indicate predatory publishing is an inevitable problem mainly rising from the developing world researchers and institutions.

It was observed that these publications prey on the needs, desires, and expectations of the author without valuing their hard work and contribution to the scientific community. The rising number of predatory journals and mere obligations are a constant global threat not only to the legitimate publishers but damages research integrity and disservice the author's reputation as well. Thus, predatory journals are the corporate services aiming to reap profits from publishers, proliferating and expanding whilst dismissing scientific integrity.

Possible characteristics of a predatory Journal:

By definition, “Predatory journals and publishers are entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practice, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices.”

According to Jeffrey Beall, usually, the predatory publishers are spotted using the Gold Open Access³, however, Joseph D. Olivarez added that traditional peer-reviewed journals also could be considered as predatory to attract readers and authors to gain followers. This concept of open access intrigues the author to open his work to all for citations and raise expectations for

appreciation. There are few checklists developed to help identify predatory journals, however, motivation and felony tactics vary among these journals with specific characteristics:

- Charging fees for publication or subscriptions
- No specification of the quality of work
- Falsely claimed peer-review process and policy
- False claims related to impact factor and indexation
- Unethical practices
- Fail to comply with standards of scholarly publications

However, it should be acknowledged that not all open-access journals are predatory publishers; their unethical behavior discriminates them from early risers. The upsurging number of articles leads to the development of multiple forums for publications. Nevertheless, the inexperience, financial instability, no memberships of well-known ethical committees, offering service individually, and publication fees initially to support the early recognition instigates doubts and results in backlisting as a predatory journal.

The purpose of many national rising journals is to support non-native English publications as the authors are under pressure to produce refined quality papers for international English journals, a venue for publication of research findings related to local or national topics, that can have a direct impact on the society. Hence, many universities are now supporting young researchers and faculties to pursue research and publish in national and institutional journals to encourage them for the future prospectus. But these journals are still struggling to justify their existence and legitimacy as not being a predatory journal. Moreover, the Impact Factor (Thomson Reuters' database) rarely contains national journals in a language other than English, so such

publications are not usually assigned an Impact Factor which for some can be tantamount to having no impact at all.

So, a few objections to rising journals are justified as under:

Well Managed Website: It's not because they are predatory publishers, and preying on the author's & reader's desires, but they have utilized their skillset and resources at the very best.

Not a Member of Ethical Committee: A large number of society journals specifically in Asia are not members of the different organizations like COPE, and IJMCE. It's all due to a lack of funds to get a membership and to generate revenue for their survival; the possible solution is a high publication fee.

Publishing Cost: Early institutional journals are mostly not funded by the established organization and a high budget to ensure publication does not perish imposes a threat for the survival to maintain standards, follow protocol, and establish recognition for the contribution to the scientific society.

Luring Promises: a new establishment in the publishing industry often offers authors and readers high-quality service to gain trust; however, if they are fulfilling their promises, they can't be predatory ones.

The confusion still thrives as many predatory journals and early journals fail to index in many well-reputed scientific indexing databases like PubMed, Medline, or enlisted in Journal Citation Report (JCR), Scopus, or Web of Science. However, to distinguish the predatory from legitimate early risers of Asia, it is convenient to identify specific signs to forfeit these journals:

- The predatory journals often adopt aggressive marketing strategies such as social media approach (LinkedIn)
- Frequent emails requesting for submission of manuscripts
- The journal's scope of interest includes unrelated subjects alongside legitimate topics.
- The website contains spelling and grammar errors
- Offers, images or logos are distorted/fuzzy or misrepresented/unauthorized. Positions as a reviewer or editorial irrespective of the qualification.
- Flattering communications to convince the authors to publish.

- Website targets authors, not readers (i.e. publisher prioritizes making money over product).
- Difficulty in tracking the publisher due to incorrect postal address. They typically have no editorial office or well-recognized institution/organization associated with the journal
- Communicates through vague email ID regarding the manuscript publication. False claims or misleading information (such as copied impact factor)
- Lack of an appropriate peer-review process or false claim of peer-review, yet authors are required to pay an article processing fee.
- Fail to follow the standard protocol from best editorial and publication practices
- A lack of transparency and control
- Inability to effectively disseminate research
- There is no digital preservation plan for content and a lack of proper archiving procedures of the journal and publisher.
- There is no article retraction policy.
- Publication within a few days or weeks represents an absence of a standard peer-review process.
- "Predatory Rate" is 14-point criteria⁴ (editorial members, review process and publishing, announcements, open access policy, and publication charges, etc), whose value can indicate the journal is possibly a predator or not.

Possible consequences of publishing in a predatory journal:

As an author, the efforts invested in drafting one article are valuable and publication in an authentic journal preserves the work permanently. The pressure to excel, publish frequently and inexperience often traps an author in this vicious cycle. As a scholar, professionalism should stop one from allowing the scientific archive to be contaminated with citations to articles in predatory journals.

Enlisted are some certain facts to avoid these journals:

- The work is subjected to peer-review, which holds minimum importance and there is a risk that predatory papers could be considered fraud.
- The risk of article removal from the website anytime may affect future prospectus

- No record in the database creates difficulty in locating
- No guarantee of plagiarized work
- Significant grammatical and typographical errors with the often-unprofessional layout of the research paper.
- The bad reputation of a journal leads to no recognition
- Not indexed in an academic database reduces the citation opportunity and impact factor
- Public embarrassment and questionable authorities
- It is a misuse of public funds paid for the research

New challenges

The research and innovation landscape is rapidly shifting towards Asia, still, most of the time the Asian Journals/Publishers are on the hit list for being predators. The low acceptance rate and delays in the review are very common among the well-known traditional journals, which leads to the turning of the young authors towards new open access journals that offer relatively low charges. Dr. Haider Sabah Kadhi, Head of Microbiology in Iraq expressed that countless authors proudly show their published work only to be disappointed by the refusal of academia, as the journal is not listed⁵. Similar reporting pointed out that many authors boast regarding the publication in the top databases such as the Web of Science, Scopus, and MEDLINE with proper DOI allocated and having impact factor; however, upon investigation, the work was not entered in the CrossRef database. Thus, the contamination of these authentic sites raises the question of publishing authentic research publications.

Due to rising felony, the new researchers are in a dilemma and under pressure to produce high academic productivity to secure their position with the number of articles published and impact factors established by numbered citations. Several journals display high impact factor value without any confirmation provided by Clarivate Analytics, the owner of journal citation reports and journal of impact factor; hence, traps millions of researchers despite their diligent assessment⁶. Institute of Scientific Information (Thomson Reuter) is an institution that provides impact factors to legitimate journals; however, sadly the predatory journals hijack and present false claims of the rating index to attract the authors⁷.

In 2014, a sudden rise of articles in known predatory journals was observed from 53000 to 420000, the

majority from Asia and Africa⁸. The authors reported that these articles were published within 2 to 3 months after submission without any revisions and average article processing charges (APC) (178 US dollars). Shen and Bjork estimated the ratio of articles published based on country; Nigeria (1580%), India (277%), Iran (70%), Pakistan (not unknown) and USA (6%) to predatory journals and Web of Science indexed journals⁹. In regards, Chinese studies provided evidence for blacklisted mishaps due to the high number of rising publishers (India-235) failing to comply with the quality and integrity of research to cater to the increasing number of articles¹⁰.

To spread awareness, Jeffery Beall (2016) published a list of predatory journals/ publishers since 2008, which enlisted more than 12000 titles and publishers questioned over the practice based on 50 criteria³; however, it was removed. In the midst of newly arising legitimate journals from the east, the well-established journals took an opportunity to certify them as predatory to suppress the competition. People were advised to thoroughly check the website for any typos and grammatical errors as a warning sign of predatory journals. However, the equation of imperfect English associated with the non-ethical practice is a wrong assumption as millions of non-native English speakers are contributing to the formation of the research forums.

Unsurprisingly, the lack of developments and advanced use of technology in developing countries is considered as the major barrier for the rising number of new journals and survival of predatory journals. The rich funded institution provides high-level training, supervision, and support that raises the literacy, which discerns predatory versus legitimate journals. Thus, it was established that the majority of the inexperienced authors are from developing countries and easily fall prey to these deceiving journals.

Recommendations & Possible Solution

After coining the term predatory journal in 2010, the scientific society and publishers took the step to alert the authors and initiated the campaign 'Think. Check. Submit.' To help the authors identify the predatory journal, more than 90 checklists were designed; where only 3 were approved based on research evidence¹¹. Moreover, it was reported that obtaining a journal's membership of agencies such as COPE (the Committee on Publication Ethics), curated indexes such as Web of Science, or listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) is not enough to guarantee the quality⁸. The predatory journals forge their presence in the list

whereas the new legitimate journals have to continue publishing for a year before applying for indexing.

Also, it is suggested by Yuki Yamada that "an open and multi-layered assessment of research content enhances the credibility of all research articles, even those published in non-predatory journals. If applied consistently by researchers in various fields, the suggested measures may enhance reproducibility and promote the advancement of science"¹⁰.

Currently, the universities and educational forums are setting up boundaries and thresholds for academic progression based on publications to set a competitive space. Many universities and grant forums cross-check the quality and integrity of the research papers through the inclusion of a journal-title in databases such as PubMed and Scopus. This opens opportunities for legitimate journals to continue without any competition; however, in the process, early journals are mistakenly forfeited with a label of the predatory journal that damages their image.

A scoping review was performed to distinguish the publishers in terms of quality and motivation. Now organizations and governments have begun to respond to the rising need. Such an example is India's University Grants Commission who prepared a reference list of authentic journals and encouraged the revision of academic publications incentives along with proper training¹².

Considering the other side of the coin, only pointing out and enlisting predatory publishers either small or big, is not enough to preserve scholarly publishing and scientific integrity. We must think of educating these predatory journals to turn them into trustworthy journals for the betterment of societies. Awareness and proper training are needed for institutes, young researchers, and scholars to spot such journals. The pressure to publish for promotion must be reduced by the institutes, whereas the researchers must be assisted by supervisors to ensure the quality of research data submitted for publication, to avoid any misconduct. It is also suggested that such academic culture where quantitative publications outnumber the qualitative ones should be reviewed critically.

There is a need for international and national collaboration to fight this predatory pandemic, especially after 'Plan S' and 'COALition S' (that encourage Open Access publishing) by developing a consensus definition (in multiple languages), evolving strategies to

tackle predatory journals based on recent studies, educational campaign and policy mandates.¹². The major problem that Asian researchers face is the challenge of approaching the well-known commercial Journals/Publishers for the Asian authors that either fall prey to the predatory journals or mistakenly assume new legitimate journals as predatory and struggle to publish due to limited choice.

Concurring, that the recognized journals should be supported by the government or ethical committees to ensure quality control and proper standards/protocols followed. The predatory journal issue is multi-layered, which requires everyone to invest their time and effort to target the root cause rather than listing the names. Moreover, another way to control the publication in fake journals is through controlling rampant duplicitous exam performance at all education levels especially PhDs. Hence, designing better metrics by grants agencies is essential for assessing the paper quality.

For the long term, educational forums should engage the young researchers in professional training and aspire the publishers to adequately adhere to the proper publication process to avoid falling prey to the predatory journals. Thus, instilling ethics from the early stage prevents authors from being subject to the repercussions of predatory journals.

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