Trends in Scholarly Publishing

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How Reliable are Anonymous Lists in Identifying Predatory Journals and Publishers?

Maryam Sayab
Asian Council of Science Editors

Corresponding Author: Maryam Sayab (maryamsayab@hotmail.com)

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the issue of predatory publishers and journals, which exploit academia's "publish or perish" culture by offering quick publication without proper peer review, editorial oversight, or quality control in exchange for hefty publishing fees. To address the issue, many researchers and publishing professionals rely on anonymously managed lists of predatory journals and publishers to identify and avoid disreputable publishing outlets. However, the reliability of such lists is questionable and their criteria for determining what constitutes a predatory journal or publisher may not be transparent or objective. Anonymous list creators may have their own agendas or personal biases that influence their decisions, leading to the inclusion of legitimate publishers or the exclusion of predatory ones. Additionally, such lists may perpetuate systemic bias and include journals with limited resources that are legitimate. Therefore, it is important to use these lists in conjunction with other sources of information, such as official blacklists maintained by reputable organizations or publisher directories that provide transparent information about the publishing process and policies. Ultimately, researchers and scholars must exercise due diligence when selecting publishers and journals to safeguard the credibility of the scientific community.

KEYWORDS

Predatory publishers, scholarly publishing, peer review, quality control, plagiarism, research integrity, transparency

INTRODUCTION

Predatory publishers and journals are a growing concern in the scholarly publishing industry. They often exploit the "publish or perish" culture in academia by offering publications without proper peer review, editorial oversight, or quality control in exchange for hefty publishing fees. Such publishers often lure researchers and scholars with promises of rapid publication, high-impact factors and quick peer review. However, the resulting publications often lack credibility and scientific rigor, which can damage the reputations of authors, their institutions and the entire academic community. Such publications also compromise the integrity of scientific research by promoting and publishing pseudo-science, plagiarized content and fake research. These practices not only undermine the credibility of scientific research but can also lead to the spread of misinformation and the propagation of unproven claims[1].

In order to deal with predatory publishing issues, a number of anonymously managed lists of predatory journals and publishers have gained popularity among researchers and publishing professionals as a tool for identifying and avoiding disreputable publishing outlets. These lists are created by individuals or

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groups that are often anonymous and not affiliated with any official organizations or institutions. While these lists can be a useful resource for identifying potentially predatory publishers, they also have some limitations and concerns that researchers and publishing professionals should consider before relying on them. Also, after a comparative analysis of such anonymously managed lists, it was noticed that the majority of these lists are managed through free blogs or WordPress themes without any authorization or affiliation and have the same listing of predatory journals without proper reasoning.

How are these lists produced? Creating a list of predatory journals is a simple process that can be accomplished for less than $10 by following these steps:

- Register a domain name that includes the word "predatory"
- Choose a free WordPress theme
- Select a free hosting service
- Copy data from other independently managed lists
- Write the names of journals or publishers and link them to their respective domains

Now the list is available online and no one can stop them. And surprisingly, many scientists follow these individually managed lists without knowing their credibility.

Impact of anonymous predatory lists: One of the main concerns with anonymously managed lists is their reliability. Because the individuals or groups creating these lists are often anonymous and not affiliated with any official organization, their criteria for determining what constitutes a predatory journal or publisher may not be transparent or objective[2]. Several of the criteria underlying the Jeffrey blacklists (which are heavily relied upon for identifying predatory journals) were insufficiently specific, excessively broad, arbitrary with no scientific validation, or incorrect identifiers of predatory behavior[3].

The proliferation of predatory lists is becoming increasingly widespread, causing publishers to expend significant effort in attempting to remove their names from multiple lists. Furthermore, it has been observed that certain newly established journals, which have yet to publish their inaugural issue, are also being identified as predatory.

Additionally, the lists may not be regularly updated and the information provided may not be verified or corroborated by other sources. Another concern is the potential for bias or conflicts of interest. Anonymous list creators may have their own agendas or personal biases that influence their decisions regarding which journals or publishers to include on their list. This could lead to the inclusion of legitimate publishers that the list creator may not personally approve of or the exclusion of predatory publishers with whom the list creator may have a personal relationship.

Despite these concerns, many researchers and publishing professionals still find anonymously managed lists to be helpful resources. However, it is important to use them in conjunction with other sources of information, such as official blacklists maintained by reputable organizations or publisher directories that provide transparent information about the publishing process and policies.

In a recent statement from the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), it was highlighted that authors and institutions should treat lists of predatory (or fake) journals with the same degree of scrutiny as they do with the journals themselves. Lists that are not transparent about the criteria used should not be relied on. Moreover, such lists may perpetuate systemic bias and include journals with limited resources, but which are legitimate journals with the best intentions. In order to identify true predatory journals, COPE suggests using Think.Check.Submit (https://thinkchecksubmit.org/journals/) and the Principles of Transparency and the Best Practices in Scholarly Publishing (https://publicationethics.org/news/identifying-fake-journals).

A recent study describes an Academic Journal Predatory Checking (AJPC) system based on machine learning methods to identify predatory academic journals and publisher websites. Data is collected from blacklists and whitelists and feature extraction is used to identify predatory website indicators. The system performs well and is open to user feedback to optimize its performance[4].

As predatory publishers and journals pose a significant threat to academic publishing and research integrity, early career researchers and scholars must exercise due diligence when selecting publishers and journals to publish their work and only prefer reputable, peer-reviewed and well-established academic journals to ensure the integrity of their research and safeguard the credibility of the scientific community.

In conclusion, while anonymously managed lists of predatory journals and publishers can be a helpful tool for identifying disreputable publishers, researchers and publishing professionals should be aware of their limitations and consider using them in conjunction with other sources of information. Numerous organizations have observed that such predatory lists are not fulfilling their intended purpose, but rather raising doubts about their efficacy. In a recently published article, Emanuel Kulczycki stated, "We won't defeat predatory journals by making a list of them." Moreover, several journals identified as predatory by these anonymously managed lists are included in government-approved lists and are indexed in mainstream bibliographic databases. Consequently, these non-credible lists are attempting to exert influence over indexing databases and government-approved lists[5].

Also, It is important to verify the information provided on these lists and to be aware of potential biases or conflicts of interest that may influence the creator's decisions. Ultimately, researchers and publishing professionals should rely on a variety of resources and exercise due diligence when choosing a publisher or journal for their work as such anonymously managed lists contain misleading and unauthorized information that results in credibility issues and poses a great threat to society/legitimate journals.

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