

Handout on *Predatory Publishing*

[English version]

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1. Definition

Predatory Open Access Journals promise to publish scientific articles for a fee. Unlike serious Open Access publishers, such journals neglect to carry out a quality assurance process (incl. peer review). The long-term availability of these articles and their indexing in specialist databases is also questionable. Predatory journals thus meet neither qualitative scientific standards nor offer contributions they publish actual visibility.

2. Methods Used by Predatory Publishers

Predatory publishers invest much of their resources on marketing offensives and do not shy away from making false promises to unsuspecting researchers seeking to publish. The following is a lists of some of the methods they most commonly employ:

- **Send publication calls out via spam e-mail:** In many cases, a superficial personalization is carried out by referencing the researcher's current or previous research endeavors. Often this method is associated with excessive flattery.
- **Use misleading journal names** and designs similar to those of renowned publications.
- **Advertise the involvement of renowned researchers** in the journal as, for example, editors or reviewers, without the explicit knowledge and/or permission of the researchers themselves.

- **Advertise using fake journal impact factors** or dubious standards such as the “universal impact factor” (UIF) or the “global impact factor” (GIF).
- **Conceal publication fees:** The costs of publishing are first communicated after a contribution has been accepted for publication.
- **“High jack journals”:** The online platform of an established journal is hacked or high jacked by one without an internet presence, or a fake site will be set up.
- **Organize dubious conferences and symposia:** Some predatory publishers have extended their business models to include conferences. Characteristic of such events are high registration costs for little to no return in the form of benefits. Such conferences falsely claim to feature prominent researchers or, contrary to any announcement made, are only held virtually.
- **Employ “ghost writing” of popular scientific contributions:** Using personalized spam e-mails, these journals lure researchers with the promise to publish their work in renowned Open Access publications for a fee. Often an offer will be made to have the editorial team of the predatory journal write the scientific publication for the researcher, using information provided by the researcher. Such an offer can cost researchers into the four digit range, even for just a few pages of work.

3. Distribution

Only in recent times has this phenomena gained wider attention in the German-language area. In the last several years, many English-language journals have come under suspicion for questionable practices. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and life science journals are amongst the most affected by this issue, however social science and humanities journals are also experiencing an impact from predatory practices. It is difficult to gather reliable data on predatory Open Access journals. A 2015 study on the subject showed that the phenomena is expanding rapidly and measured revenues of approximately 74 million US-dollars in the year 2014.¹

The line between predatory or fraudulent business practices and journals with low standards is difficult to discern. “Low quality journals” refrain from making false promises, however they cannot guarantee researchers the same reputational gains that publishing in journals with quality assurance processes can.

Last but not least, predatory Open Access publishing can be placed in the context of other undesirable developments in the scientific publishing market. In the area of monography publishing, a recent trend, alongside traditional forms of predatory publishing such as “vanity publishing”, makes use of print-on-demand techniques, which lack quality controls and are available in countless online shops. The targets of such practices are researchers seeking to publish work which would otherwise not be considered for publication in renowned journals

¹ Shen/Björk, 'Predatory' open access: a longitudinal study of article volumes and market characteristics, BMC Medicine (2015) 13:230, S. 13, DOI: 10.1186/s12916-015-0469-2.

(for example, degree theses and term papers, but also pseudo-scientific texts or even Wikipedia contributions).

4. Risks

The publication of your work in such journals not only comes at a monetary cost to you, but also at the expense of the credibility of your work within the scientific community, which could damage your scientific reputation. Furthermore, this damage could carry over to the prestige of your university and research unit.

5. Characteristics of Predatory Journals

As new predatory journals are constantly popping up, no exhaustive list featuring all known predatory Open Access journals exists. The “Beall’s List of Predatory Journals and Publishers” (2016) is currently the most extensive list available.² Such blacklists, however, are not unproblematic, as the risk of prejudice due to abstract evaluation criteria exists.³

The criteria and questions listed in the checklist below may be helpful in ascertaining the seriousness of a journal:

Checklist: Recognizing Predatory Journals

- a) **Prominence of the journal:** Have you read contributions published in the journal? Do your colleagues know the journal?
- b) **Inclusion in DOAJ:** Is the journal listed in the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) (DOAJ)?
- c) **Inclusion in recognized databases:** Is for example a purported medical journal found on PubMed or in the [Web of Science Core Collection](#)?
- d) **Inconsistencies:** Does the contents of the journal reflect its title? Are previous issues of the journal of high quality? Does the potential for confusion (i.e. mix-up) with another journal exist? Predatory journals often copy the layout of and use names similar to those of well-known journals. Does the journal advertise unrealistic turnaround times between submission and publication?

² Internet Archive, Beall’s List of Predatory Publishers, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170112125427/https://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/> (last accessed: 14.11.2018); Internet Archive, Beall’s List of Predatory Standalone Journals, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170111172309/https://scholarlyoa.com/individual-journals/> (last accessed: 14.11.2018).

³ For a critique of the Beall’s evaluation approach see *Berger, Monica: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Predatory Publishing but Were Afraid to Ask*, ACRL 2017, S. 206 (209), <http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/conferences/confsandpreconfs/2017/EverythingYouEverWantedtoKnowAboutPredatoryPublishing.pdf> (last accessed: 14.11.2018).

- e) **Impact:** Does the journal have an impact factor? If so, is it plausible? Note: the impact Factor can be checked at Clarivate [Journal Citation Reports](#) (JCR). Similarly, some journals advertise with dubious standards, such as the "universal impact factor" (UIF) or the "global impact factor" (GIF). Are third party advertisements featured on the homepage of the magazine? Are there spelling and/or grammatical errors on the website? Does the magazine have an ISSN? Are persistent identifiers (DOI, URN) assigned to the journal?
- f) **Transparency:** Is information available on the website regarding the costs associated with publishing in the journal, the peer-review process in place, and on the long-term archiving practices?
- g) **Seriousness of the managing parties:** Is a serious publishing house or a renowned institution or professional society behind the magazine? For publishers, membership in the [Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association](#) (OASPA), the [Committee on Publication Ethics](#) (COPE) or the [International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers](#) (STM) is a positive indicator. Do recognized researchers serve as managing editors or peer-reviewers of the journal? Do they mention their involvement in the journal on their own website? Note: some journals use the names of recognized researchers without the researchers' explicit permission to do so. Do the e-mail addresses listed on the homepage of the journal stem from the domains of the institutions at which the researchers are employed? Of concern are e-mail addresses stemming from commercial domains (for example, gmail.com) and calls for publication sent out using spam e-mails.

6. How to Rate Newly Established Journals

Newly established journals present a particular challenge, as the above named criteria applies to them only to a certain extent. New journals, for example, are not immediately listed in databases and might not receive an impact factor for several years. Therefore, we do not explicitly dissuade you from publishing your research results in newer journals, but rather encourage you to evaluate inconsistencies (or discrepancies), the seriousness of those involved in, and the transparency of the journal's practices.

7. When in doubt...

If you are experiencing difficulty discerning the credibility of an open access journal, you may contact the Open Access Publishing team at JGU/UMC Mainz by writing to publikationsfonds@ub.uni-mainz.de.

8. Further Reading

Beall, Jeffrey: Criteria for Determining Predatory Open-Access Publishers, 3. Edition (2015), <https://beallslist.weebly.com/uploads/3/0/9/5/30958339/criteria-2015.pdf> (last accessed: 14.11.2018)

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