

Predatory Open Access Journals Publishing: What, Why and How?*

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[Abstract:

The Internet has transformed scholarly publishing and made the availability of online resources possible, both in subscription and open access models. Open access, has enabled wider access to the scholarly literature, thus reducing the digital divide among the haves and have-nots. In the case of journal articles, even though its ‘Gold’ (author pays model) and ‘Green’ access models have risen to the occasion, but some publishers of journals have turned its ‘Gold’ model to their advantage to earn a profit by charging fees for publication and adopting certain unethical practices of publishing. An effort has been made here to explore what is ‘Predatory’ open access journals publishing, why this kind of publishing is flourishing and how this model works.]

Introduction

The Internet has given new vistas to the scholarly world. It has transformed the scholarly publishing and made the availability of online journals, books, reports, data and many more sources easily available, both, in subscription and open access models. Open access, an angel gift to the scholars, has enabled wider access to the scholarly literature, especially for the researchers from the developing countries. It has been 15 years now, from the Budapest Open Access Initiative (<http://budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/boai15-1>), which revolutionized access to the scholarship; it was otherwise parked behind the pay walls. In a way, it has filled the gap in the digital divide among the researchers having wider access to the subscribed content with the ones, who do not get access to such content owing to the huge subscription cost.

Open access, propagates ‘Gold’ (author pays model) and ‘Green’ models to publish and provide free access to the scholarly literature. ‘Gold’ model applies to pre-publication, whereas ‘Green’ model is concerned with post-publication, *aka* self-archiving on a repository or website. Open access journals like their subscription based counterparts to a greater extent do not charge fees to publish articles; however, there are certain number of journals across disciplines which do charge Author Processing Charges (APCs) [Gold Model] to sustain the publishing costs. Some publishers of journals have turned the ‘Gold’ model to their advantage to earn a profit by charging fees for publication and adopting certain unethical practices of publishing, which is often referred as ‘Predatory’ open access publishing.

What is predatory open access journals publishing?

It is an exploitative open-access publishing business model that involves charging publication fees to authors without providing the editorial and publishing services associated with legitimate journals (open access or not) (Wikipedia, 2016). This kind of publishing merely exists to earn a profit through the collection of Author Processing Charges (APCs) and not for the actual dissemination and furtherance of knowledge (Berger and Cirasella, 2015). It ensures faster publication of articles without undertaking a rigorous peer review, thus adding a low-quality content often referred as ‘*Pseudoscience*’ to the gamut of scholarly literature. It is often being proved by certain authors, who experimented by submitting fake articles containing repetitive sentences and automated content generated from tools like SciGen to such journals and received acceptance of publication with a demand for publication fees (Martin and Martin, 2016; Bohannon, 2013; Segran, 2015).

Jeffrey Beall, a Librarian at the University of Colorado Denver, first time coined the term ‘Predatory’ to define this type of publication. He has also developed set criteria to judge a particular publisher or a journal as potential, possible or probable predatory publisher or journal (Beall, 2015). According to Beall, “Predatory open access publishers are those that unprofessionally exploit the gold open access model for their own profit. That is to say, they operate as scholarly vanity presses and publish articles in exchange for the author fee. They are characterized by various levels of deception and lack transparency in their operations. The open

access publishing model seems like a recipe for abuse: The more articles a publisher publishes, the more money it makes.” (Elliott, 2012). In order to keep the scholars, librarians and other stakeholders updated about such publishing, he maintained a blog (<https://scholarlyoa.com>), regularly posting information regarding predatory publishing. He also published, since 2010, a list of predatory publishers on his blog, which stood at 18 in 2011 has gone up to 1155 in January 2017. In addition to this list, he also maintained a list of independent standalone predatory journals, which increased from 126 in 2013 to 1294 now (Yould Publications, 2017). Since 2015 he also started maintaining two more lists, one listing the number of journals, which provide fake impact factor (IF) or similar kind of metrics and the other listing which is, hijacked journals (counterfeit titles). But, the lists are unavailable now, as he has withdrawn contents from blog around Jan 15, 2017, owing to certain unspecified reasons.

Why predatory open access journals publishing?

Research communication is an essential and integral part of any research endeavor. The dissemination of research findings through publication adds to the scientific productivity, growth of scholarly literature and the possible application for the public good. Also, it helps in the career advancement of researchers in the form of appointments and promotions. Publications in the peer-reviewed journals not only boosts individual researcher’s profile, but also educates the research community. However, if the research finds its way for publication without a proper peer-review, then it increases the risk of adding low-quality content through unethical research practices (Hansoti and others, 2016). Predatory open access publishing, is giving rise to such content, cashing primarily on the researchers and institutions in developing countries.

The rise of predatory publishing is greatly triggered by certain factors such as, firstly, a researcher’s desperation to publish, owing to the increasing demand for publications, often referred as ‘*publish or perish*’ syndrome. Secondly, lack of suitable guidance in choosing the right kind of peer-reviewed or reputed journals in the chosen field. Thirdly, long time taken or high rate of rejection by the reputed or peer-reviewed journals. Fourthly, Internet is acting as a low cost and easy medium to host online only journals. Fifth, proliferation in open access publishing is resulting in keeping track of new titles is extremely difficult, and finally, the profit

maximization from the end of certain open access publishers. Among all the factors, I think, it is the ‘publish or perish’ syndrome, which exerts pressure on researchers is causing a great damage to the scholarly literature.

Researchers, specifically, who work from the developing countries, where publications guidelines are very hazy, are more likely to fall prey to the predatory publishing. Academic culture to a certain extent is also responsible for this type of publications, where in quantity upholds the quality. Lack of scrutiny of research publications by authorities and funding agencies is another aspect, which is encouraging mediocre research across the disciplines. Chase for metrics, is yet one more issue adding fuel to this syndrome. Some or all of these forcing authors to practice unethical practices such as plagiarism, data falsification and fabrication in their publications creating ramblings in the scholarly landscape. The sudden spurt in number of conferences organized and the quantum of papers published in India is an example of such a scenario, after the announcement of UGC’s 2010 guidelines (UGC, 2010) of Academic Performance Indicators (API) for promotions and appointments. Predatory publishers or journals acting as ‘*messiah*’ to this type of researchers, who wish to have their publications within no time, even at a cost to increase their academic credentials.

How? – The modus operandi

Predatory publishers or publications, usually pray for the naive young researchers, who are less aware and explored to novel publishing procedures. This naivety is widely seen among researchers working from developing countries or graduate students outside of research-oriented programmes (Rich, 2016). The foremost method applied by these publishers to woo the researchers is through email spamming, parallels of the same may be made with the Nigerian scam of money laundering in the form of safekeeping of millions of dollars, the sender owned or chanced or sending distress mails to all the contacts by hacking email accounts of individuals (Prasad, 2012).

The email invitation for authors requesting them for publishing their papers in their journals, usually sent in the name of editor *sans* name using popular email services such as Gmail, Yahoo

or domain names of their websites. Sometimes, such communications are intriguing, indicating familiarity with the researchers work and stating interest in engaging with them to publish on the topic (Craft, 2016). Emails do not out rightly mention the publication charges or it is given on the publishers or journals website, most of the publishers let authors know, only when their paper is submitted or accepted for publication. The publication fees charged by them usually varies somewhere between US \$ 100 and US \$ 1800 (Prasad, 2012).

The second, most attractive feature offered by these journals, is quick publication turnaround time with or without a peer-review. This entices researchers, who are at the edge to get their works published quickly for obtaining a degree or promotion or appointment. Thirdly, in their editorial board, they add eminent person's names in the field, with or without their consent, which attracts budding researchers to publish papers without anticipating the possible catch. Fourthly, they get certain good papers of some well known researchers in the field published in their journals, who unknowingly sent their papers without realizing the nature of the publication. Finally, some hijack the name or web style of more established journals by creating a fake title. These again attract the naive researchers to submit their papers.

Conclusion:

The Internet has brought in new publishing opportunities and open access publishing is one such new opportunity which added more vigour to the scholarly world. However, some open access publishers or journals are misusing this opportunity by adopting fraudulent means of publishing practices to gain a profit. This is causing a greater danger to the scholarly literature. In order to ensure better future for scholarly publishing and sustain the value of open access, it is essential to educate researchers and librarians alike about good vs. bad. To facilitate the identification, there are certain sources, which can be consulted by librarians and researchers, to try and find out the genuineness of a publication. The sources include, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA) and Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). Also, they may refer to the material given on 'Think, Check and Submit' campaign website (<http://thinkchecksubmit.org>), which to a greater extent alleviates the fears of publishing

in a wrong journal. The checks and means may cause temporary inconvenience but bring in golden tomorrow for scholarly publishing.

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