

OPEN ACCESS, RESEARCH COMMUNITIES, AND A DEFENSE AGAINST PREDATORY JOURNALS

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Abstract

In this opinion article, the author describes his experiences of naming, listing, and analyzing predatory journals. The gold open-access model has led to the creation of many predatory journals that exist only to exploit researchers. Medical research is the most valuable research for humans, so we must guard against the publishing of medical research in predatory journals. Community-based journals that combine a geographical and a disciplinary focus may be seen as a defense against the pathological nature of predatory publishers.

Keywords: Open access publishing, Periodicals as topic, Medicine, Predatory publishers, Research, Community networks

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INTRODUCTION

For five years — from 2012 to 2017 — I published a blog that listed predatory journals and publishers and critically analyzed them and scholarly publishing in general. The blog was called Scholarly Open Access, and its objective was to alert researchers to predatory journals, a term I first coined and defined in 2010.

I thought that by listing the predatory publishers and journals I could help researchers avoid becoming victimized by them, for most predatory journals are counterfeit journals, pretending to carry out an honest peer review process but instead only seeking to earn income quickly and easily from researchers by providing fast and easy publishing without a *bona fide* peer review [1].

I also gave presentations at conferences and meetings around the world — including one in Central Asia (see

Figure 1) — and published about 40 articles on the topic of predatory publishing [2]. Now I am retired and have had some time to consider what I gathered from my experiences with predatory journals, and in this opinion article, I would like to share some of what I learned. In addition, I would like to share why I think journals such as the *Cent Asian J Med Hypotheses Ethics* (CAJMHE) have a strong potential to rescue scholarly communication from the pathology of predatory journals.

MEDICAL JOURNALS

I believe that no research is more important than biomedical research, for it has universal benefit and seeks to improve human life, the most precious thing on Earth. The findings and results of medical research are translated into clinical practice and shared via scholarly articles, and this clinical work and scholarly communication directly benefit those who are ill. More specifically, medical research is chiefly shared among

researchers and clinicians through peer-reviewed, scholarly medical journals. Charities, foundations, and other benevolent organizations fund medical research, as do governments. The funding is in the form of research grants awarded to the researchers. The advent of gold (author pays) open access means that scholarly authors now often have to pay to publish their research, and increasingly, grant monies are used to pay the open-access publishing fees.

This change has resulted in two negative outcomes. First, less money is being spent on research, with some of the grant funds instead going to cover author fees. Second, it has led to the creation of thousands of predatory medical journals, journals that exist only to harvest as much of the grant monies as they can by pretending to be authentic medical journals [3].

THE BEGINNING OF OPEN-ACCESS PUBLISHING

Backed by a strong social movement, open access to scholarly literature has the obvious advantage of being freely accessible to anyone with internet access. However, lower-income countries for many years have had access to subscription journals through programs such as research4life (<https://www.research4life.org/>).

The Open Access movement began in the early 2000s with proclamations from several self-appointed groups with titles such as the Budapest Open Access Initiative, the Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing, and the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Scientific Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities [4]. Out of these proclamations emerged gold open access, with its built-in conflict of interest: the more articles a gold open-access journal accepts and publishes, the more money it makes [5]. Unscrupulous publishers soon emerged by the hundreds to take advantage of the easy money they could make by preying on unsuspecting researchers, publishers I listed and analyzed on my blog.

Unfortunately, the three small groups who created the three proclamations have done nothing to stop the damage to scientific integrity and publishing ethics caused by predatory journals. I believe that the Open Access movement was both about trying to eliminate subscription-based journals and promoting scholarly open-access journals. The transition to open-access has hit researchers in many countries hard, as they lack the funds to pay the author fees.

Increasingly, as legacy publishers purchase fleets of open-access journals that were first started up by

predatory and marginal publishers, and as they start their own open-access journals, the fees charged to authors have increased regularly. Moreover, publishing in highly respected journals is more expensive, effectively prohibiting scientists and other researchers from publishing in them.

RESEARCH INTEGRITY

The biggest defenders of predatory journals are the predatory publishers themselves and, increasingly, people who use the journals to take advantage of the easy publishing they offer [6]. People use predatory journals and their easy and fast acceptance of submissions to publish marginal science that would not be accepted in journals with a strong peer review process. Also they use predatory journals to quickly publish articles to increase the number of publications on their CVs to get tenure, promotions, or good evaluations at their institutions.

Often, after they discover an “easy” journal, these authors will publish multiple articles in the same journal. When I published my lists, I was regularly attacked by researchers who had such symbiotic relationships with predatory publishers, in addition to the attacks I received from the publishers themselves.

PLATINUM OPEN-ACCESS JOURNALS

Platinum open-access journals are those that are free to both readers and authors. They have the advantages of universal open access and no financial conflict of interest on the part of the journal, for there are no monetary transactions between the authors whose papers are accepted and the journal. Of course, the disadvantages include limited funding and a reliance on voluntarism. This is why the subscription model still retains certain strengths. Successful subscription journals can earn significant income through their subscriptions, and a portion of this money can be re-invested into producing a top-quality journal.

Still, I believe that journals such as CAJMHE may be seen as a defense against predatory publishers and corporate open-access journals. The journal comprises a small but growing community of researchers yet accepts no money from its authors, freeing itself from the practices, temptations, and stigma of predatory journals.

Moreover, the journal’s dual focus on one academic discipline (medicine) and geography (Central Asia) may serve as a model for other open-access journals, a model that serves as a defense against the abuses of

predatory open access journals. The journal will unite readers and authors with these shared interests and perspectives, functioning as a centralized community where new ideas and practices are shared, discussed, and evaluated.

I know that researchers in the West are eager to read research from their counterpart researchers in Central Asia, especially those with new ideas and new research results. If you have a significant new idea, a new discovery, or an original perspective that fits within the scope of this journal, I encourage you to share your

findings with CAJMHE's readers. While the journal focuses on Central Asia, the potential audience — thanks to open-access and the Internet — is worldwide.

FUNDING

None

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None declared



Figure 1. The author at the World War II Monument in the Park of 28 Panfilov Guardsmen in Almaty, Kazakhstan in June 2015. During his visit to Almaty, the author gave talks at Almaty Management University.

Photo: Jeffrey Beall.

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АШЫҚ КІРІС, ҚАУЫМДАСТЫҚТАРДЫ ЗЕРТТЕУ ЖӘНЕ АЛДЫН АЛА ЖУРНАЛДАРДАН ҚОРҒАУ

Түйіндеме

Бұл мақалада автор жыртқыш журналдарды анықтау, бағалау және талдау тәжірибесін сипаттайды. Зерттеушілерді пайдалану үшін ғана әрекет ететін көптеген жыртқыш журналдардың пайда болуына ашық қолжетімді алтын модель ықпал етті. Медициналық зерттеулер адамдар үшін ең құнды зерттеулер болып саналады, сондықтан біз медициналық зерттеулерді жыртқыш журналдарда жариялаудан сақ болуымыз керек. Әр түрлі географиялық және тәртіптік бағыттағы қоғамдастық мойындаған журналдарды жыртқыш баспагерлерден қорғану ретінде пайдалануға болады.

Түйінді сөздер: ашық басылымдар, тақырыптық мерзімді басылымдар, медицина, жыртқыш баспагерлер, зерттеулер, қауымдастық желілері

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ОТКРЫТЫЙ ДОСТУП, ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКИЕ СООБЩЕСТВА И ЗАЩИТА ОТ ХИЩНИЧЕСКИХ ЖУРНАЛОВ

Резюме

В этой статье автор описывает свой опыт определения, составления рейтингов и анализа хищнических журналов. Золотая модель открытого доступа привела к появлению множества хищнических журналов, которые существуют только для того, чтобы использовать исследователей. Медицинские исследования являются наиболее ценными исследованиями для людей, поэтому мы должны остерегаться публикации медицинских исследований в хищнических журналах. Журналы, признанные сообществом, с различной географической и дисциплинарной направленностью могут использоваться как механизм защиты от хищнических издателей.

Ключевые слова: публикации в открытом доступе, периодические издания как тема, медицина, хищнические издатели, исследования, сети сообществ

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