



BEWARE THE "PANDEMIC" BURST OF CYBER-CROOKS, PREDATORY AND / OR HIJACKED JOURNALS - CASE SERIES (PERSONAL EXPERIENCE)

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Abstract

Background. The subject of predatory scholarly open-access journals is familiar to health librarians since 2012 and has become a global scale fraudulent type of “business”. The phenomenon of cyber-thieves compromises the reputation of legitimate, prestigious journals, by illegally using their "brands" (ISSN, fake websites, fake email address) and engenders damage for the scholars' academic prestige and budget (of time, work, and money). This case series shares personal experience, related to ethical and legal issues and recurrent fraud, linked to cyber crooks' maneuvers to lure young/ novice scientists.

Case 1. The first case is focussed on recurrent cyber-attacks and electronic scams (occurred in august 2020 and March 2021), fraudulently using fake email requests for papers, claiming to be from a prestigious ISI Thompson journal, INTERCIENCIA (ISSN 0378-1844). In-depth investigations detected a previous fraudulent attack in 2014. Directly contacted, the legitimate journal has confirmed the author's suspicions, and the afore-mentioned publication promptly and fairly denounced the fraud internationally.

Case 2. refers to a “classical” fraudulent recurrent maneuver from unscrupulous people pre-tending to represent WULFENIA (ISSN: 1561-882X), a prestigious biological Austrian publication. Unsolicited emails were received in March and May 2021, to publish in the aforementioned journal (one of the first hijacked journals in history). A rapid internet search revealed some profound issues: Wulfenia journal has not a website, does not publish online, publishes only biology science articles, not all science and/or engineering, and it is published only as hard copy (indexed and validated by Thomson Reuters). Case closed!

Case 3. Is the simplest one. The paradigm was identical: an unsolicited mail inviting for submissions of original research papers from the prestigious journal STUDIES IN SYMBOLIC INTERACTION (ISSN 0163-2396). The counterfeit website was less elaborated, unsecured, and easily differentiated from the original website of the Emerald Publishing Group.

Case 4. This case is more difficult and has deeper implications. In 2016 the main author was less experienced and he was invited to publish a paper (DOI: 10.21767/2171-6625.1000102) in the JOURNAL OF NEUROLOGY AND NEUROSCIENCE (ISSN: 2171-6625), “an international circulating peer-reviewed Open Access journal presenting original research contributions and scientific advances in the field of Neurology and Neuroscience (Journal Impact Factor: 1.45*, 1.21 (5 Years Impact Factor))”. The journal was not included in Beall's list, and at that time Clarivate Master Journal List was not available. The main issue about this paper (cited in 2017) is that predatory journals are infiltrating leading scholarly citation databases, including Scopus, inflating academic scholar metrics.

Discussion. Scammers' manipulation algorithm aimed to lure less experienced scientists is unmasked. Electronic scammers create fake websites that mimic a genuine, real journal (usually indexed ISI Thompson, so compulsory for academic promotion). Unsolicited emails request “exceptional manuscripts” from “eminent authors” offering the opportunity of a rapid publication, for quite moderate publication fees (usually under 500 UDS).

Conclusions. The academic community must be aware of the cyber-jacking fraudulent tentative, and the predatory entities (predatory publishers and hijacked journals, or predatory “conferences”). Scholars should recognize and avoid them, to limit academic detriment, wasted money, and effort invested in research. Educating and mentoring junior researchers to recognize and avoid pseudo-journals/ deceptive publishers, by including this topic in the study curricula, represent the main prophylactic measures.

Keywords: *ethical issues, predatory journals, hijacked journals, cyber-crooks, electronic scam*