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Criteria for Determining Predatory Open-Access Publishers

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Criteria for Determining Predatory Open-Access Publishers

For more information on predatory publishers, including lists of publishers and standalone journals that meet these criteria, please visit http://scholarlyoa.com

By Jeffrey Beall
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The criteria below are intended to provide a framework for analyzing scholarly open-access publishers and journals. The criteria recognize two documents published by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE):

Code of Conduct for Journal Publishers
Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing

Evaluating scholarly open-access publishers is a process that includes closely, cautiously, thoroughly, and at times skeptically examining the publisher's content, practices, and websites: contacting the publisher if necessary, reading statements from the publisher's authors about their experiences with the publisher, and determining whether the publisher commits any of the following practices (below) that are known to be committed by predatory publishers, examining any additional credible evidence about the publisher, compiling very important "back-channel" feedback from scholarly authors, and taking into account counter-feedback from the publishers themselves.

Some journals of course are "single titles." They publish independently of any multi-title publisher. In most cases, however, we evaluate journals that are part of a publisher's multi-title platform. This is very often described as a "fleet," a term meant to clarify that even a new publisher suddenly launches a large number of new journals, ranging from several dozen to hundreds of titles all at once.

The practices described below are meant to apply both to single-title independent journals and to publishers with or multiple or "fleet" journals in their portfolios.

Editor and Staff

- The publisher's owner is identified as the editor of each and every journal published by the organization.
- No single individual is identified as any specific journal's editor.
- The journal does not identify a formal editorial / review board.
- No academic information is provided regarding the editor, editorial staff, and/or review board members (e.g., institutional affiliation).
- Evidence exists showing that the editor and/or review board members do not possess academic expertise to reasonably qualify them to be publication gatekeepers in the journal's field.
- Two or more journals have duplicate editorial boards (i.e., same editorial board for more than one journal).
- The journals have an insufficient number of board members , (e.g., 2 or 3 members), have concocted editorial boards (made up names), name scholars on their editorial board without their knowledge or permission or have board members who are prominent researchers but exempt them from any contributions to the journal except the use of their names and/or photographs.
- There is little or no geographical diversity among the editorial board members, especially for journals that claim to be international in scope or coverage.
- The editorial board engages in gender bias (i.e., exclusion of any female members).

Business management

The publisher...

- Demonstrates a lack of transparency in publishing operations.
- Has no policies or practices for digital preservation, meaning that if the journal ceases operations, all of the content disappears from the internet.
- Begins operations with a large fleet of journals, often using a common template to quickly create each journal's home page.

- Provides insufficient information or hides information about author fees, offering to publish an author's paper and later sending an unanticipated "surprise" invoice.
- Does not allow search engines to crawl the published content, preventing the content from being indexed in academic indexes.
- Copy-proofs (locks) their PDFs, thus making it harder to check for plagiarism.

Integrity

- The name of a journal is incongruent with the journal's mission.
- The name of a journal does not adequately reflect its origin (e.g., a journal with the word "Canadian" or "Swiss" in its name when neither the publisher, editor, nor any purported institutional affiliate relates whatsoever to Canada or Switzerland).
- In its spam email or on its website, the publisher falsely claims one or more of its journals have actual (Thomson-Reuters) impact factors, or advertises impact factors assigned by fake "impact factor" services, or it uses some made up measure (e.g. view factor), feigning/claiming an exaggerated international standing.
- The publisher sends spam requests for peer reviews to scholars unqualified to review submitted manuscripts, in the sense that the specialties of the invited reviewers do not match the papers sent to them.
- The publisher falsely claims to have its content indexed in legitimate abstracting and indexing services or claims that its content is indexed in resources that are not abstracting and indexing services.
- The publisher dedicates insufficient resources to preventing and eliminating author misconduct, to the extent that the journal or journals suffer from repeated cases of plagiarism, self-plagiarism, image manipulation, and the like.
- The publisher asks the corresponding author for suggested reviewers and the publisher subsequently uses the suggested reviewers without sufficiently vetting their qualifications or authenticity. (This protocol also may allow authors to create faux online identities in order to review their own papers).

Other

A predatory publisher may...

- Re-publish papers already published in other venues/outlets without providing appropriate credits.
- Use boastful language claiming to be a "leading publisher" even though the publisher may only be a startup or a novice organization.
- Operate in a Western country chiefly for the purpose of functioning as a vanity press for scholars in a developing country (e.g., utilizing a mail-drop address or PO box address in the United States, while actually operating from a developing country).
- Provide minimal or no copyediting or proofreading of submissions.
- Publish papers that are not academic at all, e.g. essays by laypeople, polemical editorials, or obvious pseudo-science.
- Have a "contact us" page that only includes a web form or an email address, and the publisher hides or does not reveal its location.

Poor journal standards / practice

The following practices are considered to be reflective of poor journal standards and, while they do not equal predatory criteria, potential authors should give due consideration to these items prior to manuscript submissions:

- The publisher copies "authors guidelines" verbatim (or with minor editing) from other publishers.
- The publisher lists insufficient contact information, including contact information that does not clearly state the headquarters location or misrepresents the headquarters location (e.g., through the use of addresses that are actually mail drops).
- The publisher publishes journals that are excessively broad (e.g., *Journal of Education*) in order to attract more articles and gain more revenue from author fees.

- The publisher publishes journals that combine two or more fields not normally treated together (e.g., *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology*).
- The publisher charges authors for publishing but requires transfer of copyright and retains copyright on journal content. Or the publisher requires the copyright transfer upon submission of manuscript.
- The publisher has poorly maintained websites, including dead links, prominent misspellings and grammatical errors on the website.
- The publisher makes unauthorized use of licensed images on their website, taken from the open web, without permission or licensing from the copyright owners.
- The publisher engages in excessive use of spam email to solicit manuscripts or editorial board memberships.
- The publishers' officers use email addresses that end in .gmail.com, yahoo.com, or some other free email supplier.
- The publisher fails to state licensing policy information on articles or shows lack of understanding of well-known OA journal article licensing standards, or provides contradictory licensing information.
- The publisher lacks a published article retraction policy or retracts articles without a formal statement (stealth retractions); also the publisher does not publish corrections or clarifications and does not have a policy for these issues.
- The publisher does not use standard identifiers such as ISSNs or DOIs or uses them improperly.
- For the name of the publisher, the publisher uses names such as "Network," "Center," "Association," "Institute," and the like when it is only a solitary, proprietary operation and does not meet the definition of the term used or implied non-profit mission.
- The publisher has excessive, cluttered advertising on its site to the extent that it interferes with site navigation and content access.
- The publisher has no membership in industry associations and/or intentionally fails to follow industry standards.
- The publisher includes links to legitimate conferences and associations on its main website, as if to borrow from other organizations' legitimacy, and emblazon the new publisher with the others' legacy value.

- The publisher displays prominent statements that promise rapid publication and/or unusually quick peer review.
- Evidence exists showing that the publisher does not really conduct a bona fide peer review.
- The publisher appears to focus exclusively on article processing fee procurement, while not providing services for readers, or on billing for fees, while abdicating any effort at vetting submissions.
- The publisher creates a publishing operation that demonstrates rapacious entrepreneurial behavior that rises to level of sheer greed. The individual might have business administration experience, and the site may even have business journals, but the owner seems oblivious to business ethics.
- The publisher or its journals are not listed in standard periodical directories or are not widely cataloged in library databases.
- The publisher copies or egregiously mimics journal titles from other publishers.
- The publisher includes text on its website that describes the open access movement and then foists the publisher as if the publisher is active in fulfilling the movement's values and goals.
- None of the members of a particular journal's editorial board have ever published an article in the journal.
- There is little or no geographic diversity among the authors of articles in one or more of the publisher's journals, an indication the journal has become an easy outlet for authors from one country or region to get scholarly publications.
- The publisher has an optional "fast-track" fee-based service for expedited peer review which appears to provide assured publication with little or no vetting.

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