



Indian Journal of Ophthalmology

HIGHLIGHTS

"FakeBooks" - predatory journals:
The dark side of publishing

Detection of the early keratoconus
based on corneal biomechanical
properties in the refractive
surgery candidates

Spectral analysis of intraocular
pressure pulse wave in ocular
hypertensive and primary
open angle glaucoma patients

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“FakeBooks” - predatory journals: The dark side of publishing

Picture this: You receive an E-mail from a seemingly familiar journal soliciting a manuscript for an upcoming special issue. On closer inspection, you notice there is a small “author processing fee” of about 100\$ that submitting authors must pay at the time of submission – in return you get a guaranteed decision after peer-review within 7 days of submitting the manuscript. Too good to be true? Welcome to the world of predatory journals!

To understand the phenomenon of predatory open access publishing, it is important to know what open access is. “Open access” is the concept that essentially brings to the reader, published research at no costs – they are free to view, read, download, copy, and distribute. By making their research open access, researchers can maximize the impact of their work since it is freely available to other researchers. For the publishing house that prints the journal, revenue comes in when they charge the authors/institutes; an “article processing charge” (APC) to cover their expenses incurred in order to make their article open access. This charge, in most cases, is to be paid only after a thorough and genuine peer-review has been performed and the article has reached the acceptance stage. The reported earnings otherwise for publishers per article can be as high as 3000 USD per article-primarily through subscription and access fees. APC pays for the article to be freely accessible and for the processes required before inclusion in PubMed and archiving in repositories such as PubMed Central, e-Depot, Potsdam, and INIST.^[1] This is called “gold open access” as opposed to “green open access” where authors themselves upload their published papers on an online repository that allows others access without a fee.

Many authors find APC to be legitimate and acceptable given the immediate availability, wider dissemination, and deeper percolation of knowledge that open access brings with it. Perbal gives a logical analogy: Contributing to the cost of publishing by paying APCs is comparable to pay a toll for driving safely and more rapidly on good quality highways. Multiple clean, fast, and safe lanes kept in good condition, with same services provided to everyone.^[1]

This brings us to “predatory open access,” a term coined by Beall.^[2] Riding on the popularity of the concept of open access, recently many publishing houses have mushroomed by the dozens and have begun spamming most academicians’ mailboxes with invitations and solicitations. These publishers are “predatory” because it is not their aim to provide a platform for science or to promote, preserve, and make available scholarship. On the contrary, their sole mission is to exploit the open-access model for their own profit. Their modus operandi typically involves rampant spamming academic E-mail lists, with journal announcements, calls for papers, review invitations, and invitations to serve on editorial boards. Furthermore, these publishers typically provide little or no peer-review to the submitted articles. In fact, in most cases, their peer review process is a sham. Some even promise a “super-fast review” for a higher fee. What is worrying is that any of these publishers could disappear overnight and with it would go all the previously published research which could have been genuine!^[2] India, unfortunately, has become a hub of sorts of many such unscrupulous journals.

Beall succinctly describes the ill effects of such journals. First, science is cumulative – since research builds on previously published data. Since most predatory publishers do a sham or no peer review, it is quite probable that fake research gets published in these journals, under the guise of real science.^[3] Obviously, this can be easily cited subsequently in legitimate journals – not only dirtying science, but also in a way legitimizing these “FakeBooks” masquerading as journals.

Sadly, ophthalmology is not immune to predatory publishing – as many as six ophthalmology journals find mention in the list of dubious journals that is available online.^[4] Authors must be careful while submitting their research to journals whose credentials are dodgy. There are many things that should raise a red flag: Previously unheard of journal names, journal names being extremely similar to other well-established journals; amateurish websites; insistence on payment of APC at the time of submission, impossible promises of peer-review and decisions within 1–2 weeks; fake nonexistent editorial boards and repeated unsolicited E-mails seeking manuscripts. An initiative called “Think. Check. Submit.” (<http://thinkchecksubmit.org/>), was launched in 2015 with the sole aim of raising awareness of disreputable journals while clearly separating them from valid, high quality, open access journals.^[5] Yucha has very methodically created a virtual checklist on how to check a journal’s credentials and how to assess a journal’s true nature in a thought-provoking editorial.^[6]

Every honest product of research deserves complete justice by means of a thorough, unbiased peer review, the opportunity to revise manuscripts based on the constructive inputs of reviewers and editors and ultimately the ideal platform to present it – in an indexed, peer-reviewed journal with impeccable credentials. Anything less is a compromise. At the Indian Journal of Ophthalmology, we ensure that nothing – nothing at all; can compromise our editorial integrity and standards. Prospective authors, especially beginners, may not necessarily aware of “predatory” online journals lurking on the fringes enticing novices. They perhaps may not be able to differentiate them from legitimate journals. Senior faculty and mentors should step in and help novice authors in selecting the best journal for their work.^[7]

Whenever commercial interests take precedence over merit and quality, science suffers. We already are battling the menace of plagiarism.^[8] We cannot let our guard down, and we hope researchers and readers take cognizance of this – the dark side of publishing and ensure that they do not fall prey to the scourge of predatory journals.

Sundaram Natarajan, Akshay Gopinathan Nair¹

Editor, Indian Journal of Ophthalmology, Chairman, Managing Director, Aditya Jyot Eye Hospital Pvt. Ltd., Wadala (W), Mumbai, ¹Ophthalmic Plastic Surgery and Ocular Oncology Services, Advanced Eye Hospital and Institute, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.
E-mail: editorjournal@aios.org, akshaygn@gmail.com

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