

The Dark Side of Dissemination: Traditional and Open Access Versus Predatory Journals

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Abstract

AIM The purpose of the article is to alert faculty about predatory online journals, review characteristics of three broad categories of journals, and provide suggestions for faculty evaluation of journals before submission of scholarship for publication.

BACKGROUND The availability of online journals in recent years has rapidly increased the number of journals available for publication of faculty scholarship. However, not all online journals meet the same standards as traditional journals.

METHOD The article is not a report for a research study.

RESULTS Currently, there are three broad categories of journals for faculty scholarship publication: traditional, open access scholarly, and predatory open access journals.

CONCLUSION Faculty authors need to carefully evaluate the journal characteristics and publisher business practices before submitting a manuscript for publication to prevent inadvertent submission to a predatory open access journal.

KEY WORDS Academic Publishing – Online Journals – Open Access – Predatory Journals – Scholarly Publication

Faculty promotion and tenure criteria across all professions typically require scholarly publications. Consequently, an increasing number of traditional and open access (OA) journals for faculty manuscript publication are being developed daily to meet the demand for timely publication of authors' work. The purpose of this article is to alert nurse faculty about predatory journals, identify types of journals to meet promotion and tenure publication requirements considered acceptable by the respective academic tenure and promotion committees, and provide suggestions for selecting a journal. Unfortunately, solicitation of faculty manuscripts for publication in predatory journals has become an increasing problem (Nicoll, 2014).

The article describes the types of journals for scholarly dissemination, discusses the characteristics of three categories of journals, and identifies examples of each category. Furthermore, suggestions for selecting the type of journal for faculty manuscript publication designed to meet promotion and tenure requirements, especially committee ranking for OA publications, are provided.

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JOURNAL CATEGORIES

Three broad categories of journals are available for faculty scholarly publications, excluding individual or standalone publications not connected to a publisher platform. The categories are traditional, scholarly OA, and predatory OA journals. Each category is described below.

Traditional Journals

Traditional journals are available through hardcopy and/or electronic journal subscription. As a gold standard, such journals are affiliated with reputable publishers with archiving and indexing capabilities. Peer review is mandatory and sufficiently blinded to prevent a conflict of interest. Copyright is typically assigned to the publisher.

Scholarly OA Journals

Scholarly OA journals are a valuable option for faculty manuscript publication. The journals are: a) free of charge to readers, b) free of permission barriers (copyright law, licenses, hardware/software digital rights management), c) indexed for easy location, d) deposited in supported OA archives or repositories, and e) contained in a readily identifiable OA label (Suber, 2003). Such journals may be labeled "author-pays" journals because the author pays for manuscript publication. A number of definitions of scholarly OA exist and are available at the www.mlanet.org/resources/publish_sc_open-access.html website.

To maintain the more traditional, scholarly standards for manuscript publication, three declarations, known as the "BBB Declarations," were among the first established as the basis for designating OA journal credibility:

- Budapest Open Access Initiative defined the term *open access* in 2002 and recommended institutions of higher education develop a policy for institutional repositories in 2012 (www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read).

- Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing drafted statements of principle for OA publishing (2003) (<http://legacy.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/bethesda.htm>).
- Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities specified the measures for consideration of OA dissemination (2003) (<http://openaccess.mpg.de/Berlin-Declaration>).

Predatory OA Journals

Predatory publishing is a term conceived by University of Colorado Denver librarian and researcher Jeffrey Beall. Defining a predatory journal is complex and requires examination of the publisher’s content, practices, and websites. Predatory OA publishers do not follow established academic practices for publication and primarily exist as fee-collecting operations (Berger & Cirasella, 2015).

CHARACTERISTICS OF MAJOR JOURNAL TYPES

The explosion of OA journals began in the early 2000s. There has been ongoing popularity growth due to the timely publication for scholarly work (Suber, 2013). Key, identifiable characteristics of each major category of journals discussed are presented in Table 1, which

is synthesized from Beall’s (2012, 2015) work and supported by others (Nicoll, 2014).

Ethical Considerations for Professional, Academic Publications

The Medical Library Association supports the BBB Declarations, and strong support exists for timely access to useful content via faster publication in OA journals. However, some authors/readers raise serious concerns about conflict of interest.

Ethics concerns tend to focus on whether charging authors to publish in an OA journal represents a conflict of interest. Alternatively, charging both readers and authors to subscribe to or purchase traditional hardcopy and/or electronic journal access has been accepted as the “way publications can occur” and could also be considered a conflict of interest. The primary ethical issue surrounding publication in predatory OA journals is based on the purpose for establishing the journal, specifically, the “for profit” focus of the fraudulent journal owner(s) (Coyle, 2013).

Dos and Don’ts of Academic Publishing

The alert author is aware (or needs to be aware) of warning signs to distinguish predatory OA publication opportunities from scholarly

Table 1: Traditional, Scholarly Open Access, and Predatory Open Access Journal Credibility Characteristics

Journal Characteristic	Traditional Journal	Scholarly Open Access	Predatory Open Access
Acceptance to publication time	Peer review time is from weeks to months; once accepted, publication time is from months to years	Peer review time is weeks; once accepted, few weeks for publication	Once accepted, immediate publication; high acceptance rate
Archiving	Publisher repository accessed by subscription or purchase	Archiving by the journal in an open access repository, educational departments, or personal preservation	Absent or limited at best
Author cost for publication	No author cost; reader cost for subscription or purchase	Average article processing charge in Directory of Open Access Journals is \$906 calculated over journals and \$904 calculated over articles; price range is from \$8 to \$3,900 (Solomon & Bjork, 2012)	Exploitation of author-pays model; fees may be higher or similar to scholarly open access journals
Board member quality	Reputable scientists with numerous publications	Reputable scientists with numerous publications	Often fictitious names or names used without permission
Copyright ownership	Assigned to publisher	Author may retain or assign to publisher	Publisher bypasses process (ownership may not be assigned)
Indexing	Major indexing service supported	Major indexing service supported	None
Impact factor	Yes	Some publishers use impact factor and some do not	If used, usually fabricated
Peer review	Mandatory blinded peer review	Quality is a function of the editor, editorial board, and reviewers	No meaningful peer review
Subscription or license	Required	Permanently, open availability on the public Internet	Free availability on the public Internet

OA journal opportunities. There are a number of important questions authors need to consider before submitting a manuscript. A brief list follows (Beall, 2012):

- Does the publishing opportunity sound too good to be true? (If so, maybe “it is.”)
- Are articles from the journal available only on Google Scholar? (Google Scholar provides access to all publications without screening for quality.)
- Do the journal board members list any articles actually published in the journal?
- Is the publisher listed on Beall’s list of either questionable journals or questionable publishers (updated at least annually)?
- Is the journal name “interesting” or a variation of a scholarly journal name, for example, *The American Journal of _____*, *National Journal of _____*, or *International Journal of _____*?
- Is the “home office” located in an emerging or third-world country (e.g., India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania)?
- Is the “home office” located in a small, old storefront or listed as a post office number?

SUGGESTIONS FOR LOCATING CREDIBLE SCHOLARLY OA JOURNALS

Distinguishing safe journal titles for publication is difficult. One strategy to use is the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), where journals accepted after March 2014 have met revised, stringent criteria for inclusion. Journals meeting revised, stringent criteria are identified by a green tick symbol. Journals without the symbol were approved prior to March 2014, and the publishers have been asked to reapply for acceptance under the more stringent criteria.

Another option is to evaluate relative importance of a published article via “impact factor,” a calculation used as a measure of article quality, based on frequency of article citation by others in the field (Springer, 2013). The assumption is, if other scientists/authors are willing to build on content published in the original article, then the original article must be valid (Garfield, 1996). Reputable examples of databases with impact factor include Scopus[®], Journal of Citation Reports[®], Web of Science[™], or the new SciELO* Citation Index. Unfortunately, impact factors may be used by questionable publishers and databases, as well, and not all reputable publications have an actual calculated impact factor.

Another strategy is to assess website navigation. If navigation goes in circles, the topic being searched cannot be located in a database “about” the topic, and/or the editors do not reply to requests for additional information, then the website/database may be questionable.

Finally, a useful strategy for scholarly publication is to use the Public Library of Science and BioMed Central websites. Each site started as a location where authors could publish faster with credibility. Both currently charge for publication. Public Library of Science charges approximately \$2,500 per article, and BioMed Central charges from \$1,450 to \$3,000 (Suber, 2003).

The essential peer review process is critical for ensuring quality, ethical publication and tends to be a source of publication and production fees. Thus, requiring authors to pay for peer review may not be all bad as some individuals believe, but costs need to be reasonable. There are strategies currently in development to create “safe” or “white lists” of reputable publications (Van Noorden, 2014). DOAJ is one of the attempts to create a “safe” list.

SUMMARY

Characteristics of scholarly OA journals are compatible with many characteristics of traditional journals, including the four key criteria of archiving/preservation, reputable board members, indexing, and peer review. Characteristics of predatory OA journals are not compatible with the identified traditional journal characteristics. Thus, authors need to complete due diligence in reviewing both publisher and journal with the help of the aforementioned resources and then decide where and whether to submit a manuscript for publication.

Do not prematurely limit publication possibilities because of professional blindness toward “author-pays” requirements, while evaluating opportunities for publication in scholarly OA journals. In addition, promotion and tenure committees need to recognize the value of OA publications. Finally, check Beall’s list of predatory publishers (<https://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>) to identify predatory publishers and the DOAJ after March 2014 (<https://doaj.org>) to identify safe journals before submitting a manuscript. Be sure to caution students about the identification/use of predatory publications.

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