Know Moore About: Predatory Publishers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Welcome to the session and introductions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Housekeeping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Slides/handouts will be distributed electronically.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presenter notes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Definitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Problem or business model?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Warning signs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Problem publisher checklist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Topics to cover in this session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What are ‘predatory publishers’ and why is the terminology controversial?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discuss whether they are really a problem for researchers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some warning signs to watch out for and a checklist you can use to assess potential publishers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presenter notes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>“Those that unprofessionally exploit the gold Open Access model for their own profit”</em> - Jeffrey Beall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>“An exploitative open-access publishing model that involves charging publication fees to authors without providing the editorial and publishing services associated with legitimate journals”</em> - Wikipedia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenter notes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animated slide - click to highlight exploit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A new definition?</th>
<th>Script:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>“Predatory journals and publishers are entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices”</em> - Nature</td>
<td>• Latest definition of predatory/problem publishers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenter notes:</td>
<td>• Took three focus groups, eighteen hours and multiple discussions for a group consensus to be reached.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Demonstrates the levels of disagreement about a definition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Long but accurate definition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Characteristics

- Solicit content via email
- Charge for non-existent services
- Misrepresents itself
- Lack of transparency

Script:

- Despite a lack of definition these publishers display similar characteristics.
- Typically approach researchers via flattering emails (usually after they have authored something),
- Exploit lack of understanding of OA model to charge for editorial services which they don’t provide.
- Type of vanity press but claim to be scholarly publishers. Not uncommon for them to lie about IF etc.
- Often quite secretive about their process or lie about what they do – can be hard to find out more information.

Presenter notes:

Open Access recap

- Take a step back and look at Open Access publishing to fully understand the problem of predatory publishers.
- From a researcher point of view – publish something, can pay to make it OA (which is needed for the REF). More nuance than this but not always from researcher POV.
- Predatory publishers exploit this confusion by charging an ‘OA’ fee but they don’t offer publication services.

Presenter notes:

Animated slide - click to make each element appear.
Lack of publication services = lack of peer review.
Peer review = quality control procedure for research which ensures that scholarly outputs are reliable and accurate.
Not carrying out peer review means that errors are missed and potentially harmful publications slip through.
Examples from real predatory publishers who claimed to carry out peer review: Star Wars, chocolate breakfast cereals, The Simpsons.
These examples were tests but all claimed to be rigorously reviewed research = perpetuates bad research.

Can also have an impact on the individual researcher.
Even if your work is sound it might end up sitting alongside poor work = tainted by association?
Lost chance to publish work with a more reputable publisher. Need to get everything you can out of a publication and this is a lot of effort for little reward.
Although rare it can cause long term damage to reputations if you publish with a predatory publisher and certainly doesn’t enhance your CV.
Some predatory publishers use tactics which can further damage a reputation.

Screenshot of a journal editorial board with photos, names and research interests = standard.

But there are problems with the three people circled.

These three people are not who the journal claims they are — images stolen from Cambridge University webpages (incl. the Vice Chancellor) and even a stock image of ‘manager with business card’.

Shows how easy it is to set one up.

Highlight issue of predatory conferences — several events happening simultaneously in a hotel, charging speakers who often end up being the only attendees = another way for these firms to make money = no academic merit.
Predatory publishers starting to be recognised by the academic community as a problem.

OMICS Publishing case (2019) – many complaints from researchers led to the case coming to court in the US.

Judge ruled against OMICS and said they were guilty of deceiving researchers over their services.

Although they were ordered to pay damages they are not based in the US so unclear if this will actually happen.

Some people think these publishers operate a legitimate business model.

Researchers in different academic cultures have different motivations to publish – what about if they just want something on their CV and are prepared to pay?

Does the traditional publication model place too much emphasis on metrics? Should it just be about getting the research out there?

If there is a need for people to publish and they are prepared to pay to publish are these publishers meeting an expressed need?
Script:

- Whichever publisher you use it’s important to do your research into their practices.
- Final section will look at signs you can use.
- CAUTION: none of these signs should be taken in isolation and when applied to ‘legitimate’ publishers several will fail on one or more points.

---

### Warning signs

- Overly flattering emails
- Publishing on a vast range of topics
- Asking for a submission fee
- Too good to be true publication times

---

Script:

- General warning signs which should raise a red flag.
- Authors will be approached by emails which can be flattering (both in language and offers to publish).
- CAUTION: remember that this could be a language barrier issue.
- Publishers are usually selective/specialist so publishing on a variety of topics may indicate money making rather than a desire to share outputs.
- Any fees should be made clear upfront and fully explained. OA fees are common but there should not be a charge just for submitting.
- No peer review = quick publication times = a problem. Peer review takes time so be wary of quick turnarounds.
- What follows is a practical checklist you can use if you have concerns to assess a publication/publisher.
Script:

- Publishers should be open about their practices to encourage submissions and preserve integrity.
- It should share its practices and philosophy including any contact information.
- Contact should be professional and come from a named person at a registered email address.
- It’s not unusual for predatory publishers to clone legitimate names e.g. Journal of Physics becomes American Journal of Physics.
- Look for publishing on a vast range of topics = more money than interest in sharing research.

Presenter notes:

Handout – checklist.

Script:

- Any fees should be clearly explained and easy to find. Know what you are actually paying for.
- Be wary of any hidden fees that crop up – it may not be too late to back out.
- Some authors find that they have to purchase a certain number of copies or get their library to subscribe. Do you want to/are you able to meet these conditions?
### Copyright

- Are author rights clearly explained?
- Does it allow a CC licence?
- Does the journal policy comply with funder requirements?

### Presenter notes:

### Peer review

- Is the process clearly described?
- Is the time frame realistic?
- Are any given metrics correct?

### Script:

- OA publishing often allows authors to retain copyright through an open licence.
- The type of licence(s) available should be made clear and easy to find.
- Rights of the author should be laid out on the website – what do they retain?
- If a CC or other open licence is allowed researchers should check they are happy with this and that it meets their funder requirements if needed.

- Lack of peer review = major problem with predatory publishers.
- Any process used should be clearly described including timescales.
- Peer review can take anything from weeks to months. Timescales of less than this = major red flag.
- You may be able to check times from acceptance to publication on the website.
- If any metrics are given e.g. JIF check that these are correct (especially if they seem high)
As with anything else, members of a journal board should be listed on the website and easy to find.

- Look for recognisable names in the field or search for the names of people listed.
- Double check that people know they are on these boards and that names/images are not being used without permission.
- Check department/other webpages which may list their affiliation.
- If in doubt contact the person and ask for their experiences of the journal.

Connections to a recognised institution are a good sign e.g. university press.

- Check that the name has not been cloned or a link falsely claimed.
- Check the Directory of Open Access Journals to see if they are listed.
- CAUTION: may be too new for them to be listed by DOAJ.
### Website Quality

- Can get a lot of information from the look/feel of the website of a journal.
- Professional journals should have a professional website including a professional invitation to publish.
- Look for errors in spelling or grammar.
- **CAUTION:** remember cultural differences. What looks polished and professional to some people might be out of the reach of others.

### Indexing

- Check recognised databases to see if the title is indexed. It will need to meet the standards for inclusion to be featured.
- Check for other titles by the same publisher.
- **CAUTION:** newer titles may not yet have been included.
Script:

- Biggest indicator of the quality of a publisher.
- Look at previous titles: are these good quality? Would you read them? Would you want your work in them?
- Check for errors in the title and abstract which may indicate that the editors were not familiar with the topic – subject specific terminology.
- Link back to earlier examples of poor publication e.g. Star Wars. Would you want your work next to that?

Presenter notes:

Most important thing = trust your judgement.
- Always check any journal you are thinking about publishing with – whether you know them or not.
- If in doubt double check with your research support librarian.
- Not about Cambridge telling you what is right or wrong but equipping you to make your own mind up.
Script:

- Any questions?

Presenter notes:

Action – send slides/online handout to audience.

Action – hand out feedback forms.