



Forum agenda
Meeting to be held on Monday 5 November 2018
BY WEBINAR

At 4pm–5.30pm (GMT)

1. Update on COPE activities by the Chair

2. Forum discussion: Predatory publishing

3. New cases

18-11 Increased number of casual submissions

18-12 A pre-submission inquiry with a bribe

18-13 Self-plagiarism and suspected salami publishing

18-14 Authorship conflict

18-15 Peer reviewer contacted by author

18-16 Data fabrication in a rejected manuscript

18-17 Possible plagiarism

18-18 Victim of article theft wants correction to list their name, not retraction

18-19 Student thesis contains published article content

4. Updates

18-09 Editor manipulation of impact factor

CONTENTS

2. FORUM DISCUSSION: Predatory publishing.....	3
3. NEW CASES.....	4
18-11 Increased number of casual submissions.....	4
18-12 A pre-submission inquiry with a bribe.....	5
18-13 Self-plagiarism and suspected salami publishing.....	6
18-14 Authorship conflict.....	7
18-15 Peer reviewer contacted by author.....	8
18-16 Data fabrication in a rejected manuscript.....	9
18-17 Possible plagiarism.....	10
18-18 Victim of article theft wants correction to list their name, not retraction.....	11
18-19 Student thesis contains published article content.....	12
4. UPDATES.....	13
18-09 Editor manipulation of impact factor.....	13

2. FORUM DISCUSSION: Predatory publishing

<https://publicationethics.org/news/forum-discussion-topic-comments-please-0>

What are the issues?

- Predatory publishing is generally defined as for-profit open access journal publication of scholarly articles without the benefit of peer review by experts in the field or the usual editorial oversight of the journals in question. The journals have no standards and no quality control and frequently publish within a very brief period of time while claiming that articles are peer-reviewed. Those who publish in these journals are frequently invited to serve on editorial boards or become editors with no reference to relevant experience to assume such roles
- Confusion between some legitimate open-access peer review journals and predatory open-access journals
- Predatory journals sometimes include legitimate scholars on their editorial masthead without the permission or knowledge of those individuals
- The Name Game – Predatory publishers frequently choose names that are very similar to the names of legitimate peer-reviewed journals
- Problem with the title ‘predatory publishing’ as treating authors, who knowingly publish in predatory journals, as innocent victims
- Who publishes in predatory journals? Many junior faculty and faculty from developing world and countries where English is a second language
- The related problem of predatory conferences and predatory proceeding publications
- Public loses faith in scholarly research and public government grants are questioned in terms of legitimacy of products of research
- Role of global university research rankings in adding to the pressure of publish or perish

Recent discussion

On prevalence

August 10, 2018, The Guardian stated that “more than 175,000 scientific articles have been provided by five of the largest ‘predatory open-access publishers’, including India-based Omics Publishing group and the Turkish World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology, or Waset”.

On the label predatory publishing

July 10, 2018, The Economist, “...the ‘predatory’ label has proven broadly misleading. Authors typically know what’s up, or at least should when visiting journal websites rife with glaring errors of language and wild claims, such as rigorous peer reviews that can be completed in a jiffy.” [Further, there appears to be]...apparent collusions or at least the turning of a conveniently blind eye, appears most common in poorer countries.”

October 30, 2017, The New York Times, Gina Kolata notes “...its increasingly clear that many academics know exactly what they’re getting into, which explains why these journals have proliferated despite wide criticism.”

Questions and possible solutions

- Whose problem is it?
- What do we have within our power that we can do?
- Is general advice at all useful, like [Think.Check.Submit?](#)
- Might preprints solve the problem anyway?
- How are publication ethics enforced globally? Is this even realistically possible?
- Approaches to address the problem of poor countries where scholars are trying to publish in English which is not their first language
- Help with publish or perish pressures, especially among junior scholars
- Mitigation of global rankings (or not)
- Other

3. NEW CASES

18-11 Increased number of casual submissions

We have experienced a sudden spurt in casual submissions of poor quality articles. We believe this is because authors wish to show that they have submitted articles which are under consideration at reputable journals.

While any journal or editor would be happy to see increased numbers of submissions, sadly, most are of very poor quality in all respects. Most are very casually prepared without following even basic principles of scientific writing and publication ethics. The incidence of plagiarism and potential compromise of publication ethics is increasing.

Increased numbers of submissions of such poorly written casual submissions take substantial time and resources, adding a lot of pressure to the editorial process. We believe some of the reasons why this is happening include:

- 1) the scam of publication in predatory journals is being exposed;
- 2) authors are now realising that articles in dubious/predatory journals are actually a liability;
- 3) it is easy to submit articles to reputable journals, which do not charge any fees;
- 4) in many cases, authors submit manuscripts to reputable journals as a transient step to notationally improve their cv;
- 5) most authors wish to show that their article is submitted to a reputable journal and is “under consideration”.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- How can we curb the number of casual submissions?
- Are there any appropriate restrictive steps, such as charging a reasonable fee at the submission stage? These 'submission charges' could be refunded/adjusted with the APC after the article is accepted?

18-12 A pre-submission inquiry with a bribe

We recently received a pre-submission inquiry from an author, who identified as being fairly inexperienced with writing papers. At first glance it was a fairly standard pre-submission inquiry. The author mentioned the titles of two papers they allegedly had wrote and wondered whether we might be potentially interested in them. The author added that they had a colleague who would also be potentially interesting in submitting papers to our journal and wondered whether we might be interested in publishing 1–2 articles in each issue of the journal.

The author also asked for a swift peer review process and even for me to help with making the revisions to the paper in order to enhance the chances of publication. Finally, the author concluded by saying they would pay me \$1100 US dollars to thank me for ultimately accepting the papers.

This is the first time in all my years of editing that I have come across a clear bribe attempt. My main concern is whether I can/should report this situation (and if so, how and to whom) even though the author did not provide any information apart from the name of the affiliations and institution.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- What can/should I do considering I do not have information on affiliation or workplace of the author?
- Should we respond to these emails or just ignore?

18-13 Self-plagiarism and suspected salami publishing

Journal A accepted a manuscript with six authors in June 2017, which was published in January 2018. Several months later, the editors of journal A found that journal B had published paper B, which shared striking similarities to paper A. Journal B accepted paper B in November 2017 and published it in February 2018. The first author of paper B was different but the remaining four authors were from paper A.

The editorial board of journal A concurred that papers A and B were written (i) in an identical manner or format of presentation; (ii) under the same study design with only minor changes that would make little clinical difference; and (iii) with extensive use of recycled texts which covered most of the papers, including the majority of the materials and discussion sections.

Had the editors of journal A known that the authors had submitted or planned to submit paper B to another journal, they would have rejected paper A. The claim now is that the authors have self-plagiarised the manuscripts, with potential salami publication.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- When self-plagiarism and suspected salami publishing is found in a published article, what can the editor do?
- Should the editor inform the other journal editor?
- In such cases, should the article be retracted from both journals?

18-14 Authorship conflict

Author A contacted our journal following publication of a manuscript claiming that he was the rightful author. We asked the author for proof and he said that he had all of the data concerning the patient because he received the operative specimen and made the diagnosis. Author A said he also collaborated in writing the article with author B and hence was surprised that neither his name nor his contribution appeared in the published article.

Author A alleged he gave authorisation to present the case in a conference to author B who later published the article in our journal without his consent.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- Who is the owner of this article?
- Is this a case of plagiarism?
- What action can we take regarding authors A and B?

18-15 Peer reviewer contacted by author

In a single blind peer review process, a reviewer gave an author detailed suggestions about improvements in the statistical analysis. The author was asked to revise and resubmit the paper to address these and other reviewers' suggestions. The author, unaware of the reviewer's identity, subsequently approached the reviewer as a respected colleague at a professional meeting to discuss the manuscript revision. During this conversation, to avoid having to pretend to go over their own suggestions as if they were from someone else, the reviewer disclosed that they were one of the reviewers. The author and reviewer discussed how to improve the manuscript, and at this point, the reviewer offered to assist with new statistical analyses they had recommended and become a co-author, which was agreeable to the author.

Before proceeding, the reviewer disclosed this interaction and her intention to the journal editors and the associate editor handling the paper. We determined to reject the manuscript because of the breach of confidentiality and the conflict of interest between the reviewer's role as reviewer and proposed role as co-author. They will presumably submit the co-authored paper to another journal.

Although the proposed transition from peer reviewer to co-author is clearly inappropriate, some of the early steps leading up to this are less clear. COPE guidance for peer reviewers (<https://publicationethics.org/files/Peer%20review%20guidelines.pdf>) recommends that reviewers not contact the authors directly without the permission of the journal but provides no guidance about how to handle a situation in which an author, in good faith, approaches the reviewer. This may be particularly common in smaller scientific communities.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- Does the reviewer have an obligation to conceal their status when asked by the author?
- Alternately, would it be better to acknowledge their status as a reviewer but decline to comment further?
- How should a reviewer handle having an author unknowingly approach them to discuss a manuscript?

18-16 Data fabrication in a rejected manuscript

An author submitted two manuscripts to our journal and the data were clearly fabricated, which was confirmed when we examined the original patient data files. The lead author admitted that they had only recruited a few patients and fabricated all of the remaining data and said that the co-authors had done this without their knowledge.

We reported this to the institution, who conducted an investigation. However, this investigation exonerated the lead author from misconduct, who went on to publish one of these manuscripts elsewhere and is still publishing suspicious manuscripts in other journals.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- Should other journals be warned about this case so that they can take a view about further submissions?
- Should anyone else be informed about this case?

18-17 Possible plagiarism

We received an email from a whistleblower notifying us about possible plagiarism in two chapters published by us, both authored by the same two authors. The whistleblower accused the authors of substantial plagiarism.

In both chapters there were, indeed, certain unattributed parts of the text, although the majority was properly attributed. Some of the unattributed parts were authored by the authors themselves, while some were taken from third parties. The whistleblower highlighted some properly cited parts of the text, as he claimed they were directly copied from other sources.

As a first step we contacted both authors for an explanation. The authors admitted their mistakes but also explained that they did not have any malevolent intention, and that it was a simple oversight on their behalf. They explained that they were willing to correct (publish a correction of) their chapter.

We then contacted the editor of the book. In his opinion this was not a case of substantial plagiarism and suggested publishing a correction. The whistleblower was not satisfied with the opinion of the editor.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- Is this misconduct serious enough to warrant a retraction, or would it be sufficient to publish a correction?

18-18 Victim of article theft wants correction to list their name, not retraction

Author A contacted us claiming that an article published in the journal recently by author B was stolen from an article author A had earlier submitted to two different publishers, publisher A in 2016 and publisher B in 2017. Author A provided the PDFs of the manuscripts they had submitted to those other publishers. The version submitted to us 2018 by author B was very similar to that submitted to publisher B.

We contacted publisher B who confirmed the details of the submission to them by author A in 2017. Author B is listed publicly as a reviewer for publisher B's journal, but publisher B could not confirm that they had direct access to this particular submission. Author B said their PhD advisor, now apparently deceased, had given them the article but they recently had doubts that this had been their advisor's work. They agreed to retraction.

Author A has asked whether instead of retracting we might publish a correction to replace author B with the rightful author, Author A, because the article has already been peer reviewed and accepted.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- Is correcting a stolen article to list the correct authors a potential solution? If so, should we correct the article metadata too?
- Is there any precedent for such a total correction of authorship?
- How might we detect and prevent the publication of stolen articles? They do not show up on Crossref Similarity Check because they are unpublished.

18-19 Student thesis contains published article content

The authors of an article published in 2009 are very upset with us, the publisher of the journal. A student used sections of the authors' article (uncited) in their thesis, which was published in 2012. The authors of the journal article retained copyright, and the article was published under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- What should the publisher do?

4. UPDATES

18-09 Editor manipulation of impact factor

An editor in chief of a major medical journal in a specialty field is also an author. The editor submits a manuscript to a competing journal in the same field. The manuscript receives moderately favourable reviews and the authors are invited to respond to the reviewer input and submit a revised manuscript. In the communication from that journal's editor in chief, the authors are asked to cite additional references, both of which are from the same journal. The references are only peripherally related to the topic of the manuscript and are within the time frame of publication that will influence the impact factor.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- Is using the manuscript review process to increase citations of your journal ethical?
- In a related question, is writing editorials which cite large percentages of manuscripts from your journal ethical?

In summary, is it ethical to use these tools to influence the impact factor metric?

Advice:

The Forum agreed with the advice given previously by COPE council on this case. The summary is given below. Citation concerns have been raised by Clarivate Analytics as evidenced by recent dropping of some journals for citation manipulation. It may be unavoidable to cite the journal if the subject is a new or niche topic as there may be fewer options for citing peer reviewed work in the field.

However, acceptance of an article should not be contingent on introduction of inappropriate or tangential citations. For reviewers, when authors self-cite for more of the authors' prior work, an extra check by editorial staff is needed.

The new CEO at Clarivate in charge of impact factor issues is Annette Thomas. She holds an AMA (Ask Me Anything) Reddit on a regular basis according to one of the attendees at the Forum. Questions such as these can be raised to obtain more specific information, for example, the question about citing papers in an issue in the editorial. There is generally a limit of 15% for self-citations but it might be possible for editors to calculate this so that they come up to but not over the limit.

Summary of previous advice: In general, the answer to all of the questions is no. Using the manuscript review process to increase citations of your journal is unethical, especially if the references are not germane to the paper. Sadly, this practice is common. A figure of 15% for journal self-citations is deemed acceptable by Clarivate Analytics.

However, it is very difficult to know whether in this specific case the editor-in-chief's behaviour was unethical. Reviewers and editors routinely suggest papers that the authors may have neglected to include in their review of the prior literature. It is also usual that other relevant papers would have come from the same journal. An editor-in-chief may be choosing references to bolster the level of scholarship of a borderline paper, regardless of where they come from. Were those the only references the editor-in-chief asked for? If the suggested papers are truly wide of the mark, authors can simply ignore them.

It is also unclear if the additional references came from one of the reviewers and are being reiterated by the editor-in-chief or if the editor-in-chief stated them independently. In either case, the tone and context would indicate coercion versus trying to improve a paper ("you are strongly recommended" versus "you could consider"). If a reason is given but the relevance of those specific references is low, then the authors could find other references that address the point better.

Writing an editorial and using citations to manipulate the impact factor is wrong, but in a more generic case, editorials have been written which have cited nothing but the journal articles. For example, editorial introductions to a special issue or themed article set, in which those articles that appear are cited, is not a case of citation manipulation.

The following materials may be useful

The CSE white paper 2.1.5 Citation Manipulation

<https://www.councilscienceeditors.org/resource-library/editorial-policies/white-paper-on-publication-ethics/2-1-editor-roles-and-responsibilities/#215>

Follow-up

A letter was sent from the journal and the publisher requesting that Clarivate not count citations from editorials in the IF calculations. We have not had a response.