

Plagiarism and Predatory Publishing

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Abstract - The paper tackles the issue of predatory journals and publishers. Jeffrey Beall (2012), librarian at the University of Colorado, coined the term 'predatory publishers' and defines them as "... *those that unprofessionally exploit the author-pays model of open-access publishing (Gold OA) for their own profit.*" A socio-economic model for predatory publishing similar to the law of supply and demand in economics is proposed and made as basis for analyzing what can be done to eliminate this unethical practice. The paper concludes that, based on the model, the only way to stop the practice is to strengthen the nation's higher education quality assurance system in research; institute national research journal accreditation systems and emphasize the value of professionalism and intellectual honesty in the academe.

Keywords - predatory publishing, plagiarism, journal accreditation service

INTRODUCTION

With the worldwide web and internet, the world has indeed become one global academic community of scholars with knowledge made available irrespective of spatio-temporal boundaries. Open access publishing, established more than ten years ago, helped to generate a social climate that changed academic publishing for expanded worldwide access to latest research at cheaper cost (Sanchez, 2012). Then, predatory publishers exploited the situation by publishing counterfeit journals or journals of dubious quality and asking authors to pay. Predatory publishers abound on-line and in the cyberspace: they are dishonest and aim to lure researchers, espe-

cially those desperate and inexperienced authors wanting tenure, with a quick “fix” to their publication problems. These publishers are experts in mimicking the behaviour of legitimate journals and have websites that indeed look as respectable as properly indexed journals.

There are faked journals that are willing to accept almost every article submitted for as long as the author is willing to shell out exorbitant fees. With stiff competition in the more respectable and indexed journals, authors opt to publish in these journals because they look legitimate anyway. Author J. Beall(2012) argued that “*journals that exploit the author-pays model damage scholarly publishing and promote unethical behaviour by scientists*”. The academic community knows about this; talks about this; and discusses this phenomenon but the issue stays in the fringes of the academic world as if it were a juicy “gossip” that will remain juicy only if left on its own.

Just what sort of anomalies befall on the scholarly publishing world with predatory publishing? Sanchez (2012) has opened a blog ***Scholarly Open Access*** which serve as a forum for discussing predatory publishing and he averred:

“Some predatory publishers spam researchers, soliciting manuscripts but failing to mention the required author fee. Later, after the paper is accepted and published, the authors are invoiced for the fees, typically US\$1,800. Because the scientists are often asked to sign over their copyright to the work as part of the submission process (against the spirit of open access) they feel unable to withdraw the paper and send it elsewhere.”

Legitimate authors and scientists feel victimized as evidenced by the hundreds of e-mails received by the blog administrator from victims seeking redress: how to withdraw an article submitted; what to do when their work is plagiarized by the predator; whether a particular publisher is legitimate or not; how to retrieve money solicited by the predators and so on. However, perhaps the most serious adverse impact of predatory publishing in scholarly work is when publishers print flawed, erroneous and low quality research articles read all over the world because quality control and quality assurance are absent.

In this paper, we examine the phenomenon of predatory publishing and how it leads to wholesale plagiarism in the academic community. We also propose a socio-economic model that can serve as basis for analyzing the phenomenon of predatory publishing with the end-in-view of minimizing their negative and adverse impact to the world of scientific research. The paper is mainly descriptive and expository precisely because the goal is simply to generate awareness of the existence of the problem in the academe and in the international community of scholars.

A Socio-Economic Model Explaining Predatory Publishing

If we are to address the issue of predatory publishing squarely, we need to analyze the situation carefully and understand the intricate interplay and dynamics of the forces that surround it. We claim that predatory publishing exists and appears to be flourishing because of social and economic factors obtaining in the academic world.

To shed light on the matter, Sanchez (2012) observed that the problem of predatory publishing is most severe in India and nearby countries where journals and publishers emerge every week. They are appearing because of the market need — hundreds of thousands of scientists in India and its neighbouring countries need to get published to earn tenure and promotion. In short, there is a very strong *demand* for new journals in various disciplines whereas *supply* is, at least theoretically, artificially limited through the imposition of quality assurance by way of thorough peer-review and by being indexed in either the Thomson-Reuters or Scopus. Economically, therefore, the situation can be viewed as a simple Supply-Demand model. To minimize supply provided by predatory publishers and journals, the law of supply and demand tells us that we should find ways to minimize demand.

Minimizing demand by providing no incentives i.e. not crediting articles published in non-indexed journals for promotion and tenure purposes, will have very limited impact and cannot succeed in eliminating predatory publishing. In the Philippines, for instance, both the researchers/scientists and the authorities responsible for tenure and promotion ignore this provision. If the university officials impose the condition of publishing only in accredited journals on their faculty, the university's budget suffers because public higher education financing formulae are based on the number of research articles published in international peer-reviewed journals (with no qualification on the quality of the peer-reviewed journals). The problem is not just with the publishers who act as clever businessmen. Scientists and researchers themselves are also to blame along with University officials. Many are taking pathetic shortcuts and paying for the publication of plagiarized or self-plagiarized work with the university officials abetting in the process. Dishonest researchers playing with the system are earning tenure and promotion at the expense of the honest ones. Soon, honest scientists and researchers will cease to publish their work because they stand to lose the most in this sorry state of unethical quagmire. When a legitimate researcher's work is published alongside articles that are plagiarized or of low quality which give conclusions from rather unsound methodologies or manufactured data, the high quality research of the legitimate researcher will be tainted by mere association.

The pressure and expectation to publish can be corrupting at several levels. When the threat of losing one's means of livelihood becomes real (e.g. losing one's tenure),

a typical researcher will go through all means just to get published: First, produce a research by manufacturing data or by contracting someone else to do the research. Next, search the internet for some predatory publisher/journal who will accept the paper for publication for a fee. Finally, submit the “acceptance letter” to university officials as evidence of publication who in turn, uses the instrument to gain larger budget for the university. Publication, however, will remain as the single most important criterion for obtaining a tenure in the academe.

In other countries, universities require some evidence of journal quality such as Impact Factors or Eigenfactors. Corcos(2011) claimed that requiring such evidences need not necessarily eliminate predatory publishing because there are ways to get around these journal metrics. Boksa (2012) editor of the Journal of Psychiatry and Neuroscience, a high impact factor journal, believed otherwise. In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education began a tedious process of accrediting university journals through a Journal Accreditation Service(JAS) in order to ensure that high quality university-based journals are made available for faculty publication. University-based journals are easier to monitor by the State in terms of quality (through the mechanism of blind review process) than monitoring predatory publishers (which, to date, can be in the thousands). In order to monitor research journals, it is necessary to ensure that : (a.) there is some form of peer-review with the same standards of quality, and (b.) there is some form of recognition e.g. timeliness, content, and citation analysis (Beall, 2012).

The other dimension of the model is the social component which can be disjoint from the economic component. Social prestige and social influence are two social variables which influence a researcher’s desire to get published, regardless of whether or not he gets monetary rewards from it. A well-published researcher is regarded high in the totem pole of academics and consequently wields considerable influence in academic circles. To majority of the researchers, particularly those who have retired from formal academic work but still do research, these are sufficient motivations to publish.

The Socio-Economic Predator-Prey Model proposed mimics the behaviour of a regular market economy where the Predators (publishers) supply the desired service (publication for fee) to the Preys (authors) who demand the services. We claim that predatory journals/publishers will cease to exist if there are no demands (preys) for their services. Thus, the predators’ existence depends on the preys’ demand for their services. The predators feed on the need of the demanders and so, if such needs are minimized or eliminated, the predators will no longer find their businesses profitable. Woodget (2012) rightly stated that “greater awareness of the existence of the problem , namely, the existence of predatory journals and publishers will suck the oxygen out

of their trade.

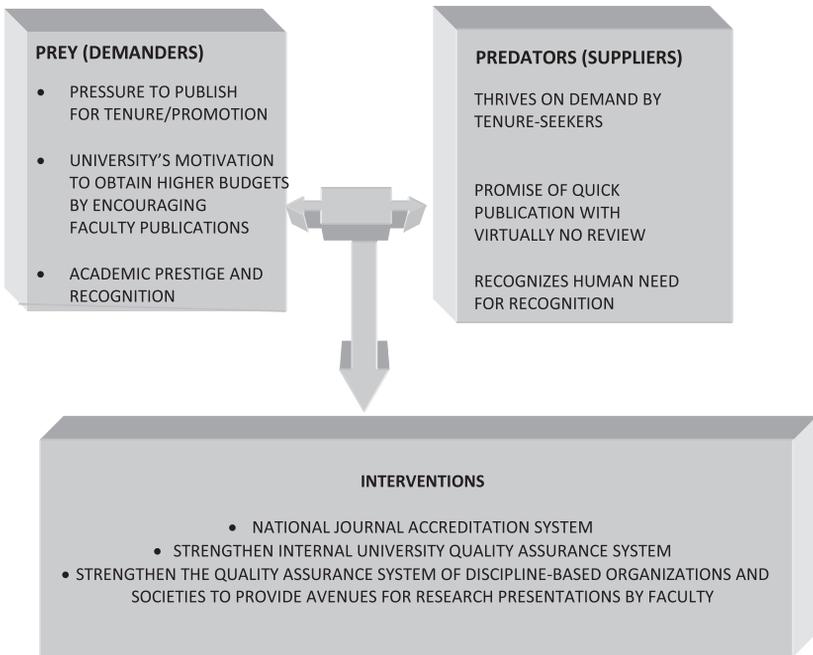


Figure 1. Socio-Economic Model for Predatory Publishing

Figure 1 shows the socio-economic model proposed for portraying the relationship between predator and prey in the context of academic publications. The rate at which predation occurs varies directly as the socio-economic variables found in the characteristics of the prey viz. the more intense are the needs for tenure and promotion, university budgets as well as prestige and recognition by the individual faculty, the more predators will emerge and the greater will be the financial requirements for publication. Since all the socio-economic variables appearing as traits of the prey are and will remain as defining characteristics of the academe, the only way to put a stop to predatory publishing is to institute interventions.

Some the interventions proposed in the past include: the Finch report proposals (Nature 486, 439; 2012) which makes access to readers open but closed to authors; include only journals with high impact factors and citation counts for consideration; naming predatory publishers as done by the Beall's report (2012), and others. Each of these interventions have unwanted and unintended effects to the community of

scholars. The latter intervention, that of actually naming the predatory journals and publishers, have limited value because of the fast rising number of predatory publishers.

The proposed interventions under our model considers practical implementation issues such as:

1. It is easier for the State or its higher education regulatory bodies to impose journal accreditation systems at the national level and maintain a data base for the accredited journals than to monitor thousands of journals on line. This also allows the country to define its own quality (of research). State normative financing formulae can be modified to include this particular parameter.
2. Once a national standard for research journals is established, the Universities can define their own quality assurance mechanism to support their growing number of faculty seeking tenure e.g. direct all faculty seeking to publish their work to nationally accredited research journals. The University can, for instance, provide greater weights to articles published in ISI/ Thomson-Reuters indexed journals than to nationally accredited journals, and no points for other types of journals not found within these categories of acceptable journals.
3. To respond to the need for prestige and recognition, national societies and organizations in specific disciplines can sponsor research symposia for all papers published in nationally accredited journals in the disciplines. The State can support activities of these nature by the Guilds.
4. Strengthening of the Guild system implies that the professional societies police their own ranks. The concern for protecting the integrity of a profession is a matter that squarely falls on the Societies, Organizations and Guilds.

Other Considerations in Academic Research Publication

Publication in reputable and properly indexed journals has become quite difficult with rejection rates ranging from 90 to 95 percent. Consequently, neophytes and other promising young scholars are marginalized in the business of publishing new research results. Predatory publishers take advantage of this situation by offering guaranteed and quick publication without the hassles of peer-review. The system of peer-review must, therefore, be carefully re-evaluated along this line: how can brilliant starters be given a chance to prove their worth if traditional lenses are used

to examine their research outputs? Benoit Mandelbrot's (1987) idea of modelling roughness and irregularities in nature as fractal geometry was initially scorned and dismissed as nonsense by traditional mathematicians who believed that the world is a world characterized by regularity and continuity until fractal geometry was proven useful in various settings. Mandelbrot himself was a victim of several rejections in his attempt to publish in regular, reputable and respectable journals. This is a crucial point in scientific research because it is a point that unethical and exploitative publishers take advantage of.

Second, the idea of having a set of journals that belongs to the category of "reputable and proper" is viewed by many as elitist or quality control in disguise. What is truly needed is a quality assurance system that will enable one to say that a "journal is of quality and can sustain such quality". The key to such a system is in the appointment of respectable scholars in the Editorial Board: scholars whose expertise and integrity are beyond reproach. A secondary element to this quality assurance system is peer-review by equally competent scholars on the subject matter of research.

Third, it is important that legitimate authors, researchers and scientists recognize a predatory journal/publisher when presented with one. Beall (2012) realizes the difficulty in identifying a predator journal or publisher. Predatory publishers use big words, promise quick publication, and have personalized touch with prospective authors (victims). Sometimes, fees are not talked about until it is too late to back out. Beall (2012) also provides a list of characteristics of predatory publishers which may be useful in spotting them. We remark that some legitimate publishers may also possess some of the characteristics we are quoting from the original list below:

1. 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).
2. 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.
3. The publisher publishes journals that combine two or more fields not normally treated together (e.g., *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology*).
4. The publisher displays prominent statements that promise rapid publication and/or unusually quick peer review
5. Publish papers that are not academic at all, e.g. essays by laypeople or obvious pseudo-science.

6. Makes frequent announcements of international conferences, seminars and fora on their websites.

Finally, we maintain that all these issues boil down to the individual scholar and researcher. Professionalism, intellectual honesty and a real sense of commitment to his discipline are hallmarks of true scholars. The academic requirement of “publish or perish” should be taken by each academic as an opportunity to further his search for knowledge rather than as a problem that needs solution: good or bad. There will always be opportunistic and enterprising individuals who will take advantage of a perceived demand by turning the situation into a business enterprise. This is as real as the problem of “ghost writers” in the Philippines. Just as we have provided solutions to the latter problem (see CHED Order No. 53, s. 2007 prescribing Theory Development for Doctoral Dissertations), we can, without doubt, also find a solution to predatory publishing.

We are fast losing the breed of scholars in the old tradition of the academe in today’s overly materialistic world where everything is reduced to an economic bottom line.

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