TRANSLATION

THE CURRENT SITUATION AND SOLUTIONS TO "PREDATORY" PUBLISHING

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Abstract: *This article provides a comprehensive overview of "predatory" publishing, a complex and increasingly prevalent phenomenon within today's academic world. Predatory publishing is a business model that makes a profit by collecting article processing charges (APC) from authors but does not ensure a quality editing, reviewing, and publishing process. Predatory journals and publishers often impersonate reputable journals and promise fast publication times, mainly to profit from APC. This problem is increasing, seriously affecting the scientific reputation and the quality of researchers' publications. This article aims to identify the characteristics of "predatory" publishing, analyze the causes that promote the development of this phenomenon, and propose preventive solutions for the academic community through the following steps: (1) synthesizing and analyzing international and domestic literature on "predatory" publications; (2) develop a system for recognizing and avoiding predatory journals; and (3) gaining practical from reputable academic forums. The results showed that the signs of identifying a predatory journal that are confusing names, non-transparent peer review process, unclear contact/headquarters information, fake editorial boards, and unprofessional invitation emails. Furthermore, due to limited awareness among a portion of researchers and the current insufficiency of measures to prevent low-quality publishing, it is essential to enhance awareness, develop detection tools, and strengthen publication quality control in order to safeguard scientific credibility.*

Keywords: *academic ethics, open access, predatory publishing*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the Internet in information storage and access has led to the explosive growth of the Open Access *(OA*) publishing model in scientific communication. Traditionally, access to scholarly articles published in academic journals required readers —both individuals and institutions—to pay a subscription fees. In contrast, the open access model shifts the financial burden to researchers, who must pay an *Article Processing Charge (APC*), in order to publish their work in OA journals. The most significant advantage of the OA publishing is that it enables free and easy access to research findings, especially for researchers and institutions with limited financial resources. As long as there is Internet access, anyone can read published articles without cost. This facilitates faster and more equitable dissemination of scientific knowledge, allowing different organizations and regions, especially those with limited financial resources, to have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to a major research project globally. However, alongside these benefits, OA publishing has been exploited by numerous publishers and journals that prioritize profit over scientific rigor and ethical standards. They are called predatory publishers/journals. The issue has emerged as a significant challenge within

the global academic ecosystem, particularly in the context of mounting publication pressure faced by researchers today. The predatory publishers/journals aggressively target researchers who are under pressure to publish, aiming to extract manuscripts from those seeking to meet requirements for promotion or to obtain research funding. The rising number and increasing sophistication of such entities have progressively eroded the public's trust in the OA system, resulting in substantial waste of time and resources, and severely damaging the academic credibility of authors who unknowingly publish their work in these journals. Furthermore, legitimate scientific journals operating under the *Gold Open Access* model—which charges authors publication fees while offering free public access to published content—have also suffered unnecessary reputational harm. This confusion, stemming from the blurred lines between legitimate OA and predatory practices, has contributed to a growing sense of mistrust toward the open access model as a whole (Oviedo-García, 2021).

Numerous efforts have been made by the academic community to eliminate the exploitative practice of predatory publishing. However, Panda (2020) likens the phenomenon to the multi-headed Hydra monster of Greek mythology, highlighting its complexity and adaptive nature: when one form is exposed and suppressed, new and more sophisticated variants emerge. Consequently, raising awareness of how predatory publishing operates, improving identification strategies, and implementing solutions to mitigate its harmful effects on research dissemination have become increasingly urgent.

1.1 The Emergence of Predatory Publishing

The term *"predatory publishing"* was introduced by librarian Jeffrey Beall in 2010 to describe a publisher or journal that operates under the guise of academic legitimacy but in reality functions as profit-driven enterprises. They typically engage in tactics such as mass unsolicited invitations, promises of rapid peer review, non-transparent publication fees, and financial pressure on authors—ultimately undermining editorial standards and eroding trust in the academic publishing ecosystem (Linacre & Syed, 2020). However, since 2017, Beall's original list has ceased to be updated. The website https://beallslist.net, which currently maintains a similar directory, functions as an unofficial continuation and is no longer managed by Beall himself (Figure 1).

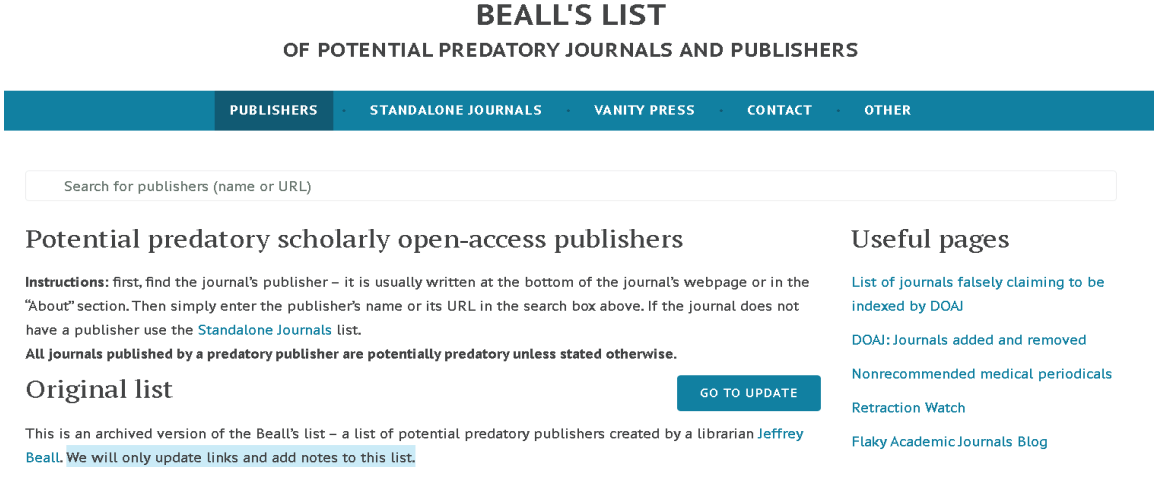


Figure 1. The announcement on the Beallslist website, no longer updated by Beall

The term *"predatory"* is metaphorical in nature, evoking the cunning behavior of carnivorous animals in the wild—targeting vulnerable prey, launching sudden attacks, and striking without mercy. In the academic context, *"predatory"* refers to the pay-to-publish model adopted by certain OA journals and the fraudulent schemes that often accompany it. Today, the term *"predatory publishing"* has become widely used within the scholarly community, although it remains controversial (Braak et al., 2024), and has been the subject of numerous academic articles and research reports warning against such practices (Castellana, 2024).

It should be noted that the form of scientific publication varies depending on the specific characteristics of each discipline. In fields such as Physics, Medicine, and Biology, researchers often prioritize publishing their findings in reputable academic journals. In contrast, disciplines like Information Technology, Computer Science, and Engineering tend to emphasize the presentation of research at scientific conferences, with publications primarily appearing in the form of conference *proceedings*. This distinction has created fertile ground for the emergence of another predatory model—*predatory conferences*—which operate in parallel with and are often as sophisticated as predatory journals. However, the present article primarily focuses on the phenomenon of predatory publishers and journals.

The modern academic system places considerable emphasis on publication output that leads to the rise of to the pervasive *"publish or perish"* culture. This phrase captures the intense pressure imposed on researchers to continually publish in scientific journals as a prerequisite for employment, promotion, and even retention within academic institutions (Moosa, 2024). As a result, many researchers worldwide—from seasoned scholars to early-career scientists—are compelled to disseminate their findings as quickly as possible. Whether due to inexperience or deliberate choice, some turn to low-quality publication channels and ultimately fall into the trap of predatory publishers and journals.

Meanwhile, the OA model—originally designed to promote the dissemination of scientific knowledge—has increasingly been exploited as a vehicle for predatory publishing. Under this model, scholarly articles are made freely available online to readers. Instead of charging subscription fees or pay-per-view access, publishers require APCs from authors to cover the costs associated with publication and editorial operations (Burton, 2024). These fees can range from 100 USD to over 11,000 USD per article, contributing to a rapidly growing business worth nearly $9 billion (OPUS, 2024).

Driven by substantial profit potential and the scientific community's desire to publish—often coupled with a lack of vigilance—predatory journals charge authors publication fees while bypassing rigorous peer review processes. In many cases, these journals fail to conduct even basic checks for plagiarism or violations of research ethics. According to an online report in *BMC Medicine*, so-called predatory publishers generated approximately US$75 million in revenue and published nearly 400,000 articles in 2014 (Bohannon, 2015). By 2021, it was estimated that more than 393 million USD in publication fees had "flowed into the pockets" of such publishers, with over 787,000 articles involved (Burton, 2024). The 2022 Cabells Report estimated that over 15,500 predatory journals were operating globally (IAP, 2022). A world-wide survey conducted by the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP) in the

same year, involving over 1,800 researchers from 112 countries, revealed that nearly 24% of respondents had published in predatory journals or participated in predatory conferences (PLOS, 2022).

Since then, the number of predatory publications has continued to grow. In today's digital era—where anyone can easily purchase a domain name and build a website—establishing a predatory publishing platform with an entire catalog of journals has become a relatively simple endeavor. This ease of setup has enabled predatory publishing to expand in parallel with legitimate academic publishing. Although no comprehensive national data is currently available, applying the aforementioned proportions to the Vietnamese context suggests that domestic universities and research institutions may be allocating research funding to publications in journals suspected of being predatory or of poor quality—primarily due to limited experience in identifying such entities. This financial loss is estimated to reach hundreds of billions of VND per year, while also undermining academic reputations and jeopardizing future funding opportunities. These issues point to significant gaps in the existing mechanisms for screening and evaluating scientific publication activities.

1.2 Definitions of predatory publishing

Predatory publishing is a multifaceted phenomenon that has been defined from various perspectives by academic sources and international organizations. According to a widely cited statement in *Nature* by Grudniewicz et al. (2019), *"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."* The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), in its 2023 guidelines describes *"common features of predatory publishing include deception and lack of quality controls, and a range of warning signs exist when assessing a journal."* This refers to the exploitation of the name of science and the OA model to generate revenue, often through the creation of journals that mimic legitimate academic journals in appearance but offer no genuine research value. Alarmingly, these journals have become increasingly sophisticated and deceptive, making it extremely difficult to distinguish between legitimate and predatory ones (Nguyen Van Tuan, n.d.). Publication in such journals may falsely associate authors with unethical or untrustworthy practices, thereby jeopardizing their academic reputation (Kozmenko, 2020).

In addition, it is noticeable that, alongside many authors who unknowingly fall prey to predatory publishing due to inexperience or pressure to publish, there exists a subset of so-called *"parasite authors"* who intentionally exploit predatory journals to expedite the dissemination of their work—particularly questionable scientific content—with the aim of advancing their careers and securing financial incentives or research funding from their affiliated institutions or collaborating organizations. Notably, "paper mills" also play a critical role in this ecosystem by supplying low-quality manuscripts, fabricating data, or systematically replicating content, which is then submitted to predatory journals for swift publication without rigorous peer review (Joseph, 2024).

2. HOW TO IDENTIFY PREDATORY PUBLISHING

Predatory publishers and journals often masquerade as legitimate scientific outlets while primarily focusing on the dissemination of low-quality articles for financial gain. Their modes of operation are increasingly diverse

and, over time, have become more difficult to detect, thereby exposing both novice researchers and experienced academics to potential deception. Consequently, it is essential for researchers to recognize the warning signs associated with predatory publishing practices in order to safeguard the integrity of their scholarly work and academic reputation. Based on the frameworks proposed by Beall (2015), McCoy (2019), and Nguyen Van Tuan (n.d.), and as observed within the academic context of University of Phan Thiet, several indicators can be used to identify a predatory publisher or journal:

2.1 Hijacked journals

Predatory journals often adopt names beginning with terms such as *"International"*, *"Global"*, *"World"*, *"Universal"*, *"Innovative"*, *"Advanced"*, *"Modern"*, or *"Frontiers in..."* (the latter mimicking the reputable *Frontiers* series but not affiliated with it). Other examples include titles such as *"American Journal of..."*, *"British"*, or *"European Journal of..."*—regardless of whether the journal is actually based in the United States or Europe—many of which are documented in Beall's list. It is important to note that the mere presence of an ISSN (International Standard Serial Number) on a journal's website is not, in itself, a reliable indicator of legitimacy or quality. According to Linacre (2020), more than 40% of the journals listed in Cabells' Predatory Reports possess an ISSN, many of which may have been copied from legitimate journals or generated independently without appropriate registration or verification.

A common tactic employed by predatory journals is to impersonate reputable ones by adopting deceptively similar titles and domain names, making it easy for authors to be misled (Figure 2, for example). The website of hijacked journals may include false or misleading claims, such as fabricating an Impact Factor (IF) despite lacking formal indexing or recognition by ISI or Scopus databases.

Legitimate journal **Hijacked journal**

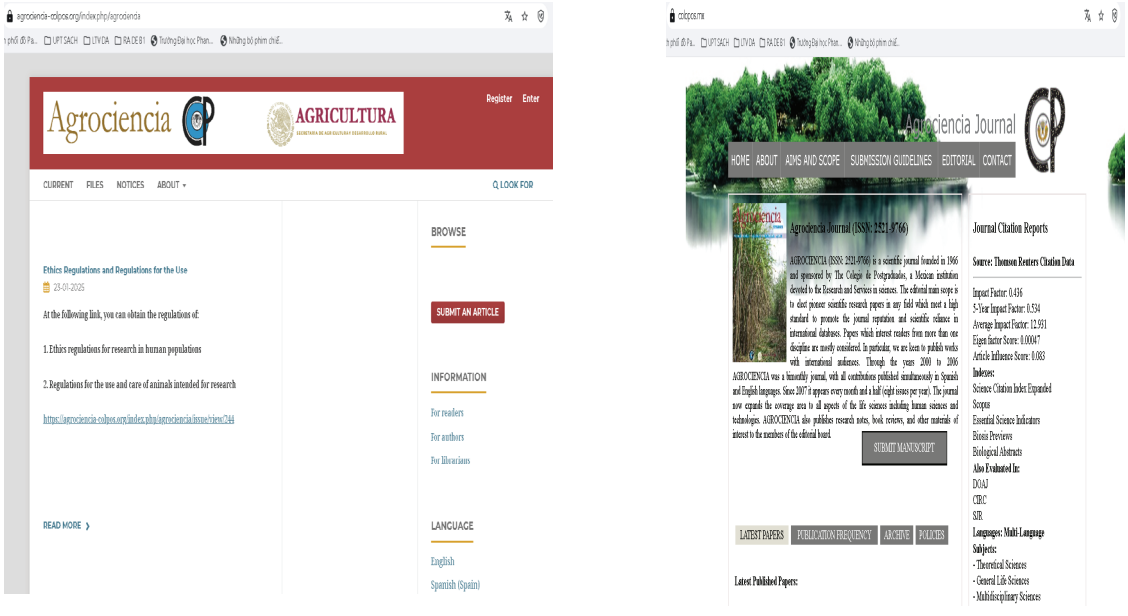
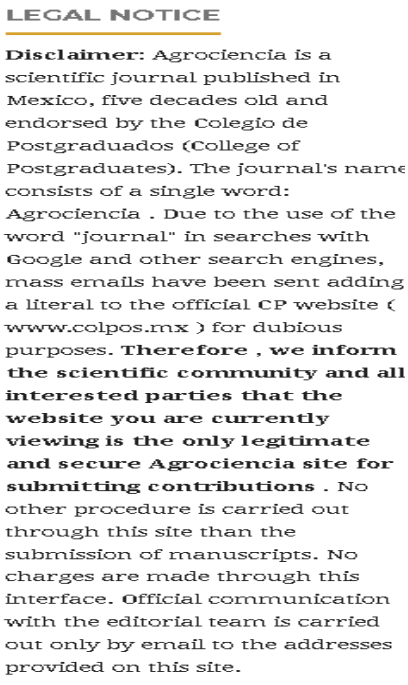


Figure 2. A comparison between the website of a legitimate journal and that of a hijacked version

(Screenshot of websites accessed on 28 April, 2025)

Warnings about counterfeiting are published by the legitimate journal on their websites (Figure 3).

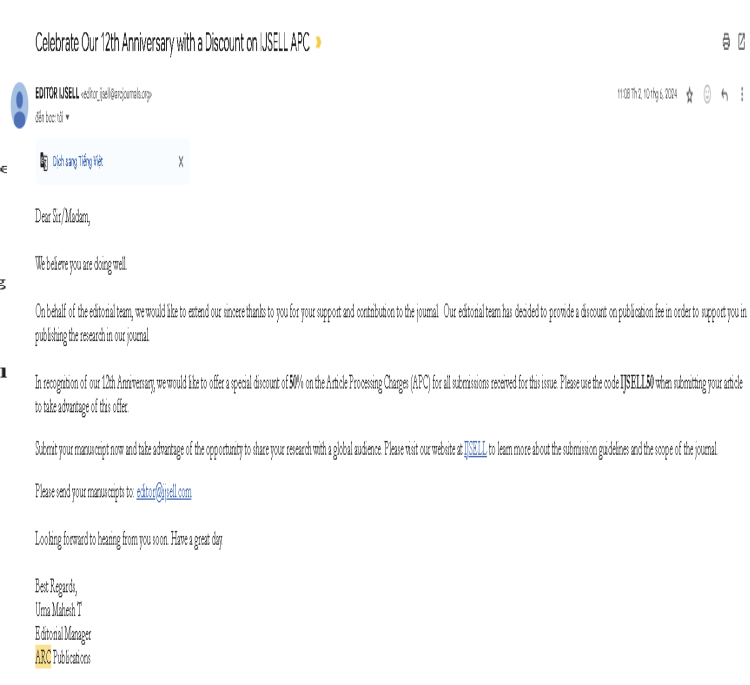


LEGAL NOTICE

Disclaimer: Agrociencia is a scientific journal published in Mexico, five decades old and endorsed by the Colegio de Postgraduados (College of Postgraduates). The journal's name consists of a single word: Agrociencia . Due to the use of the word "journal" in searches with Google and other search engines, mass emails have been sent adding a literal to the official CP website (www.colpos.mx) for dubious purposes. **Therefore , we inform the scientific community and all interested parties that the website you are currently viewing is the only legitimate and secure Agrociencia site for submitting contributions** . No other procedure is carried out through this site than the submission of manuscripts. No charges are made through this interface. Official communication with the editorial team is carried out only by email to the addresses provided on this site.

Figure 3. Warning notice regarding journal impersonation published by the legitimate Agrociencia journal

(Screenshot of the official website, accessed on 28 April 2025)



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Looking forward to hearing from you soon. Have a great day

Best Regards,
Uma Mahesh T
Editorial Manager
ARC Publications

Figure 4. Example of a solicitation email from a predatory journal offering publication opportunities and discounted article processing charges

(Screenshot of email received on 10 June 2024)

2.2 Failure to Ensure the Peer Review Process

Predatory journals frequently promise extremely rapid publication—often within a few days or weeks—whereas reputable academic journals typically require an average of 10 to 20 weeks from manuscript submission to final publication (Nguyen, M. T. & Nguyen, L. U. M., 2024). Articles published in predatory journals are often accepted without undergoing any plagiarism check, peer review, or editorial oversight. In many cases, manuscripts are published exactly as submitted or with minimal, if any, editorial intervention, resulting in the retention of grammatical and typographical errors, and significant inaccuracies in officially-published content (Beall, 2015). As noted by Grudniewicz et al. (2019), predatory journals are often characterized by poor presentation quality, misuse of idiomatic expressions, inconsistent writing style, and the uncritical use of AI-generated content to produce misleading or incoherent text.

2.3 Unclear Invitation Emails and Website Information

Predatory publishers frequently employ aggressive marketing tactics, including sending mass email solicitations to scholars—often from generic, non-institutional domains such as *@gmail.com, @hotmail.com,*

or @yahoo.com—rather than from addresses affiliated with recognized academic institutions. A notable example involves the email address *sakaijuro45@gmail.com,* which has been associated with a range of questionable journals such as *Bulletin of National Institute of Health Sciences, Azerbaijan Medical Journal, General Medicine, and Zhonghua Yi Shi Za Zhi.* Notably, one of these journals is a fake version of the legitimate journals, which are set up without providing a serious review process nor publicly posting on the journal's website (Keller, 2024). Some emails may even reach the recipient's inbox, but their content lacks specificity and relevance. For instance, the invitation may refer to a previously published article by the recipient, yet proceed to solicit a submission in a field entirely unrelated to their area of expertise (Anderson, 2020). Additionally, some journals often offer publication fee discounts and require payment in advance (Figure 4).

Links on the website (e.g., to Articles, Publications and Editors) may lead to an incorrect detail page or only take users back to the top of the current page. These journals focus on collecting APCs but do not provide transparent information on their websites; instead, payment requests are sent later via email (Bisaccio, 2019).

2.4 Unreliable Headquarters Address

Another common indicator of predatory publishers is the absence of a verifiable or accurately represented headquarters address on their websites. The listed locations may appear to be based in countries, such as India, various parts of the Middle East (e.g., Arabia, Iran, Iraq), Africa, or even in Europe or the United States, but these publishers predominantly target authors from developing countries. A closer inspection—such as checking the address via Google Maps—often reveals that the locations do not correspond to any legitimate publishing office (Figure 5). In many cases, the address may not exist at all, or it may be associated with multiple unrelated businesses (Linacre & Syed, 2020).

Figure 5. Google Maps screenshot of the claimed address of a predatory journal

(Captured on 10 April 2025)

2.5 Dubious Editorial Board

Many of these journals either deliberately conceal editorial information or impersonate prominent names by using the names of well-known scholars to create a false sense of familiarity and credibility in order to deceive potential submitters. More concerning is the practice of arbitrarily listing reputable scientists as members of the editorial board without their knowledge or consent, in an attempt to enhance the journal's perceived legitimacy (Laine et al., 2025).

For instance, on the website of the *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies* (Figure 6), several editor profiles appear to be fraudulent or fabricated, as illustrated below:

• The purported editor-in-chief is listed as *Sam Okoroafor*, a likely pseudonym intended to mimic the identity of a real individual named *Sam Okoroafo*;

• *Taylor M. Matt* is falsely presented as affiliated with *Macquarie* University (Australia); however, no such individual exists, and the university's name is misrepresented as *Macqu**q**rie* University;

• Professor *Matthew Peters* is listed as affiliated with *Western Sydney* University (Australia), but no such faculty member can be verified;

• Professor *Nathan N. Elekwa* is claimed to be from the University of *Nigeria Nsuka*, although no official records support this claim;

• Professor *Make Smart* is falsely associated with the University of *Augsburg* (Germany), and the so-called *"Department of Mathematics and Natural Science"* does not exist; it appears to be a misrepresentation of *the Faculty of Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Materials Engineering.*

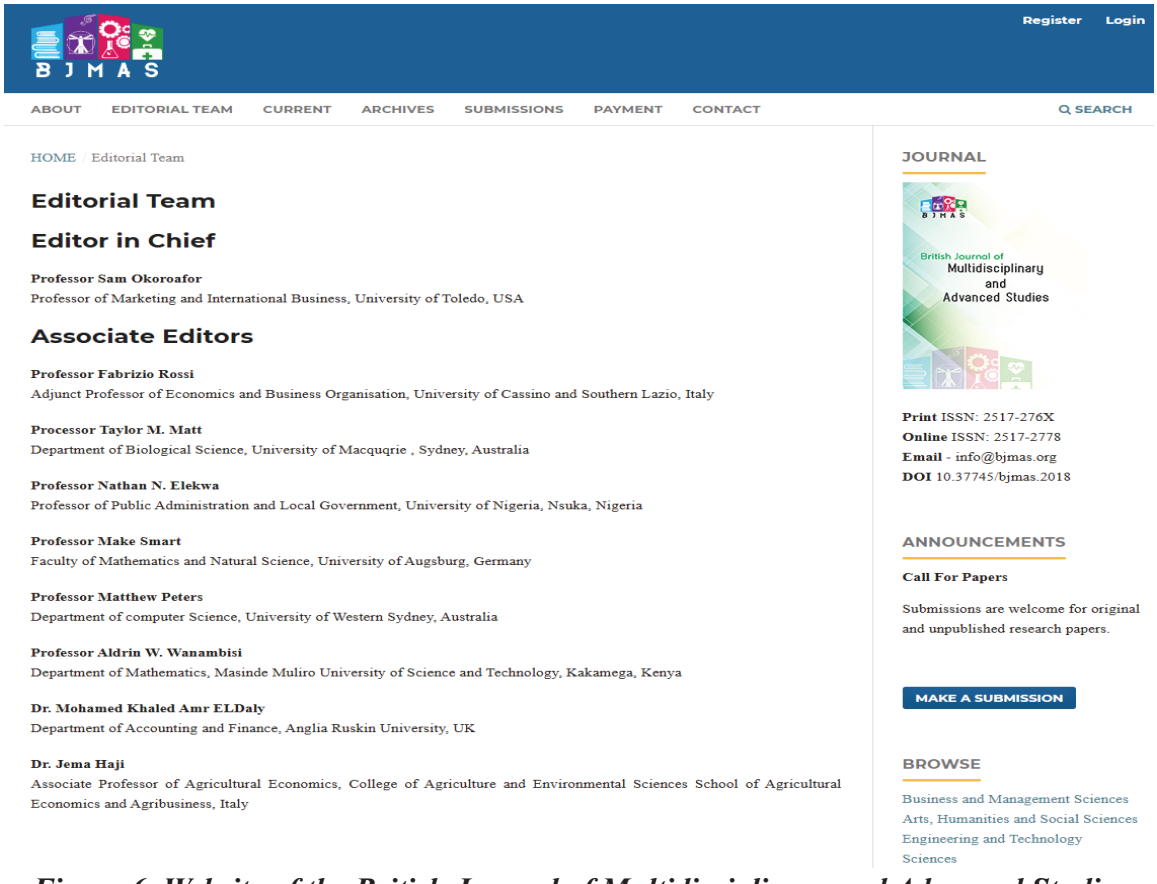

Figure 6. Website of the British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies
(Screenshot captured on 01 May 2025)

Some predatory journals list an unusually large number of editorial board members relative to the actual number of articles published, suggesting that there may be insufficient editorial workload to justify such a board size (Anderson, 2020). It should be noted that certain indicators alone may not definitively confirm whether a journal or publisher is predatory. Nonetheless, these signs reflect substandard academic publishing practices that authors should approach with caution. A common strategy employed by such journals is the use of broad interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary titles—such as *International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies*—to attract submissions across various academic fields. However, the editorial boards in such journals frequently reveals a lack of clear alignment with the stated academic scopes. Editorial members may lack relevant publishing experience, show inconsistency in academic specialization, or include individuals who are deceased, fictitious, or listed without their consent.

3. THE HARM OF PUBLISHING IN PREDATORY PUBLISHERS OR JOURNALS

Publishing in predatory journals can have detrimental consequences for individual researchers and broader academic ecosystems. It may severely damage the scholar's professional reputation, result in the loss of intellectual property, and lead to significant financial waste—both at the institutional and national levels. These harms can be categorized as follows:

3.1 Lack of Quality Control and Reliability

The core deficiency of predatory journals lies in their failure to uphold academic standards, particularly the absence of rigorous peer review and editorial oversight. Although these journals often claim to provide such services—and charge authors accordingly—they routinely publish content of low quality, methodological weakness, or even content that is scientifically meaningless, all in pursuit of profit. This issue becomes especially alarming in fields directly related to human health and safety, such as medicine and engineering, where articles may contain serious methodological flaws. Even more troubling is that such flawed studies are presented as peer-reviewed, lending them an unwarranted appearance of legitimacy (Anderson, 2020). Research shows that approximately 37% of articles published in predatory journals exhibit serious methodological errors, posing risks to real-world application in clinical and technical settings (Masic, 2017).

Due to the lack of meaningful quality control, articles published in these journals tend to have negligible academic impact. Many receive no citations in reputable sources even five years after publication (Brainard, 2020). In cases where citations are present, they often originate from affiliated or *"partner journals"* within the same predatory ecosystem, creating an artificial citation network known as *"citation leakage"* rather than reflecting genuine scholarly engagement (Hinchliffe, 2022). This pattern underscores the low scientific value of such publications and highlights the broader issue of wasted research resources due to inadequate evaluation.

The responsibility for this problem does not lie solely with the publishers. Researchers themselves, seeking rapid and easy routes to publication—often for purposes of institutional recognition, promotion, or academic compliance—may intentionally submit work to these outlets. Predatory journals typically charge lower publication fees compared to reputable OA journals, making them financially attractive (Himmelfarb Library, 2025).

3.2 Lack of Academic Recognition and Career Impact

While publishing in predatory journals may offer a seemingly easy and rapid route to acceptance, researchers who choose this path risk having their work unrecognized by academic institutions and funding organizations. Such publications may be disregarded in key academic evaluations, including hiring decisions, promotions, degree conferrals, and grant assessments. Since 2023, several institutions and organizations—such as the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia, the Zhejiang Ministry of Industry and Trade in China, the Vingroup Innovation Foundation (VINIF) in Vietnam, along with various universities globally—have released updated lists of low-quality or predatory publishers. These institutions have officially announced that publications appearing in journals associated with such publishers—including Hindawi[1], MDPI, and Frontiers—may not be recognized for academic or funding purposes (Tran Huynh, 2023). This restriction applies even to journals indexed in prestigious databases such as ISI and classified in Q1 or Q2 quartiles, reflecting a growing emphasis on ethical publishing standards over mere index-based rankings. Publishing in unaccredited or questionable journals not only undermines an author's scholarly credibility, but may also hinder academic progression, particularly in today's increasingly transparent and rigorous scholarly environment where publication quality is under heightened scrutiny.

3.3 Intellectual Property Risks and Violations of Academic Integrity

Predatory publishers frequently fail to adhere to copyright and intellectual property regulations, thereby exposing authors to the risk of rights infringement. Submitting manuscripts to such outlets may result in intellectual property theft, as exemplified by the case of OMICS, which was sued for publishing research without the authors' consent—highlighting the severity and legal consequences of such misconduct (Linacre, 2019; Masic, 2017).

Moreover, the lax publication processes and absence of rigorous peer review in these journals have created conditions under which unethical practices proliferate. Some authors have deliberately collaborated with so-called "paper mills" or manuscript-for-hire services to purchase authorship or add their names to studies in which they played no role. This behavior constitutes a serious breach of academic integrity, undermines the legitimacy of the scholarly publishing system, and contributes to the proliferation of low-quality research, data fabrication, and ghost authorship in international academic databases.

3.4 Difficulties in Withdrawing Articles

According to an anonymous author who consulted with members of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), withdrawing a manuscript from a predatory journal can be extremely difficult. Even in cases where the author has not signed a copyright agreement or paid any APCs, predatory publishers often refuse withdrawal requests. In some instances, they may demand a fee for withdrawal or resort to threats and intimidation (COPE, 2016). This creates significant barriers for authors who wish to submit their work to reputable journals, as the previous unauthorized publication may be interpreted as duplicate submission. Attempting to republish the same content may subject the author to accusations of *self-plagiarism*, further jeopardizing their academic reputation.

4. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Identifying and mitigating the risks posed by predatory journals remains a significant

[1] The Hindawi brand was terminated by Wiley Publishing in 2023 because of the "paper mills" scandal of poor quality (Kincaid, 2023).

challenge, particularly given their increasingly sophisticated and deceptive tactics. Therefore, vigilance is essential for all researchers—whether early-career or experienced scholars. Addressing this issue effectively requires a coordinated and multi-stakeholder response. Efforts must extend beyond individual responsibility to include the active engagement of the wider academic ecosystem, including universities, research institutions, governmental organizations, and professional scientific associations.

4.1 For the Author

Authors must be the first to take the necessary due diligence steps in safeguarding the integrity of scholarly communication when selecting journals for manuscript submission. Researchers should adhere strictly to principles of academic integrity and ethical publishing—particularly in the face of increasing pressure to publish—and avoid making hasty decisions driven by the desire for rapid dissemination. Furthermore, scholars should be equipped and encouraged to develop the ability to critically evaluate journals and distinguish legitimate outlets from deceptive ones. Utilizing reliable verification tools is a key strategy in this process (Yoo, 2025).The following section outlines several widely used tools that assist authors in identifying predatory journals:

4.1.1 Step-by-Step Evaluation Process for Identifying Potential Predatory Journals

To assist early-career researchers and those with limited experience in journal selection, the authors propose a structured evaluation process based on consolidated sources and practical publishing experience. This process is operationalized into four concrete steps, each comprising a series of binary ("Yes/No") questions designed to help determine whether a journal exhibits characteristics commonly associated with predatory publishing practices.

Step 1: Assess Initial Warning Signs

├─ Is the website poorly constructed or does it contain questionable editorial board information? (See Section 2.5)

├─ Is the author asked to pay publication fees before taking the next steps in the publishing process?

├─ Is there a lack of transparency regarding the peer review process, or does the journal promise rapid publication without formal review?

├─ Is the contact address associated with a generic email provider *(e.g., @gmail.com, @hotmail.com, @yahoo.com)* rather than a domain affiliated with a legally recognized institution or organization? (see Section 2.3 and 2.4)

├─ Do the published articles contain obvious grammatical or typographical errors, indicating a lack of editorial oversight?

└─ If **"Yes"** is selected for two or more of the above, the journal is likely predatory → Stop evaluation and consider withdrawing.

└─ If "No" or only one warning sign is observed → Proceed to **Step 2.**

Step 2: Verify Indexing Status

└─ Question: Is the journal in **Scopus** or **Web of Science** databases ?

├─ **Scopus**: Search for the journal on Scimago Journal & Country Rank (Scimagojr).

└─ Find the journal's name → No results → the journal is not indexed in Scopus.

├─Web of Science: Search using the journal name or ISSN in the Master Journal List.

└─ Find the journal's name/ ISSN→ No results → the journal is not indexed in WoS.

├─ Yes→ Continue to check the ***Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)***

└─ Question: Is the journal in DOAJ ?

├─ Yes → Proceed to **Step 3.**

└─ No → Consider consulting an expert for further review.

├─ No → Stop evaluation.

Step 3: Consult Independent Verification Tools

├─ Think. Check. Submit – A free checklist-based tool for evaluating journal reliability.

├─ Cabells' Predatory Reports – A subscription-based database listing suspected predatory journals.

└─ Question: Is the journal listed in a known predatory database or does it exhibit further suspicious indicators?

├─ Yes → Terminate evaluation and select an alternative journal.

└─ No → Proceed to **Step 4.**

Step 4: Final Decision and Action

└─ If the journal has passed all of the above checks without raising concerns, the manuscript may be safely submitted.

└─ If the journal is confirmed to be predatory, authors should warn the community, for example they can report it by emailing journals@cabells.com with specific supporting evidence.

For a more comprehensive and up-to-date evaluation of journal credibility, researchers are encouraged to consult multiple reliable sources in addition to Beall's list. One such source is the Lacuna database, developed by the University of Montreal, which includes metadata on over 900,000 articles associated with questionable publishing practices (Siler et al., 2021). Additional tools such as Cabells' Predatory Reports and Think. Check. Submits. initiative are also valuable resources that support researchers in identifying trustworthy journals (COPE, 2016).

However, the journals not being listed in these databases do not necessarily imply that they are predatory (Siler et al., 2021). These tools should be viewed as complementary indicators rather than definitive judgments of journal quality. A newly launched journal may not yet appear on any "blacklist" but could still exhibit predatory behavior due to the inherent lag in identification and database updates. Conversely, some journals that have improved their publishing standards may remain on blacklists if there is no transparent mechanism for regular revision or feedback from the academic community (COPE, 2023).

4.1.2 How to Handle Submitted or Published Articles in Predatory Journals

If the author has submitted a manuscript, received acceptance, or even had the article published in a predatory journal before realizing its nature, handling the situation can be very complicated. However, according to advice from members of the COPE forum, authors should still make every effort to withdraw the article, even if this involves paying a withdrawal fee. If no copyright transfer agreement has been signed, the article may be rewritten using different wording and submitted to a legitimate journal. Ideally, this should be accompanied by an editorial note explaining the situation transparently. One COPE forum member shared an experience of sending a warning message to the predatory journal stating that legal action would be taken. In some cases, such journals may back down when faced with the possibility of legal consequences (COPE, 2016).

If the journal is clearly identified as predatory, authors are encouraged to proactively report it to databases such as Cabells' Predatory Reports by sending specific evidence to the email address journals@cabells.com (Linacre, 2020).

From such experiences, authors can draw valuable lessons, become more cautious in future submissions, and at the same time contribute to raising awareness and helping others avoid falling into similar traps.

4.2 For Regulatory Agencies

First and foremost, universities and research institutions should implement targeted training programs aimed at raising awareness of research ethics and equipping scholars with the ability to identify the characteristics and risks associated with predatory journals. Such programs are particularly crucial for early-career researchers, who may be more vulnerable to manipulation or exploitation (Yoo, 2025).

Several countries have taken proactive steps to address this issue. For instance, the Korea Institute of Science and Technology Information (KISTI)—a government-funded body—has launched the SAFE (Scholarly ecosystem Against Fake publishing Environment) initiative to strengthen the academic publishing landscape (Yoo, 2025). In Vietnam, the State Council for Professorship has compiled a discipline-specific list of reputable journals to guide academic evaluation (LawNet, 2024). An increasing number of universities and research organizations have introduced academic integrity regulations that explicitly discourage publication in predatory journals. In some cases, outputs published in such journals may not be recognized for academic purposes such as hiring, promotion, title evaluations, or research grant consideration (Tran Huynh, 2023). These stringent policies aim to disrupt the "symbiotic" relationship between predatory publishers and authors seeking effortless publication or engaging in academic "paper mills". Preventing the recognition of low-quality publications in academic assessments is also an effective strategy to deter such practices.

Governments and academic associations are called upon to collaborate in developing robust legal and institutional frameworks to sanction or eliminate predatory publishing. The Sydney Statement underscores the necessity of government intervention in this matter (Talley et al., 2024). A notable precedent is the United States Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) imposition of a 50 million USD fine on OMICS for publishing approximately 69,000 articles without proper peer review or editorial oversight (Masic, 2017).

In Vietnam, the State Council for Professorship continues to coordinate with the Ministry of Education and Training to expand mechanisms such as curated lists of reputable journals and training programs for researchers (LawNet, 2024). Research funding bodies—including the National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED), the KC-4.0 Program, and academic institutions—play a key role in enforcing compliance. Strict regulations are essential to prevent the acceptance of manuscripts published in predatory or low-quality journals. These may include disciplinary warnings and the establishment of blacklists for researchers who persist in submitting to such outlets despite repeated advisories.

However, regulatory approaches should also allow for flexibility and contextual consideration. Mechanisms should be in place to support researchers who have mistakenly published in predatory journals, offering them opportunities to reflect, enhance their academic standards, and continue their professional development. Additionally, the integration of technological tools—such as artificial intelligence for plagiarism detection and blockchain for ensuring editorial transparency—should be considered as part of a comprehensive solution.

5. CONCLUSION

Predatory publishing represents a critical threat to the integrity of academic scholarship. It undermines the credibility of the scientific publishing system, erodes public and institutional trust, and leads to a significant waste of research resources. This phenomenon has emerged as an inevitable consequence of the "publish or perish" pressure, compounded by a lack of awareness regarding proper academic publishing standards. When scientific articles are not subjected to rigorous peer review and editorial processes, they are more likely to disseminate false or low-quality information, thereby impeding the advancement of knowledge and its practical applications.

To address this issue effectively, researchers must proactively enhance their awareness and equip themselves with the knowledge and skills necessary to identify the warning signs of untrustworthy or predatory journals. At the same time, coordinated efforts among regulatory agencies, scientific institutions, and the academic community are crucial to foster a transparent and reliable publishing environment aligned with international standards.

Furthermore, the systematic collection and dissemination of official data on the financial damage caused by publications in low-quality journals would constitute a pivotal step. This would enable key authorities—such as the State Council for Professorship, the NAFOSTED funding, and relevant ministries and sectors—to compile "blacklists" of disreputable publishers and journals, while also implementing early-warning mechanisms within the scientific community. If such solutions are adopted in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, they can play a significant role in safeguarding academic integrity, enhancing the overall quality of scientific research in Vietnam, and generating momentum in the battle against the ever-evolving and elusive threat of predatory publishing—a "Hydra-headed monster" that continues to defy easy containment.

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