

Tuesday late morning session Track D, Tuesday, Sep 23 2025, 11:30-13:00

Location: Seminar 3

Session: Publication and Authorship

Chair: Hjördis Czesnick

OR-17

Predatory and papermill practices in a small predatory journal – A case study involving a journal with links towards Turkey, Pakistan and Iran

Wouter Vandeveld

KU Leuven, Belgium

Background: The Research Integrity and Ethics Unit of my host institution was contacted by a senior researcher, acting on behalf of four researchers who found out they were listed as joint authors of a paper they did not write and were not even aware of. Upon a closer look, the same study was also published in a different journal, in another language and with a different set of authors. After multiple emails to multiple persons at the first journal, the manuscript with the wrongful attribution of authorship was withdrawn, but no explanation was given on how or why the paper had been published in the first place.

This case raises clear issues of plagiarism and identity theft. It triggered me to look into the journal that published the paper with the wrongful attribution of authorship. A first, superficial screening identified several worrisome practices, which question the quality and intentions of the journal. Moreover, a further analysis of papers in the same journal suggested problems with a substantial proportion of its published work. To learn more on the modus operandi of this supposedly predatory journal, I decided to dig deeper.

Methodology: The information on the journal's website was analysed by comparing its current content against previous versions on the Internet Archive to evaluate the journal's evolution over time. In a complementary approach, all articles published by the journal (46 articles at the time of writing) were analysed using plagiarism detection software, combined with reverse text searches looking for specific phrases or results.

Results: I will present a qualitative and quantitative overview of my findings on the journal, its publisher and the articles published in the journal. I will, among others, illustrate the ease with which the journal switches publishers and engages in other forms of identity theft such as the listing members of the editorial board without their knowledge. I will show that some content is backdated to make it appear published at earlier dates to generate content for older volumes. Finally, my analysis of the individual papers will demonstrate identity theft, plagiarism and republication of identical papers in different journals.

Conclusion: It appears that fake papers are generated to provide content for the journal with the aim of making it appear trustworthy. Unfortunately, the backdating of content and the moving of articles across different issues makes it difficult to assess where and when duplicated papers were published first. Given that this case appears to be but only of many, together with the fact that maleficent journals will become better in evading detection, it is of utmost importance to get a better understanding of how these papermilling, predatory journals work.