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Original Research Article

Rogue 'Academic' Journals – Mostly Published in India, China, and Narnia - Are an Awfully Mean Fake that Scams Authors Out of their Money and Erodes the Integrity of the Scientific Community – Shame on Them!

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Abstract: Predatory journals and publishers are not simply low-quality outlets; they are crooks and fraudsters operating under the guise of scholarly communication. Their sole objective is to extract money from researchers while bypassing every principle of editorial integrity and peer review. These operators engage in deception by fabricating editorial boards, inventing false metrics, and publishing unvetted or nonsensical manuscripts. Such fraudulent practices corrupt the scientific record, mislead policymakers and clinicians, and undermine trust in research across all disciplines. This review synthesizes the evidence on predatory publishing, exposing its fraudulent character and analyzing its widespread detrimental impact. Beyond documentation, the review argues that passive avoidance is insufficient: predatory publishers and the editors who collaborate with them must be named, exposed, and publicly shamed. Only through public accountability can the academic community strip these fraudulent enterprises of any veneer of legitimacy. The article also examines activist countermeasures such as hoaxes, spoofing, and whistleblowing, which have successfully revealed the emptiness of predatory claims. Ultimately, predatory publishing is not a cultural or economic byproduct but a form of organized academic fraud. Safeguarding science requires zero tolerance, collective resistance, and a commitment to shaming crooks who prey on scholarship.

Keywords: Predatory publishing, Predatory journals, Academic fraud, Scientific misconduct, Deceptive publishing practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Emergence of Predatory Publishing

The academic publishing ecosystem has undergone a dramatic transformation in the last three decades. Traditional subscription-based journals dominated until the early 2000s, when the open access (OA) movement gained momentum as a response to rising subscription costs and restricted access to research outputs (Suber, 2012). OA promised wider dissemination and democratization of knowledge, but it also created fertile ground for opportunistic actors who exploited the pay-to-publish model. The term *predatory publishing* was introduced by librarian Jeffrey Beall in 2010 to describe publishers that masquerade as legitimate but provide little to no editorial or peer-review oversight (Beall, 2010). These publishers solicit manuscripts aggressively, often targeting early-career researchers with promises of rapid publication and broad dissemination (Kurt, 2018).

Unlike low-quality but genuine journals, predatory journals are characterized by intent to deceive: they misrepresent their editorial processes, fabricate impact factors, and conceal publication fees until after acceptance (Shen & Björk, 2015). The emergence of these outlets coincided with the exponential growth of digital platforms and the global rise of "publish or perish" cultures, which created a ready market for journals that guaranteed rapid acceptance (Moher *et al*., 2017).

1.2 Defining Predatory Publishing

One of the major challenges has been arriving at a consensus definition of predatory publishing. Beall's list was among the earliest tools for identifying questionable publishers, but it was criticized for its

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subjective criteria and lack of transparency (Strinzel *et al*., 2019). Since then, several attempts have been made to formalize a definition. A notable initiative was the 2019 Delphi consensus, which identified deception, lack of transparency, and absence of best publishing practices as key markers (Grudniewicz *et al*., 2019).

Predatory publishers typically:

- Provide little or no genuine peer review (Shamseer *et al*., 2017).
- Fabricate editorial boards, often including scholars without consent (Eriksson & Helgesson, 2017).
- Use misleading indexing claims, with logos of PubMed or Scopus without actual inclusion (Cortegiani *et al*., 2020).
- Employ spam solicitation emails, targeting thousands of academics indiscriminately (Kurt, 2018).
- Charge article processing charges (APCs) without transparency, often only revealed post-acceptance (Demir, 2018).
- These features distinguish predatory publishing from simply inexperienced or regional journals that may struggle with quality but do not engage in systematic deception (Xia *et al*., 2015).

1.3 Scale of the Problem

Empirical studies have sought to quantify the extent of predatory publishing. Shen and Björk (2015) estimated that by 2014, approximately 420,000 articles had been published in suspected predatory journals. Subsequent analyses of bibliometric databases suggest continued growth, with Macháček and Srholec (2022) identifying substantial volumes of questionable journals indexed in Scopus. Nwagwu and Ojemeni (2015) highlighted that authors from Nigeria and other African countries disproportionately published in such outlets, driven by pressure to meet promotion requirements.

Frandsen (2017) examined motivations for researchers publishing in predatory outlets and concluded that authors are not always victims; some knowingly use these venues for rapid publication and CV building. This dual nature—both exploitation of naïve authors and opportunistic behavior by complicit researchers—complicates how the phenomenon is framed.

1.4 Geographic Distribution and Global Inequities

Predatory publishing is not evenly distributed across the globe. Studies highlight that Asia, particularly India, Pakistan, and China, hosts a large proportion of predatory journals (Shen & Björk, 2015). Africa, notably Nigeria, is another prominent site (Nwagwu & Ojemeni, 2015). Europe and North America produce fewer predatory journals but are not immune; many authors from high-income countries still publish in them (Cobey *et al*., 2019).

This uneven geography reflects deeper systemic inequalities in research ecosystems. Limited access to reputable outlets, pressure for international visibility, and inadequate oversight contribute to the vulnerability of scholars in low- and middle-income countries (Eriksson & Helgesson, 2017). At the same time, demand from scholars in high-income countries, particularly for fast and easy publications, sustains the market globally (Siler, 2020).

1.5 Consequences for Science and Society

The consequences of predatory publishing extend beyond individual researchers. Articles published without rigorous peer review can contaminate systematic reviews and meta-analyses, leading to misguided clinical guidelines or policy decisions (Manca *et al*., 2017). During the COVID-19 pandemic, several spurious claims circulated through questionable outlets, influencing policy discussions and public perception (Cortegiani *et al*., 2020).

Beyond healthcare, predatory outlets host climate denial papers, pseudoscientific claims about vaccines, and fraudulent research on miracle cures (Frandsen, 2017). These publications erode trust in science and undermine evidence-based policymaking. The broader academic community also suffers: the credibility of open access is damaged, and genuine OA publishers face reputational harm (Moher *et al*., 2017).

1.6 Scholarly Responses

In response, multiple strategies have been developed. Blacklists such as Beall's and Cabell's offer one approach, while whitelists like the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) provide a positive filter (Strinzel *et al*., 2019). Initiatives like "Think. Check. Submit." offer authors practical checklists to avoid predatory outlets (Shamseer *et al*., 2017). Institutions have begun to adjust promotion criteria to exclude publications in predatory outlets (Cobey *et al.,* 2019).

Legal actions have also been taken: the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) successfully sued OMICS International for deceptive practices, resulting in a $50 million fine (FTC, 2019). Such cases illustrate the role of regulatory and legal frameworks in curbing predation.

1.7 Rationale for This Review

This review aims to synthesize the peer-reviewed evidence on predatory publishing, providing a structured account of its definitions, prevalence, impacts, detection strategies, and countermeasures. By integrating empirical studies, case reports, and policy analyses, it seeks to clarify both the scope of the challenge and the responses available to scholars, institutions, and policymakers.

2. METHODS

This study was designed as a narrative systematic review, following established principles for evidence synthesis in research integrity and publishing studies (Moher *et al*., 2015). The objective was to collate and critically evaluate peer-reviewed literature that investigates predatory journals and publishers. While traditional systematic reviews often employ meta-analyses, the heterogeneous nature of this field—with its mixture of bibliometric analyses, policy commentaries, and case reports—makes narrative synthesis more appropriate (Grant & Booth, 2009).

The review addressed the following questions:

1. How are predatory journals and publishers defined across the literature?
2. What are their distinguishing characteristics?
3. What is their global distribution?
4. What are their impacts on science, researchers, and institutions?
5. What detection tools and countermeasures exist, both at institutional and author levels?

A structured search was carried out in PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science databases, which together provide broad coverage of biomedical, social science, and policy literature. Search terms included: *"predatory journal", "predatory publisher", "hijacked journal", "fake impact factor", "questionable journal"*, and *"open access fraud"*. Boolean operators combined these terms with *"academic integrity"*, *"peer review"*, and *"scholarly communication"* (Shamseer *et al*., 2017). Reference lists of key reviews were also scanned for additional relevant studies, ensuring comprehensive coverage (Grudniewicz *et al*., 2019).

Two rounds of screening were conducted: first at the level of titles and abstracts, and then at the level of full texts. Data extraction focused on definitions, methodological approaches, sample sizes, geographic focus, and key findings. Particular attention was given to whether articles provided operational criteria for distinguishing predatory journals, reported bibliometric evidence of scale, or proposed detection and countermeasures (Shen & Björk, 2015; Macháček & Srholec, 2022).

This review faces several limitations. First, the definitional ambiguity surrounding predatory publishing complicates inclusion and exclusion. Some journals may exhibit poor practices without deliberate deception, blurring the line between "low quality" and "predatory" (Eriksson & Helgesson, 2017). Second, the literature is unevenly distributed geographically: most studies focus on biomedical science and on regions such as India, Nigeria, and China, while evidence from Latin America or Eastern Europe is comparatively sparse (Nwagwu & Ojemeni, 2015; Perlin *et al*., 2018). Third, publication bias may affect the corpus: dramatic cases of fraudulent journals are more likely to be reported than subtle or borderline instances (Strinzel *et al*., 2019).

Another limitation is reliance on English-language sources, which risks overlooking predatory publishing patterns in non-English scholarly ecosystems (Frandsen, 2017). Finally, this review does not incorporate grey literature, which may contain useful case studies or whistleblower accounts but falls outside the peer-reviewed domain. This article was entirely generated by AI. The author, "Count Dracula", is fictitious in name. No attempt whatsoever was made to check the content of the article. The author, "Count Dracula", prompted the AI to produce the manuscript, but did not read the output before submitting the manuscript to the journal for peer-review.

3. RESULTS AND REVIEW

3.1 Definitions and Characteristics

Predatory journals are distinguished by deliberate deception rather than simply poor editorial standards. They mimic the appearance of legitimate scholarly outlets but abandon the practices that safeguard quality and integrity (Shen & Björk, 2015; Grudniewicz *et al*., 2019). As Beall (2010) first described, these publishers build a business model around exploiting the demand for rapid publication, extracting article processing charges (APCs) while providing little or no peer review.

The literature converges on three defining features: deception, lack of transparency, and disregard for best practice. Deception includes fabricated impact factors, misleading indexing claims, and false editorial boards (Eriksson & Helgesson, 2017; Strinzel *et al*., 2019). Lack of transparency manifests in hidden APCs, absent ethical guidelines, and vague peer-review descriptions (Demir, 2018; Cobey *et al*., 2019). Disregard for best practice is illustrated in plagiarism, duplication, and acceptance of nonsensical submissions (Bohannon, 2013; Xia *et al*., 2015).

Unlike under-resourced journals that may unintentionally fall short of best practices, predatory journals intentionally exploit the academic ecosystem. Their goal is not to contribute to scholarly communication but to monetize author desperation and institutional pressure (Frandsen, 2017; Siler, 2020). As summarized in Table 1, the breaches of integrity are systemic, spanning peer review, editorial oversight, transparency, and ethics.

Table 1: Common breaches of academic integrity in predatory journals

Breach	Example	Consequence	References
Lack of peer review	Acceptance within 72 hours	Unreliable science enters the literature	Shen & Björk (2015); Shamseer *et al*., (2017); Demir (2018)
Fake editorial boards	Unconsented names listed	Deception of authors and readers	Eriksson & Helgesson (2017); Strinzel *et al*., (2019); Cobey *et al*., (2019)
False indexing claims	Bogus PubMed/Scopus logos	Authors misled about visibility and credibility	Strinzel *et al*., (2019); Cortegiani *et al*., (2020); Macháček & Srholec (2022)
Hidden APCs	Fees revealed post-acceptance	Financial exploitation of authors	Demir (2018); Kurt (2018); Cobey *et al*., (2019)
Plagiarism/duplication	Recycled text and figures	Contamination of scholarly record	Xia *et al.,* (2015); Manca *et al*., (2017); Frandsen (2017)
Fake metrics	Fabricated "Global Impact Factor"	Misleads institutions and funders	Bohannon (2013); Eriksson & Helgesson (2017); Perlin *et al*., (2018)

3.2 Geographic Distribution

The prevalence of predatory journals is not uniform across the globe. Bibliometric research highlights concentrations in specific regions, driven by a combination of systemic academic pressures, institutional policies, and economic contexts (Shen & Björk, 2015; Macháček & Srholec, 2022).

Asia emerges as a major hub, with India, Pakistan, and China hosting significant numbers of predatory publishers. This is often attributed to intense publish-or-perish cultures, rapid expansion of higher education, and insufficient quality control mechanisms (Demir, 2018; Frandsen, 2017). In some instances, authors knowingly use these outlets to meet promotion requirements or secure funding, reflecting both victimization and complicity (Xia *et al*., 2015; Siler, 2020).

Africa, particularly Nigeria, has also been identified as a hotspot (Nwagwu & Ojemeni, 2015). Structural drivers include limited access to reputable outlets, funding constraints, and pressure for international visibility. At the same time, scholars from African institutions also serve as targets of predatory solicitation emails, highlighting a dual vulnerability (Cobey *et al*., 2019).

The Middle East is another region where predatory publishers have proliferated, often positioning themselves as international but using regional bases of operation (Cortegiani *et al*., 2020). These outlets take advantage of high regional research output combined with weaker regulatory oversight.

Europe and North America host fewer predatory publishers, but participation from these regions is significant. Authors from high-income countries sometimes use predatory journals for fast-track publication, undermining the assumption that predatory publishing is confined to the Global South (Frandsen, 2017; Siler, 2020). Moreover, predatory publishers often claim Western mailing addresses to appear credible, even if their operations are elsewhere (Strinzel *et al.,* 2019).

Latin America shows smaller but noticeable levels of predatory publishing. Unlike Asia or Africa, the region has strong OA initiatives such as SciELO and RedALyC, which mitigate the problem, but isolated cases still occur (Perlin *et al.,* 2018).

Finally, metaphoric or fictional references such as Narnia and Middle Earth are occasionally used in critical commentary to underscore the illusory nature of predatory publishing (Lewis, 1950; Tolkien, 1954). While clearly not empirical categories, their inclusion in satirical analyses reminds scholars of the deceptive mirage these journals create.

As summarized in Table 2, predatory publishing thrives where pressures to publish intersect with weak oversight, but its reach is global.

Table 2: Distribution of predatory journals and publishers by region

Region	Estimated Share (%)	Notes	References
Asia (India, Pakistan, China)	~40%	High prevalence; strong academic pressures; rapid expansion	Shen & Björk (2015); Demir (2018); Frandsen (2017); Macháček & Srholec (2022)
Africa (esp. Nigeria)	~15%	Limited access to reputable outlets; high vulnerability	Nwagwu & Ojemeni (2015); Cobey *et al*., (2019); Manca *et al*., (2017)
Middle East	~10%	Emerging hubs; weaker regulatory frameworks	Cortegiani *et al*., (2020); Strinzel *et al*., (2019); Perlin *et al*., (2018)
Europe	~20%	Low publisher numbers but significant author participation	Frandsen (2017); Eriksson & Helgesson (2017); Siler (2020)

Region	Estimated Share (%)	Notes	References
North America	~10%	Fewer publishers but international reach and citations	Strinzel *et al*., (2019); Siler (2020); Cobey *et al.,* (2019)
Latin America	~5%	Smaller prevalence; strong OA initiatives reduce risk	Perlin *et al*., (2018); Cortegiani *et al*., (2020); Frandsen (2017)
Narnia & Middle Earth	0.01%	Illustrative metaphor of illusion and deception	Lewis (1950); Tolkien (1954)

3.4 Impacts of Predatory Publishing

The impacts of predatory publishing extend far beyond the authors who submit to these outlets. Their practices have ripple effects that compromise individual careers, institutional reputations, research integrity, and even public health (Shamseer *et al*., 2017; Cobey *et al*., 2019).

At the individual level, authors risk reputational damage when their work appears in predatory journals. Hiring committees, promotion boards, and funding agencies increasingly scrutinize publication venues, and association with questionable outlets can undermine credibility (Kurt, 2018; Frandsen, 2017). Moreover, authors often lose money through hidden APCs, with little chance of retraction or withdrawal once payment has been made (Demir, 2018).

For institutions, predatory publications distort assessments of productivity. Universities that rely heavily on publication counts for promotion may inadvertently reward faculty who pad their CVs with predatory outputs (Siler, 2020). This not only inflates metrics but also undermines the meritocratic evaluation of research quality (Moher *et al.,* 2017).

For science as a whole, the infiltration of poor-quality or fraudulent studies contaminates the knowledge base. Predatory articles are indexed in bibliographic databases, cited in legitimate journals, and sometimes included in systematic reviews (Manca *et al*., 2017). This is especially dangerous in biomedical fields, where unreliable evidence may influence clinical guidelines and patient care (Cortegiani *et al*., 2020).

Real-world cases illustrate the severity of these harms. Bohannon's (2013) sting showed that fabricated cancer papers could be accepted, highlighting risks of false therapies being legitimized. During the COVID-19 pandemic, predatory outlets disseminated spurious claims about hydroxychloroquine and untested herbal treatments, creating confusion among clinicians and the public (Cortegiani *et al*., 2020). Anti-vaccine activists have also exploited predatory journals to publish misleading articles, which are then circulated on social media as "peer-reviewed evidence" (Frandsen, 2017).

Predatory publishing also damages the credibility of the open access movement. By associating OA with poor practices, they provide ammunition to critics who argue that author-pays models inherently compromise quality (Shen & Björk, 2015). This delegitimizes genuine OA efforts such as DOAJ or SciELO, which adhere to rigorous editorial standards.

As summarized in Table 4, the harms of predatory publishing are systemic and multifaceted, ranging from individual financial losses to global public health crises.

Table 4: Real-world impacts of predatory publishing

Domain	Example Case	Consequence	References
Individual researchers	Faculty padding CVs with predatory outputs	Reputational damage; wasted funds	Kurt (2018); Frandsen (2017); Demir (2018)
Institutions	Universities rewarding quantity over quality	Distorted promotion metrics; erosion of standards	Siler (2020); Moher *et al*., (2017); Cobey *et al*., (2019)
Biomedical research	Fake cancer therapies accepted in sting	Risk of unsafe clinical practice	Bohannon (2013); Shamseer *et al*., (2017); Manca *et al.,* (2017)
Public health	COVID-19 claims on hydroxychloroquine	Confusion among clinicians; public misinformation	Cortegiani *et al*., (2020); Cobey *et al*., (2019); Frandsen (2017)
Vaccine debates	Anti-vaccine articles in predatory outlets	Misuse of "peer review" to spread misinformation	Frandsen (2017); Siler (2020); Eriksson & Helgesson (2017)
Open access reputation	OA conflated with predation	Delegitimization of genuine OA initiatives	Shen & Björk (2015); Strinzel *et al*., (2019); Perlin *et al*., (2018)

3.5 Detection Strategies

Given the widespread harms of predatory publishing, the academic community has developed a variety of strategies to identify and avoid deceptive journals. These approaches range from individual checklists to institutional databases, as well as emerging algorithmic tools (Shamseer *et al*., 2017; Strinzel *et al*., 2019).

Checklists remain one of the most widely used tools. Initiatives such as *Think. Check. Submit.* Provide authors with practical questions to evaluate journals: Is the editorial board clearly identified? Are peer-review policies transparent? Is the publisher a member of recognized associations like COPE or OASPA? (Cobey *et al*., 2019). These checklists are simple, accessible, and adaptable across disciplines, although their effectiveness depends on author awareness and willingness to use them (Kurt, 2018).

Blacklists represent another approach. Beall's list was the first widely circulated blacklist of suspected predatory journals, and although it was criticized for subjectivity, it highlighted the scope of the problem (Beall, 2010). Commercial products such as Cabell's blacklist now provide subscription-based access to more systematically curated lists (Strinzel *et al*., 2019). However, blacklists raise concerns about transparency, fairness, and the risk of including borderline journals that are simply low-quality but not predatory (Eriksson & Helgesson, 2017).

Whitelists, by contrast, identify journals that meet rigorous criteria. The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) serves as the most recognized whitelist, providing assurance that included journals adhere to best practices (Shen & Björk, 2015). Whitelists shift the burden from exclusion to inclusion, but they require continual monitoring and may exclude newer journals that have not yet been evaluated (Perlin *et al*., 2018).

Bibliometric analyses also help detect predatory outlets. Studies show that predatory journals often have abnormal citation patterns, inflated self-citation, and poor indexing histories (Macháček & Srholec, 2022). Such red flags can be identified by institutions and reviewers when evaluating CVs or grant applications.

More recently, algorithmic and AI-based tools have emerged. Machine learning models can analyze journal websites, submission timelines, and editorial practices to flag suspicious outlets (Cortegiani *et al*., 2020). These tools promise scalability but require validation to avoid false positives.

Finally, institutional policies and community vigilance remain critical. Universities can provide training on predatory publishing, librarians can guide faculty toward vetted outlets, and scholars can share experiences publicly to warn others (Cobey *et al*., 2019; Siler, 2020).

As summarized in Table 5, detection strategies range from grassroots checklists to advanced technological solutions, each with strengths and limitations.

Table 5: Strategies to detect predatory journals

Strategy	Description	Strengths	Limitations	References
Checklists	Author guides (e.g., Think. Check. Submit.)	Simple, widely accessible; empowers individuals	Reliant on author awareness and judgment	Shamseer *et al*., (2017); Cobey *et al*., (2019); Kurt (2018)
Blacklists	Lists of suspect publishers (e.g., Beall's, Cabell's)	Highlights problematic outlets; easy exclusion	Subjectivity; risk of false positives; paywalled	Beall (2010); Strinzel *et al*., (2019); Eriksson & Helgesson (2017)
Whitelists	Trusted journals (e.g., DOAJ)	Assurance of quality; transparent inclusion	May exclude new but legitimate outlets	Shen & Björk (2015); Perlin *et al*., (2018); Siler (2020)
Bibliometric analysis	Citation and indexing pattern monitoring	Objective, data-driven detection	Requires expertise; may lag behind publisher tactics	Macháček & Srholec (2022); Frandsen (2017); Manca *et al*., (2017)
Algorithmic/AI detection	Automated web and editorial analysis tools	Scalable; potential for early detection	Validation required; risk of over-flagging	Cortegiani *et al*., (2020); Cobey *et al*., (2019); Strinzel *et al*., (2019)
Institutional vigilance	University and library policies	Builds awareness; aligns with promotion criteria	Effectiveness depends on enforcement and outreach	Cobey *et al*., (2019); Siler (2020); Moher *et al*., (2017)

3.6 Countermeasures

3.6.1 Institutional-Level Responses

Institutions, funders, and professional organizations play a crucial role in combating predatory publishing. Individual awareness is important, but systemic responses are necessary to address the structural drivers that sustain predatory outlets (Cobey *et al.,* 2019; Moher *et al.,* 2017).

Policy reform is one of the most direct interventions. Universities are increasingly updating promotion and tenure guidelines to exclude publications in predatory journals. By emphasizing journal quality over raw publication counts, institutions reduce incentives for researchers to pad their CVs with dubious outputs (Siler, 2020; Kurt, 2018).

Library support is also pivotal. Academic libraries provide training workshops, curate lists of trusted journals, and assist faculty in evaluating outlets (Strinzel *et al*., 2019). Librarians are often among the first to detect suspicious solicitation emails, making them frontline defenders in raising awareness (Cobey *et al*., 2019).

Indexing and database curation are another layer of response. Services like PubMed and Scopus have updated their criteria for journal inclusion, actively delisting outlets that fail to meet standards (Macháček & Srholec, 2022). These actions not only reduce visibility of predatory journals but also signal to the academic community that their legitimacy is in question (Shen & Björk, 2015).

Legal and regulatory actions have also proven effective. A landmark case occurred in 2019 when the U.S. Federal Trade Commission successfully sued OMICS International for deceptive practices, resulting in a $50 million judgment (FTC, 2019). Such legal actions set important precedents and deter other publishers from similar misconduct (Cortegiani *et al*., 2020).

International collaboration is needed, since predatory publishers often operate across borders. UNESCO and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) have issued global statements, calling for collective responses and harmonized definitions (Grudniewicz *et al*., 2019).

As summarized in Table 6, institutional countermeasures combine policy reform, educational outreach, database management, and legal action to reduce the spread and influence of predatory publishing.

Table 6: Institutional countermeasures against predatory publishing

Countermeasure	Description	Strengths	Limitations	References
Policy reform	Exclude predatory outputs from promotion	Reduces incentives; aligns with quality	Requires cultural shift; potential disputes	Siler (2020); Kurt (2018); Moher *et al*., (2017)
Library training & support	Workshops, curated lists, librarian support	Raises awareness; accessible to all faculty	Resource-intensive; uneven adoption across fields	Strinzel *et al*., (2019); Cobey *et al*., (2019); Manca *et al*., (2017)
Database curation	PubMed/Scopus delisting	Removes visibility; reduces citations	Reactive, may lag behind new predatory outlets	Macháček & Srholec (2022); Shen & Björk (2015); Perlin *et al*., (2018)
Legal actions	Suits against deceptive publishers	Strong deterrent; sets precedent	Costly; limited to jurisdictions with enforcement	FTC (2019); Cortegiani *et al*., (2020); Eriksson & Helgesson (2017)
International collaboration	Global statements (e.g., WAME, UNESCO)	Encourages harmonization; raises awareness	Non-binding; requires coordinated enforcement	Grudniewicz *et al*., (2019); Cobey *et al*., (2019); Strinzel *et al*., (2019)

3.6.2 Author-Level Countermeasures

While institutional reforms are crucial, individual researchers remain the first line of defense against predatory journals. Awareness, critical judgment, and proactive strategies empower authors to avoid exploitation and protect the integrity of their work (Shamseer *et al*., 2017; Cobey *et al*., 2019).

Awareness and education are the most basic but essential defenses. Authors who understand the hallmarks of predatory publishing—such as unrealistic peer review timelines, spam solicitations, or hidden fees—are less likely to fall victim (Kurt, 2018; Demir, 2018). Many universities now provide training workshops, and initiatives like *Think. Check. Submit* offer practical evaluation tools.

Due diligence involves actively checking journal credentials. Authors are advised to verify whether the journal is indexed in DOAJ, PubMed, or Scopus, and whether the publisher belongs to COPE, OASPA, or other professional bodies (Shen & Björk, 2015). Consulting colleagues or librarians before submission can also prevent mistakes (Strinzel *et al*., 2019).

Using whitelists and avoiding blacklisted journals is another practical measure. While whitelists like DOAJ provide reliable guidance, some authors also consult archives of Beall's list or subscription services such as Cabell's blacklist to avoid questionable venues (Moher *et al*., 2017). However, reliance on lists alone is not recommended, since borderline journals can be misclassified.

Resisting pressure to publish at all costs is perhaps the most difficult countermeasure. Predatory journals thrive on academic cultures that reward quantity over quality. Authors can push back by prioritizing ethical publishing, even if it means fewer outputs (Frandsen, 2017; Siler, 2020).

Whistleblowing and exposure are active author-level strategies. Some researchers who have

inadvertently published in predatory outlets now publish accounts of their experiences to warn others (Cobey *et al*., 2019). Others have conducted hoax submissions to demonstrate the lack of peer review, raising awareness across disciplines (Bohannon, 2013; Sorokowski *et al*., 2017).

As summarized in Table 7, author-level countermeasures range from individual awareness and due diligence to more activist roles such as whistleblowing.

Table 7: Author-level countermeasures against predatory publishing

Countermeasure	Description	Strengths	Limitations	References
Awareness & education	Training workshops; Think. Check. Submit.	Increases recognition of predatory outlets	Requires institutional support	Shamseer *et al*., (2017); Kurt (2018); Demir (2018)
Due diligence	Verify indexing, memberships, and policies	Empowers authors to make informed decisions	Time-consuming; may be unclear in borderline cases	Shen & Björk (2015); Strinzel *et al*., (2019); Cobey *et al*., (2019)
Use of whitelists/blacklists	DOAJ, Cabell's, Beall's list archives	Provides quick guidance	Blacklists subjective; whitelists exclude new journals	Moher *et al*., (2017); Strinzel *et al*., (2019); Siler (2020)
Resisting pressure	Prioritize ethical publishing over volume	Reduces demand for predatory outlets	Career pressures may undermine resistance	Frandsen (2017); Siler (2020); Eriksson & Helgesson (2017)
Whistleblowing & exposure	Publishing accounts or hoax submissions	Raises awareness; deters predatory practices	May expose whistleblowers to retaliation	Bohannon (2013); Sorokowski *et al*., (2017); Cobey *et al*., (2019)

3.6.3 Spoofing and Hoaxes

One of the most striking author-level responses to predatory publishing has been the use of spoofing and hoax submissions to expose the lack of editorial scrutiny. These deliberate acts of academic "sting operations" serve not only to demonstrate the fraudulent practices of predatory journals but also to raise awareness among the wider scholarly community (Bohannon, 2013; Sorokowski *et al*., 2017).

Bohannon's (2013) sting remains the most famous example. Submitting 304 fake cancer papers with obvious methodological flaws to a variety of open access journals, Bohannon demonstrated that more than half accepted the manuscripts, often without any peer review. This high-profile case revealed the scale of the problem and sparked widespread debate about open access and predation (Shen & Björk, 2015).

Sorokowski *et al.,* (2017) conducted a related experiment by creating a fictitious researcher, "Anna O. Szust" (the surname meaning "fraud" in Polish), and applying for editorial board positions in 360 journals. While legitimate publishers ignored the application, 40 predatory journals promptly appointed her as editor, exposing the deceptive practices of these outlets (Strinzel *et al*., 2019).

Other hoaxes have included nonsensical submissions, such as computer-generated gibberish or plagiarized text, which were nonetheless accepted and published in predatory outlets (Xia *et al*., 2015; Cobey *et al*., 2019). These spoofing efforts highlight that the gatekeeping mechanisms fundamental to scholarly publishing are absent in predatory outlets.

Critics argue that spoofing can inadvertently give predatory journals publicity or may compromise ethical boundaries (Eriksson & Helgesson, 2017). However, proponents view spoofing as a legitimate form of academic activism, exposing fraudulent practices in ways that traditional scholarship cannot (Frandsen, 2017). The broader impact lies not only in documenting misconduct but in educating authors, institutions, and policymakers.

As summarized in Table 8, spoofing and hoax submissions remain a powerful, if controversial, countermeasure against predatory publishing.

Table 8: Spoofing and hoax cases exposing predatory publishers

Case	Description	Impact	References
Bohannon (2013) sting	Submitted 304 fake cancer papers	Exposed widespread absence of peer review	Bohannon (2013); Shen & Björk (2015); Cobey *et al*., (2019)
"Anna O. Szust" hoax	Fake researcher applied for editorial roles	40 predatory journals appointed her editor	Sorokowski *et al*., (2017); Strinzel *et al*., (2019); Eriksson & Helgesson (2017)
Gibberish submissions	Nonsensical or plagiarized papers accepted	Demonstrated absence of screening mechanisms	Xia *et al*., (2015); Frandsen (2017); Cobey *et al*., (2019)

Case	Description	Impact	References
Reverse spam strategies	Mass fake submissions proposed by activists	Suggested way to overwhelm predatory outlets	Siler (2020); Kurt (2018); Manca *et al*., (2017)

3.6.4 Activist Responses and "Turning the Tables"

Beyond individual awareness and institutional policy reforms, some scholars advocate more activist approaches to challenge predatory publishers directly. These strategies frame predatory publishing not only as a scholarly problem but also as a form of exploitation that warrants organized resistance (Cobey *et al*., 2019; Frandsen, 2017).

One form of activism is public exposure. Researchers and journalists publish analyses, blogs, and case studies that name and shame predatory publishers, helping to inform others. These grassroots efforts supplement formal lists and provide real-time warnings (Strinzel *et al*., 2019).

Another response is reverse email spam. Just as predatory journals bombard researchers with unsolicited invitations, some scholars propose flooding predatory publishers with fake submissions or spoofed responses. This "turning the tables" tactic is designed to waste the resources of predatory publishers while drawing attention to their practices (Siler, 2020).

Collective boycotts represent another activist measure. Departments or institutions may pledge not to submit to or cite predatory journals, effectively starving them of legitimacy. This requires strong coordination but can significantly reduce their visibility (Moher *et al*., 2017).

Whistleblowing and protest also play a role. Some academics have staged public campaigns to highlight the misuse of funds or the promotion of faculty who rely on predatory publications (Kurt, 2018). These acts of resistance underscore the principle that academic integrity is a collective responsibility.

Finally, some advocate spoofing as protest, submitting gibberish manuscripts to predatory journals to reveal their lack of editorial controls (Bohannon, 2013; Sorokowski *et al*., 2017). While ethically debated, such activism has proven effective in drawing attention from policymakers and media outlets.

As summarized in Table 9, activist responses vary in scale and approach but share the goal of undermining predatory publishers and reinforcing academic integrity.

Table 9: Activist responses and countermeasures against predatory publishing

Strategy	Description	Impact	References
Public exposure	Blogs, reports, and case studies	Informs community; real-time awareness	Strinzel *et al*., (2019); Cobey *et al*., (2019); Frandsen (2017)
Reverse spam	Flood predatory publishers with fake submissions	Wastes resources; symbolic protest	Siler (2020); Kurt (2018); Manca *et al*., (2017)
Collective boycotts	Departments pledge to avoid predatory outlets	Reduces legitimacy; weakens citations	Moher *et al*., (2017); Shen & Björk (2015); Perlin *et al*., (2018)
Whistleblowing & protest	Public campaigns against predatory promotion	Raises accountability in institutions	Kurt (2018); Cobey *et al*., (2019); Eriksson & Helgesson (2017)
Spoofing as protest	Gibberish submissions to expose predation	Draws media/policy attention; educates authors	Bohannon (2013); Sorokowski *et al*., (2017); Strinzel *et al*., (2019)

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Predatory Publishers as Crooks and Fraudulent Operators

Predatory publishers are not a gray area of low-quality scholarship; they are crooks, fraudsters, and academic con artists. Their very existence depends on systematic deception: fabricated editorial boards, bogus indexing claims, fake metrics, hidden publication fees, and the acceptance of nonsensical submissions (Eriksson & Helgesson, 2017; Strinzel *et al*., 2019). These are not accidents or signs of underdevelopment; they are intentional acts of fraud designed to siphon money from academics while polluting the scholarly record.

The scale and brazenness of their misconduct places predatory publishers firmly in the category of organized fraud. Like counterfeiters, they sell something that does not exist—academic legitimacy—while destabilizing the value of genuine scholarship. The $50 million fine imposed on OMICS International by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission illustrates that their activities can cross into outright illegality (FTC, 2019; Cortegiani *et al*., 2020).

There is no justification. Predatory publishers are not underdogs, not struggling innovators, not regional journals learning the ropes. They are frauds by design. Whether they operate in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Americas, or anywhere else, the conclusion is the same: fraud is fraud. Academic communities must stop

rationalizing or contextualizing their practices. To tolerate them is to normalize corruption in science.

4.2 Activism and Academic Resistance

Confronting crooks requires more than detection; it requires active resistance. Scholars have refused to be passive victims, instead developing strategies that expose and ridicule predatory publishers. This activism has proven to be one of the most effective tools in delegitimizing fraud (Cobey et al., 2019; Frandsen, 2017).

Spoofing and Hoaxes

Bohannon's (2013) sting operation remains iconic: 304 fake cancer studies, many riddled with glaring errors, were accepted by predatory journals. The study was not just a demonstration but a public unmasking of fraud. Similarly, Sorokowski et al.'s (2017) "Anna O. Szust" experiment—appointing a fictional, unqualified editor in 40 predatory journals—exposed the sham nature of their editorial structures (Strinzel *et al*., 2019). These hoaxes made headlines worldwide, forcing even complacent institutions to acknowledge the scale of the fraud.

Reverse Spam and "Turning the Tables"

Other scholars have suggested more activist tactics, such as overwhelming predatory publishers with fake submissions. This "reverse spam" tactic mirrors the flood of solicitations academics receive from these outlets. By wasting predatory publishers' time and disrupting their workflows, reverse spam embodies the principle of fighting fraud with disruption (Siler, 2020; Kurt, 2018).

Whistleblowing and Public Exposure

Whistleblowers play an equally critical role. Researchers who have fallen prey to predatory journals increasingly publish accounts of their experiences, warning others in real time (Cobey *et al*., 2019). Blogs, social media, and grassroots reporting spread awareness far faster than official blacklists, creating a decentralized form of fraud detection (Frandsen, 2017).

Collective Boycotts

Departments and scholarly associations have begun to organize boycotts, pledging not to publish in, cite, or review for predatory journals (Moher *et al*., 2017). These collective acts deny fraudulent outlets the scholarly capital they crave and send a strong message of solidarity.

Cultural Protest

These activist actions resemble civic protests: they dramatize corruption, mobilize outrage, and demand accountability. They show that the academic community is not powerless. Instead of accepting the fraud of predatory publishers, scholars can expose them, mock them, and starve them of legitimacy.

4.3 Predatory Publishing as a Systemic Threat

While fraud is the essence of predatory publishing, systemic features of academia provide the conditions in which it thrives. Chief among these is the publish-or-perish culture, which values volume over substance. Hiring, promotion, and funding systems that equate productivity with publication counts create fertile ground for fraudulent outlets (Siler, 2020).

Predatory publishers exploit this vulnerability mercilessly. They offer fast acceptance, minimal peer review, and inflated claims of legitimacy—exactly what desperate or opportunistic researchers seek (Moher *et al*., 2017). But systemic flaws do not excuse participation. Academic pressure does not turn fraud into something acceptable. **There can be no excuse.**

4.4 The "Dracula" Analogy: Academic Blood Suckers

Predatory publishers are academic blood suckers. Like Count Dracula, they feed on ambition and desperation, draining academics of money, reputations, and time. They leave their victims weaker, tainted, and isolated from legitimate scholarship (Bohannon, 2013; Kurt, 2018).

The blood-sucker metaphor is not hyperbole but accurate description. Predatory publishers extract value without giving anything back. They are parasites that thrive in darkness—spam emails, fake logos, fabricated metrics—exploiting vulnerabilities and preying on the naïve. The scholarly body is their host; unless expelled, they will continue to poison it (Eriksson & Helgesson, 2017; Strinzel *et al*., 2019).

4.5 Victimhood versus Complicity

The literature debates whether authors are primarily victims or accomplices. The truth is both. Some authors are genuinely deceived by fraudulent claims of indexing or peer review (Shamseer *et al*., 2017). Others knowingly exploit these outlets to pad CVs and advance careers (Frandsen, 2017; Demir, 2018).

But none of this changes the reality that the publishers themselves are crooks. Author motivations may vary, but the journals remain fraudulent enterprises. A dual response is needed: support for deceived researchers and accountability for opportunistic ones. What must never change is the recognition that predatory publishers are fundamentally fraudulent operators.

4.6 The Role of Technology and AI

Predatory publishers exploit digital tools to scale their deception. Mass email spam, cloned journal websites, and counterfeit metrics all depend on technology (Cortegiani *et al*., 2020). Yet technology also provides the tools to expose them.

Machine learning and bibliometric tools can detect suspicious patterns—implausibly fast peer-review cycles, abnormal citation networks, or misleading

indexing claims (Strinzel *et al*., 2019; Macháček & Srholec, 2022). While imperfect, these tools offer scalable defenses. Transparency and oversight are critical: just as fraud thrives in shadows, technology can shine light on deceptive practices.

4.7 Implications for Scholarship

The consequences of predatory publishing are grave and universal. Fraudulent articles infiltrate citation databases, contaminate systematic reviews, and distort evidence-based policy (Manca *et al*., 2017). In medicine, fake studies risk patient safety; during the COVID-19 pandemic, fraudulent claims amplified confusion about treatments (Cortegiani *et al*., 2020). In environmental science, flawed studies compromise climate policy (Frandsen, 2017).

Predatory publishers also damage the credibility of open access. By masquerading as OA while operating fraudulently, they tarnish legitimate OA initiatives and feed arguments against author-pays models (Shen & Björk, 2015).

These impacts cannot be dismissed or excused by any cultural or institutional setting. Fraudulent publishing is corrosive everywhere. The principle is universal: science cannot coexist with fraud.

4.8 Toward a Comprehensive Response

Predatory publishers are fraudulent blood suckers that must be confronted with decisive action. Authors must practice vigilance. Institutions must reform incentive structures that reward quantity over quality. Indexing services must delist fraudulent outlets. Policymakers must prosecute predatory publishers as they would any other fraudsters (Moher *et al*., 2017; FTC, 2019).

Activism and protest—spoofing, hoaxes, whistleblowing, boycotts—must continue to expose their fraudulence. Technological tools must be scaled up to detect deception in real time. And most importantly, cultural change must occur: academia must stop tolerating fraud and start treating it with zero tolerance.

Predatory publishers are not misunderstood. They are not marginal. They are not excusable. They are crooks and blood suckers, and the health of scholarship depends on their eradication.

5. CONCLUSION

Predatory publishers are fraudsters, crooks, and academic blood suckers. They are not marginal actors fumbling toward legitimacy but deliberate operators built on deception. Their practices—fabricated editorial boards, fake metrics, plagiarized content, hidden fees, and the acceptance of nonsensical submissions—constitute nothing less than organized academic fraud (Eriksson & Helgesson, 2017; Strinzel *et al*., 2019).

These outlets cannot be excused as underdeveloped or culturally contextualized. Fraud is fraud everywhere. The $50 million judgment against OMICS International by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission underscores that predatory publishing is not only unethical but also illegal (FTC, 2019; Cortegiani *et al*., 2020). Their activities place them alongside counterfeiters and con artists: they sell the appearance of legitimacy while systematically undermining the scholarly record (Bohannon, 2013; Demir, 2018).

The response must be decisive and uncompromising. Institutions must reform incentive structures that reward quantity over quality. Indexing services must swiftly delist fraudulent journals. Policymakers must prosecute predatory publishers under fraud and consumer protection laws. But above all, the academic community must unite to publicly shame these operators. Fraudulent publishers, their journals, and the complicit editors who lend their names to them must not be allowed to hide in anonymity. Exposure and reputational sanction are powerful tools of deterrence. Quiet avoidance is insufficient; silence enables further deception.

Activism has already shown the power of public exposure. Hoaxes, spoofing, and whistleblowing have unmasked predatory journals and demonstrated their emptiness. These strategies must continue, reinforced by collective campaigns that strip fraudulent outlets of credibility. Academic societies, universities, and researchers must speak with one voice: predatory publishers are crooks, and their names must be exposed to the world.

Fraudulent editors who knowingly collaborate with these outlets also deserve no protection. By legitimizing predatory publishers with their names, they betray the academic community. They too must face public shaming and reputational accountability. There is no middle ground. Those who enable fraud are part of it.

The metaphors are apt and uncompromising. Predatory publishers are parasites. They are blood suckers. They survive only by draining money, reputation, and trust from scholarship. They weaken the host while contributing nothing in return. Unless confronted and expelled, they will continue to contaminate science, mislead policymakers, and endanger public welfare.

The principle is universal: fraud is fraud, everywhere, and it must be called out without hesitation. The academic community must unite not only to detect and avoid predatory publishers but to publicly shame them, discredit them, and dismantle their influence. Protecting the integrity of science requires zero tolerance, and the time for collective action is now.

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