

Research Publishing through Open Access: Boon or a Bane

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Abstract

Publications in reputed journals are considered as the benchmark of an outstanding academic. The presence in the research world has become essential for the survival of present-day educationists particularly in the higher education sector of India. The paper focuses on the open access model of dissemination of the knowledge that is created, through these platforms both for references as well as the publication of the material. But the recent trends have shown a negative trend in the rise of fake and predatory journals in the pretext of open access as discussed here. The quality of the research publications has declined owing to the absence of proper monitoring measures by the concerned authorities. The researcher should be made aware of such dubious journals and should restrain from publishing in them. The paper also elaborates on the steps to go through to identify such fake journals and to make open access a boon to the community at large.

Keywords: Open access, Fake journals, Predatory Publications, Creative Common Licenses, Jeffery Beall, Open access initiatives, CARE list

1 Introduction

During the last century and the beginning of this century, active and credible research work happened in the scientific and medical fields. It took years for the work to be accomplished and the work was published in print journals which were the only option of those times. Publishing in the print journals of the 80s and the 90s would take years from submission of the work to its publication. The majority of the publishing houses concentrated their area of interests particularly in the west and developed nations. The journals were known for their credibility and integrity. But the visibility of the print journals was limited to the members of institutions that subscribed to the journals. The subscription fees for the journals were expensive and sometimes exorbitant for individual researchers/institutions of the developing countries, so these researchers take membership of the institutional facilities (libraries) to make use of the published materials. Publishing the articles and even getting access to the published materials was a laborious task during the print era of publishing research.

2. Is Open access – A boon?

With the onset of the digital media and with people resorting to the internet for all sources of information- the majority of them being free; journal publishers now turned to publish online too. Information became largely open-source which promised free availability and free for modification (like free software). Research becoming, increasingly interdisciplinary; the researchers could not depend on traditional print journals which concentrated on a particular discipline, for scholarly information. To satisfy their needs for the information it was not possible to shuttle between various libraries that subscribed to the journals on various disciplines. With the advent of the open access movement for information, a tremendous transformation happened in accessing scholarly information and publishing it. Information that is produced should be available for consumption. But with that in mind, a question that arises is –Is it for the betterment or will there be consequences for it?

2.1. Initiatives towards Open Access Movements

The open-access movement began in the early 90s. The notion flourished with the internet movement and that information is to be made freely available for the society for use without any fee.

2.1.1. Declaration of the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI)

In the year 2001, a meeting of the leading proponents of Open Access Society (OSI) was held in Budapest to deliberate on what can be open access and its impact. 'Open access' was defined as the free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself [1]. Self Archiving and Open access journals were used as a means to achieve this goal. Self archiving allows authors to store their refereed articles in repositories (sometimes their own) and users can access it from anywhere by using search engines. Open access journals allow disseminating articles widely and there is no subscription fee for these journals. Copyrights do not bind the information but would rather be used to ensure permanent access to the material. The ultimate goal was peer-reviewed open access journal accelerating research and education.

2.1.2 The Bethesda Statement of Open Access Publishing

The meeting held at Howard Hughes Medical Institute in Chevy Chase, Maryland April 2003 was built on the definition of BOAI. The Bethesda Statement specifies that copyright owners will grant users certain rights under licenses, and these rights shall be "free, irrevocable, worldwide, and perpetual." [2]. A license is a contract, with terms and conditions that describe permitted uses. It supersedes users' copyrights if it specifies terms and conditions that negate them.

One such right under the Bethesda Statement, which the BOAI doesn't specify, is the right to make derivative works. For example, works could be translated into another language without requiring permission [2].

Creative Commons Licenses

CC Licenses are public licenses allowing users to make changes to the work. There are 6 types of licenses CC BY, CC BY-SA, CC BY-NC, CC BY-ND, CC BY-NC-SA, CC BY-NC-ND.

CC BY (attribution); the most common license allows users to redistribute and create derivatives of the original work, provided credit is given to the author (e.g. translation works). Nearly 50 percent of the journal registered in DOAJ use CC BY.

CC BY-NC allows works to be modified but only for non-commercial purposes and CC BY-NC-ND lets redistribution of the work non-commercially but demanding the work remains unchanged; both CCs stipulate attribution to the creators. They are used by one fifth of the journals in DOAJ [3]. CC BY-SA, the share alike license; an open license dictates that the redistributed work use the identical terms of CC user rights already used by the original creator and CC BY-NC-SA permits the same share alike user rights on the redistribute work but for non-commercial purpose. The non commercial version (NC) and non derivative version (ND) of CC is restrictively less open in nature [4].

2.1.3. Berlin Declaration to Open Access on Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities

Berlin Declaration to Open Access on Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities was issued on 2003 in the conference on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities. It advocated policies that the authors are to store their works in open access repositories rather than self archiving and encouraged authors to publish in open access journals; with no price and copyright barriers.

2.2 Open Access Journals:

The various initiatives for open access have made open access journals strive towards being more open. The open access journals have the following characteristics:

- Scholarly information
- Online prints
- Quality control mechanisms like rigid peer reviewing done as in traditional publishing
- Generally, no fee subscribed to the readers.
- Versions of creative common licenses can be used by authors for copyrights, though this is a debatable issue in the open-access scenario.

2.2.1 Why publish in Open Access Journal?

When an article is accepted by a reputed open access journal, it goes through a rigorous peer review process before being published. Once it is published, it is available for the readers freely from the publisher's web site. The CC BY is prevalent where the works are redistributed or sometimes used by the readers in their work giving citations attributed to the author. From the authors' viewpoint, the work gains more visibility and gets more credit with the more number of citations received. There is concrete evidence that open access publishing is associated with higher citation rates [5]. From the readers' perspective, there are numerous articles on the topic that would be interesting to them which is freely available. Thrust in educational progress and scientific awareness together with inculcating a culture of scientific inquiry is the output of the open-access publishing. Today, the Directory of Open Access Journals, which indexes open access journals, has over 10,000 journals on its list, and 17 percent of scholarly journal articles are available open access [6, 7].

2.3 Need for Review processes:

There has been an exponential growth in the number of open access journals. To maintain the quality of the scholarly output, thereby upholding the publishing firm's credibility, the articles are reviewed by peer reviewers. The reviewers evaluate and validate the manuscripts before publishing by reading through the paper multiple times to ensure the quality of the paper. The manuscripts are then deemed as accepted or rejected by the reviewers. The reviewers chosen are generally an expert in the respective field. Fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism checks are done during the review process. The higher the ratio of retractions of articles will imply the stringent review measures adopted by the publishing house. Though this creates an overall improved research output focusing on quality and not the quantity of published work, but also scares away young and novice researchers as something unattainable.

2.3.1 Different Review Forms

Single Blind: The author is unaware of the identity of the reviewer but the identity of the author is not hidden from the reviewer. The anonymity permits the reviewers to give honest feedback about the manuscript. This is the most common review method.

Double Blind: The identities of both the author and the reviewer is kept anonymous-ensuring unbiased feedback.

Open review: Both the author and the reviewer identities are not concealed from each other. some journals prefer this mode, as the feedbacks would be more constructive, though rarely used currently. The author and the reviewer can work together to improve the quality of the paper.

3 Is Open Access – A bane?

India has a large higher education sector with 903 universities, 39,050 colleges and 10,011 stand alone institutions [8]. But none of the Indian universities are found in the first 200 rankings in the world's best universities[9]. Policies needed to be changed with the interest of radically changing the traditionally functioning higher education sector with an emphasis on research. This was an attempt to bring life to the prevailing stagnant system of education. With regard to this, Academic Performance Indicator point-based scores(API) was introduced in the year 2010 by the University Grants Commission. API made publications compulsory for the promotion of teaching faculties in Universities and Colleges as imposed by UGC. Publications were also made a mandatory criteria for the appointment of teachers at the entry-level for being considered for the teaching positions in the universities and colleges across the country. The UGC also dictates that research scholars are to publish two papers in peer reviewed journals for the award of the Ph.D. degree. Moreover, the added advantage in the form reputation, in the CV makes the scientists/researchers turn to publish papers in large numbers.

The institutions of higher learning like the IITs had always been the hub of research activities in India. Most of the funding agencies of the MHRD diverted their funds to them, expanding these centers of learning with high-end libraries and research laboratories that could compete with universities of developed countries. But this was not available to the larger section of the educational fraternity. Teachers and students of this larger section were rote learning in conventional colleges. No commendable research happened in these places. A policy like the API score introduced by the UGC was an attempt to inculcate research aptitude among the teachers and students. But the idea of extending it to colleges without giving proper infrastructure backfired. The growing pressure of publishing more from the government encouraged the copy-paste culture and the desperate teachers turned to falsifying information to make papers. Seeing an opportunity, dubious journals published these articles with little or no review.

Priority shifted from knowledge diffusion, the essence of open access publishing, to just numbers. Fake Journals and predatory publishers emerged in large numbers enticing authors with promises of publishing rapidly who were otherwise finding it difficult to publish because of the long wait owing to the peer review process in reputed journals. Publishing journals became the new lucrative business concentrating in countries like China and India and countless new publishing houses mushroomed. Studies showed that forty-two percent of the world's fake journal publishers are based in India [10].

3.1 Fake and Predatory Journals

On receiving several e-mails with invitations to submit articles in unfamiliar journals, Jeffrey Beall, a researcher from the University of Colorado conducted extensive research in predatory open access journals [11] following which he introduced the term Predatory Publishers in the year 2010[12]. According to Jeffrey Beall [13], “Predatory open-access publishers are those that exploit unprofessionally the author-pays model of publishing for their profit. These publishers typically have a low article acceptance threshold, with a false-front or nonexistent peer review process. They use deception to appear legitimate, entrapping researchers in submitting their work and then charging them to publish it”. Based on the work Beall created Beall’s List of potential, possible, or predatory scholarly open-access publishers [14] which is being updated regularly. He published his first list of predatory publishers in 2010 which is an authoritative list - which serious researchers refer, to identify the predatory journals and avoid writing in them. And in the year 2012, he posted his criteria for determining and evaluating publishers [15].

3.2 How to Identify Fake and Predatory Journals.

Listed here are some criteria put forward by Jeffery Beall to identify the fake journals:

- Most of the pretentious journals in India are found to have titles starting with “International Journal of.....”. Or would have the words Global, Asian, South Asian, etc included in the title. This is to mislead the researcher implying the journal is International [16].
- Fictitious editorial members whose names are included without their permission. The contact address and academic information of the members will not be provided.
- A poorly maintained website with mis-spellings, numerous grammatical errors, and dead links.
- The majority of the journals will have monthly issues and the number of papers published will go into hundreds every year.
- Though the journal claims to be international, the papers published will be mostly domestic.
- Publisher contact address and the place of publication would be hidden.
- The time taken to publish the papers would minimal though the journals claim to follow a peer review process like single blind or double blind.
- The papers published would be nothing related to the discipline been advertised on the website and some claim to be multidisciplinary to accommodate all types of papers.
- Claims of taking minimal article processing charge and once the paper is accepted and copyrights made, surprise authors with more charges for processing [17].
- Publish papers that have already been published in other journals.
- Falsified Impact factors and other metrics and no proper indexing.

3.3 Measures to counter publishing in fake and predatory journals:

The alarming rise of publications by Indian authors in fake journals that have questionable credibility prompted the UGC to take measures to curb the unprecedented rise. UGC introduced a CARE list of legitimate journals in which the academicians could publish. Earlier it had asked the universities to recommend journals for the list - allowing some poor quality publications to slip through the list. Once questions were raised, 4,305 journals were removed from the original 30,000 journals from the CARE list [18]. The API has also been scrapped by the UGC, alleviating the pressure to publish in the fraudulent journals, and teachers can focus more on teaching than research in colleges[19]. Furthermore, steps have been taken to educate the scholars on the ethics of research by including this in the compulsory course work for the research.

3.4 What should the researchers, indexing agencies and other stakeholders do?

Academicians must refrain from publishing in the fraudulent journals, though the offers might be tempting enough. They can educate themselves to be internet savvy to identify the phonies in business before publishing. The indexing agencies like Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) should strengthen the journal approval processes and the inclusion criteria thus ruling out the possibility of including blacklisted journals[11]. The guidelines of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) should be followed strictly in the ethical aspects of the research publications [20] and the government should impose a ban on the identified fake journals.

4 Conclusion

Open access, in reality, is a boon to the educational aspirants for knowledge dissemination if taken in letter and spirit. But the inherent nature of man is to find an easy way out causing the fake journals to flourish. These publishers cannot entirely be blamed as even experienced scholars, many a time publishes in them. The awareness and the precautionary measures have helped to curb the effects.

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