

Communication

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Communication

Novel Aspects of Open-Access / Predatory Science Publishing: *Samizdat** Avenue for Novel Ideas and the Concept of Predatory Editors

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Abstract

Two fundamentally new approach is presented to the ongoing and heated debate around the predatory division of the open access science publishing. 1. The somewhat relaxed peer-review practices of some Open-Access / Predatory [OA/P] journals have an important, not widely recognized function: it makes possible to disclose novel scientific insights which are automatically censored by the paradigm-oriented or politically manipulated Scholarly / Academic (S/A) publishers. They can be the contemporary "*Samizdat*" [1] alternative for some original and daring scientists. 2. Much of the critic against OA/P journals is failing even if they are well founded. It can be changed by publicly recognizing each Editorial Board member of every predatory journal as Predatory Editors, i.e. *accomplices* [2] in the fraudulent, deceptive publishing practices.

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Observations and Discussion

A group of chief-editors, representing influential scholarly scientific journals, published recently a reminder for the necessity of actions against the so called "*predatory*" journals "*to protect their pray*" [3]. Journals misrepresenting themselves as scholarly journals for financial gain despite not meeting scholarly publishing standards [4] are called "*predatory*". The targeted authors and reviewers are called "*pray*" because they are misled by fake marketing statements of these "*pseudo entities*" and not getting the expected value for their money (Article Publishing Fee, APF). However this wild-life-analogy (predator & pray) under the shadow of the outstretched helping hand of the chief-editors of academic authority and moral superiority is grossly misleading and even patronizing.

The *predatory publishing* grown out of the very well received idea of open-access publishing. Some authors are ready to pay for speedy publishing, unlimited (electronic) distribution, free access to information/ideas by their readers and the unlimited right to unrestricted re-publishing by the author himself or anybody else. *Scholarly publishing*, on the other hand, is based on exclusivity practices, there some privileged person can gain accessed to the scientific information after paying a fee. It is largely publicly financed by university purchases of periodicals.

Both open-access/predatory [OA/P] and scholarly/academic [S/A] publishers are dependent on the attitude of their consumers toward their products. These publishers (on both side) are business professionals and not scientists, they are selling what the consumer want to have. For these persons there is 2 types of information: 'sellable and not sellable'. The categories 'true' or 'false' is irrelevant. The economic viability and legal acceptance of a publication is the publishers responsibility, meanwhile the scientific standard is (supposed to be) controlled and determined by the editorial boards of the respective publication.

There are obvious wrongdoings by some open-access journals which are belonging mainly to the misleading marketing, false representation categories of business law. Numerous very serious

efforts targeted some 'predatory' publishers, including the first, landmark lawsuit against a science publisher, OMICS Publishing Group, by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) for deceptive practices [5]. The U.S. National Institutes of Health sent a *cease-and-desist letter* to OMICS in 2013 [6]. What happened? OMICS is larger than ever and became the owner of another Indian-based publisher, the Pulsus Group. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulsus_Group].

The estimated number of 'predatory' journals is around 15,000 [7] and growing. (This is a very large number. The estimated number of fully open-access journals is ~ 20,000 [8]). No business is growing without demand (consumers) and the demand for open-access-publishing, including the predatory division, seems to be massive. This success of predatory journals can't be explained only by improving the deceptive capacity of these journals or by the successive stupidification of the scientists. Scientists are getting tired of some anachronistic practices of the academic journals, like the slow, ineffective review process, well noticeable decline in the quality of reviews, and the growing practice of prompt rejection of some manuscripts by a single authority, the chief editor, without any peer review. The strong influence of political doctrines and the publisher's soft-spine reaction is a very sad reality. The traditional academic independence, virtuous commitment to the scientific truth is crippled. Looking for alternative publishers is a natural reaction of any rational scientist, young or old. Especially when the "*publish or perish*" mentality is widely practiced by bureaucratic administrators of jobs and grants.

Open access publishing is the rising Sun and fresh breeze for many scientists. We recently experienced the effect of COVID on the cherished freedom of the expression of scientific opinion. Well known and widely respected leading scientists were silenced when they tried to publish critical remarks regarding the administration of COVID epidemic by the government authorities. Others quickly changed opinion adopting to the political wind. Less known scientists, practicing doctors, lost their medical license for opposing the state-ordered hysteria. The Open-access journals remained the only legitimate option for some brave (!?) scientists to tell to somebody, anybody, about their concern that "*something is very fishy around this "ones in the century pandemic"*" [9], it looks more like the "*ones in the century evidence fiasco*" [10].

The author of this letter admits that his lifelong commitment to scholarly publishing had been broken by the four years long failure and frustration caused by the all-covering censorship of COVID-critical scientists. Discovering the surprisingly liberal open access journals was a real climax for him and he honestly confesses that he intentionally used OA/P journals [initially not knowing that some of them were predatory] as his "*samizdat*" alternative to S/A forums, similarly to intellectuals in suppressed countries used self-published, uncensored and highly illegal underground papers to maintain some of their intellectual freedom and mental health under periods of dictatorship.

COVID is not the only example when academic publishers were forced (?) to behave like '*scholarly prostitutes*' of the "*political correctness*". There are historical stories associated with the names like Galileo, Copernicus, and Lysenko. Ones in the time academic science publishers recognized two kinds of science: Jewish and non-Jewish. Einstein was not mentioned as valuable scientist by any German scholars.

Criticizing open access journals or its predatory variants, from the Parnassus of Academic authority, for bitches in peer review proves, for selling publishing services for benefits is, - in the authors opinion - hypocrisy. Historical examples clearly document that publishers, editors and reviewers adopts to changing economic and political environment, no matter if they serve OA/P or S/A journals. Survive first and fight later.

Chief-editors or any other high officers of leading academic publishers have no jurisdiction to criticize any other publisher because they have no jurisdiction and because they are in the conflict of interest situation. OA/P and S/A publishers are competitors to each other. They are both fighting for good quality contributors (authors) and solvent consumers (readers). Discovering and punishing business related wrongdoing is the jurisdiction of law officers and not the competing editor in chief.

There is only one group of editors who has the jurisdiction, power and ethical duty to correct and punish an OA/P journal for violation of the standards of scientific ethic: and it is the Editorial Board of the respective journals. The Editorial Board members are not supposed to be only pretty dolls in the marketing display of science journals, but they are very powerful scientists with the power to lift or sink a publisher and they are backed up with the community of all other academic science editors, including the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, ICMJE [11]. It is surprising that an upset group of chief editors completely forget the role of their most obvious collaborators in improving the quality of open access journals, their closest colleagues sitting in the editorial boards of the targeted journals.

However the outsider editors have the jurisdiction and power to enforce the editors of OA/P journals to take more seriously their duty to the scientific community and actively work for the improvement of quality and ensure the acceptance of ethical standards of the OA/P publications. The legal power is given by the Civil- and Criminal Laws of every country. Please recognize that publishers and editors, especially the chief editors, can be regarded as collaborators, accomplices. Consequently, if a journal and publisher deserves to be called and treated as 'predator', the editors (accomplices) of this journal can be called and treated as "Predatory Editors". Therefore the author of this letter suggests the establishing of a public list of Predatory Editors, listing all editorial members of a OA/P publication as long as they stay and listed as editors or as far as their journal deserves to be called predatory.

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