

# Evolving Trends in Scholarly Publishing and Impact on the Monotony of Predators

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## Abstract

Open access (OA) journals have emerged in the past two decades and have influenced scholarly publications to a great extent, contributing to the benefits of OA publishing. The research focuses on the evolving trends of OA and the measures required to address the issue of exponentially growing predatory publishing. The study concludes the research by proposing measures for the scholarly world to address predatory publishing globally. The scope of the research is qualitative, discussing the fair publishing practices and implications of Plan S and open peer review. In the methodology, the study reviews the wealth of published literature in the discipline to decide the variables and impact on the dependent variable.

## Keywords

open access, predatory publishing, junk science, publication ethics, Plan S, open peer review

## Introduction

The landscape for OA publishing has been steadily developing for the past two decades. The open science revolution began in 1989, with the launch of the first open access (OA) journal, *Psychology* and now PubMed is listed with 30,000 OA journals. OA publishing has changed the dimensions of scholarly publishing.

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The publishing landscape has expanded from the research published in traditional subscription models to OA publishing models. Academics opt to publish in OA journals and pay high article processing charges (APCs) to achieve higher visibility and a wider dissemination of available research. Plan S is the major contributor to the open science movement in the 21st century, aiming to promote open science publishing. cOAlition S introduced Plan S in 2018 with an objective to make research content available immediately and fully OA. Plan S consists of 10 principles and a single objective that all academic publications which are result from funded research by public or private grants from any national, regional, research councils or funding bodies are openly available (cOAlition S, 2021). The legitimacy of OA publishing is supported by creative common policies, author-accepted manuscript policies, re-print servers and the recent development of open peer review. The evolution of open science significantly impacts academic publishing. According to Carl Malamud, 'Open should be a default, not the exception'. Leading publishers are also supporting the dissemination of knowledge without subscription firewalls and offering various OA publishing models. The Gold OA model is where the author pays APCs for freely accessible publications; the Hybrid OA model is where the author can publish funded open research in traditional subscription journals. Platinum OA is another model where an institute funds publication and authors are not required to pay any APCs. Over and above the OA publishing models, the Plan S movement for disseminating the knowledge in an open environment has culminated in transformative agreements between institutes and publishers for article fees so that authors do not pay any direct payment to the publisher for publishing an article with OA (Van Noorden, 2020). Transformative deals offer read and publish or publish and read models. Several institutes from Austria, Canada, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the USA have signed the transformative agreement in the last two years with the objective of supporting the OA movement (Transformative Agreements, 2020)

The rise of OA publishing is grappling with the challenges of predatory journals. The word 'predatory' is a disgrace to the research scientists in publishing. The predatory publishers prey on researchers for commercial benefits, mostly in Gold OA publishing models where the author is expected to pay APCs for publication. The quality of research is compromised as predatory publishers do not follow the desired standards of quality publishing. The impact of Jeffrey Beall's 2009 work is highly valued for its identification of predatory OA journals and publishers. He was the first to coin the term 'predatory' and release the blacklists. Jeffrey Beall coined the term 'predatory publishing' in 2008 (Koerber et al., 2020). Predatory publishing is a persistent challenge for the rise of OA publishing. Predatory open access (POA) journals follow unethical practices to trap scholars by sending spam emails, fake metrics, fake editorial boards and exploiting academics' identities, etc.

Along with the appreciation, Jeffrey Beall faced many controversies for his work on blacklisted journals and publishers. The list is maintained by an

anonymous scholar and is available in open source. More recently, Cabells has released *Whitelists and Blacklists*, available on a subscription basis for accessing their scholarly analytics (Koerber et al., 2020).

OA was instituted as a publishing model to beat the high costs of subscription journals. The study claims that more than 50,000 articles are published in POA journals across many disciplines (Xia, 2019).

While there is a tremendous focus on improving the research quality in OA, it is constantly challenged by exponentially growing predatory content that is published in open science. In OA publishing models, APC in hybrid OA models is most susceptible to predatory publishing.

The scope of the article covers the evolving landscape, research integrity for publishing ethics, best practices in academic publishing and has an enormous focus on peer review. The research also focused on author motivation behind the exponential growth of predatory articles, junk science created from predatory published content and the importance of blacklists and whitelists.

## Literature Review

Journals perform an essential role in recording research activity, and OA journals offer wider dissemination and visibility of the content without firewalls. Institutes follow a performance-based review system. Therefore, publishing in peer-reviewed and prestigious journals is mandatory for researchers' career growth. The role of commercial publishers is providing legitimate infrastructure for publishing, developing and broader dissemination of research. With the emergence of OA publishing, the major challenge with which the scholarly world is grappling is POA publishing.

OA publishing provides a platform for researchers to publish content without a firewall, which is unlike traditional journals where content is behind a firewall (Govindarajan & Dhanavandan, 2019). Research published in OA journals is freely available, whereas libraries are required to pay to access studies published in traditional journals. OA publishing has been growing for the past two decades (Rodrigues et al., 2020). Considering the numerous benefits of publishing research in an open environment and making research widely available, OA is the first choice of scholars (Perlin et al., 2018). While there are several benefits of publishing research through OA, the challenges are also steadily increasing. The major threat to an OA publishing model is the spike in predatory publications (Cortegiani et al., 2019). The research shall examine the published research to address POA publications and the factors contributing to the consistent growth of POA.

POA journals follow fraudulent publishing practices, claim to be legitimate and charge APC for publishing. POA journals do not follow required peer-review procedures and do not offer editorial services, etc. The word 'predatory' was first coined by Jeffrey Beall in 2008 and was followed by the release of the list for blacklisted publishers and journals. The reality is that the most discussed challenge of predatory publishing in academic publishing remained without an appropriate

definition (Krawczyk & Kulczycki, 2021). Research by Krawczyk and Kulczycki acknowledges the definition of the term ‘predatory’ in publishing by Grudniewicz et al. (2019). It also states that the definition fails to mention OA. Another paper by Krawczyk and Kulczycki (2021) defined predatory journals that exploit the Gold OA model, wherein the author pays APCs for publishing. Variations in the definitions published are needed considering the evolving scope of OA academic publishing and changing habits of predatory publishers to prey on researchers.

The organised review of the related literature focuses on the factors that influence the evolving trends in scholarly publishing to control the monotony of predators in the academic world. The following questions are evaluated for the study:

1. What is the research integrity in publishing, and would it help to reduce exponentially growing predatory publishing?
2. What are the evolving trends in scholarly publishing and the impact of the same in controlling predatory publishing?
3. What are the reasons for author motivation to increasingly supplement content to predatory journals?
4. Does junk science have a potential impact on research science and are there measures to address the problem?

Authors have reviewed the enormous content published in research articles, reports and case studies relating to evolving trends in scholarly publishing and the monotony of predators from the period 2017–2021. In collating the literature, the following three independent variables were examined:

1. Research integrity in publishing
2. Author motivation
3. Junk science

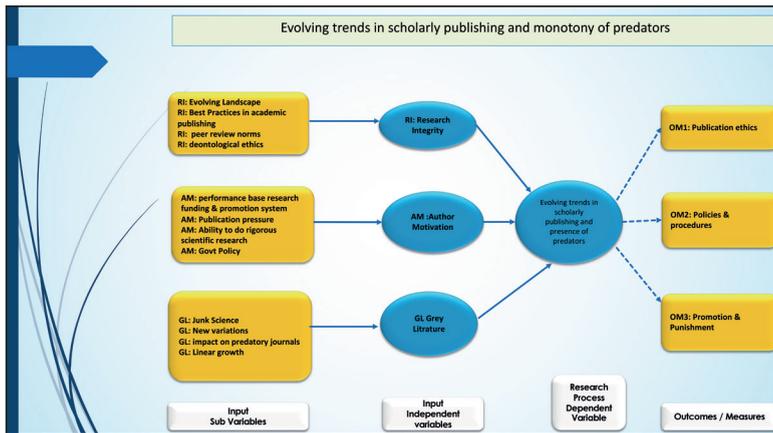
## **Methodology and Framework**

In the research framework, the three key independent variables are recognised for the impact of evolving trends in scholarly publishing on the monotony of predators. The study is the summary of the literature reviews mostly published between 2017 and 2021.

Research problems, key objectives, outcomes and gaps are mapped from the literature review of the published content during the designated period. It is worth noting that the research gaps from previous research addressed in the latest research are overruled in this study.

Referring to the research composition of independent and dependent variables, the study identified the research gaps and scope for future research to address predatory publishing and measures for eradicating it from academic publishing.

## Research Framework



## Discussion, Outcomes, Proposition and Relationship

### Research Integrity

Research integrity in publishing is most desirable for the quality outcome of scholarly research. Ethics and integrity in research publications have always been a topic of discussion in the publishing industry (Wright, 2016). Researchers, journal editors, reviewers, publishers and the scholarly community contribute enormously to ensure that research published in journals upholds optimum quality. The contributions in the directive have been outstanding, starting from the Committee on Publication Ethics, Retraction Watch, plagiarism check software, best publishing practices, peer-review policies, and open peer review. Academic literature on research integrity and misconduct increased exponentially. On the global scale, funding and consortium have been allocated for more research on the topic of research integrity (Bonn & Pinxten, 2019).

Open peer review is a recent development to ensure transparency in the peer-review process. Open peer review is regarded as a measure to uphold a high level of transparency and high standard of research quality (Krawczyk & Kulczycki, 2021). Publishers have supported the idea of open peer review from the scholarly community and have offered open peer-review models to numerous journals. Despite all the measures to ensure ethical and high-quality research, exponentially growing predatory OA publishing is posing a threat to research science.

The Plan S movement evolved transformative agreements from the past two years with 'publish and read' versus 'read and publish' models to promote open science. The move is also expected to impact the increased scope of predatory publishing in the future (Borrego et al., 2021).

Another research emphasis on deontological ethics indicates that the author chooses between right or wrong. It implies that the author has an obvious choice to select between predatory or non-predatory journals (Koerber et al., 2020).

Research suggests, when issuing an advisory notice, that predatory publishing has the capacity to complicate research evaluation and, therefore, effective allocation of research funding would be considerably impacted in many corners of the world. Developing countries aiming to embark on a technological catch-up trajectory need to take these intricacies more seriously than ever.

According to Cabell's reports, there were 13,000 predatory journals published in 2020 (Linacre, 2021). Another research study claims that predatory journals published 53,000 articles in 2010, while the number reached an estimated 420,000 articles in 2014, yielding a growth rate of 70% over a period of four years (Xia, 2019). Predatory publishing is an outcome of unethical practices and a lack of integrity in the publication of research. The aim of predatory publishers is purely commercial. Predatory publishing is the biggest threat to research integrity and research science in publishing.

The literature reviews on the subject indicate that research integrity in publishing is a mandatory requirement for disseminating quality content in the scientific world. Published literature emphasised the following factors that are critical in achieving quality output:

1. Best practices in academic publishing
2. Evolving landscape
3. Deontological ethics
4. Peer-review norms

*Outcomes.* The most important outcome of research integrity is consistently evolving standards of publication ethics. The landscape continues to grow for ethics and integrity in research. Best practices in academic publishing play the role of a fence for filtering the quality research. There has been enough emphasis on robust peer-review practices involving defined peer-review policies. In peer review, a minimum of two independent blind reviews are considered as ideal practice for research review. Best practice involves robust peer review; plagiarism checks; an online manuscript submission system for transparency in manuscript flow and peer-review practices; global standard content editing style; journal registration with cross-referencing and a DOI assignment for each article; and, last but not the least, the online hosting of the content. The Committee on Publication Ethics has set the standards for the publishing industry and are recommended for referral for ethical guidelines in research integrity. Deontological ethics is highly recommended for the quality output and most desired contribution to research science. In publishing practices, robust peer reviews are stressed mostly for quality publication in every sphere belonging to scholarly publishing. It is recommended to have a definite peer-review policy and mention the same in the submission guidelines and journal web page.

**Proposition 1.** Research integrity is supported by best practices in academic publishing, the evolving landscape and deontological ethics, and peer-review norms have had a significant relationship with predatory OA publishing, which has resulted in the outcome of research ethics.

## *Author Motivation*

Author motivation is boosted from a system wherein the quantity is preferred over the quality of research publication. Predatory journals have grown by 61.60% since Beall's list was introduced from the period of 2012–2016. Articles published in predatory journals yielded a growth rate of 70% over a period of four years, indicating that there is sufficient demand and supply of articles for publishing in predatory journals. Research by Xia included an economic analysis of predatory journal publishing to focus on the demand and supply relationship in a predatory publishing context. The demand for publications has shown a steady increase over the years, with an increase of about 69% from 1996 to 2014. The total number of journals published increased by 106.47%, from 40,000 to 100,000, from 1996 to 2016.

According to the research, scholars from developing countries mostly publish in POA journals (Frandsen, 2017). However, another study states that authors from developed countries like USA are also potentially publishing in POA journals in tourism and hospitality (Alrawadieh, 2020). Other research has indicated that POA publishers and authors publishing in POA journals are not only confined to developing countries (Erfanmanesh & Pourhossein, 2017).

According to Dr Erfan, the POA market was worth USD 74 billion in 2014 (Erfanmanesh & Pourhossein, 2017). The main revenue source is the research funding received by the scholars from the institutes. Publication in the academic world is considered as a contribution to science and motivates scholars to publish scientific research. The correlation of funding with research has also led to a flare-up in publications in the previous decades. 'Publish or perish' reflects the outlook of the institutes for the performance-based research funding and promotion system. The pressure of publication is unquestionably immense on the researchers for career progression, reward and recognition (Grimes et al., n.d.).

Research focuses on probable factors influencing scholars to publish in predatory OA journals. Peer pressure, tenure and promotion systems in the institutes add stress in the research community to raise the profile of their publications. The research investigates the challenges faced by Asian and European researchers in publishing their research papers (Eykens et al., 2019). The hypothesis is further supported by other research conducted in the area (Yeoh et al., 2017). Another study investigates the hypothesis that not only young scholars are prey in the POA publications. Senior scholars are also presumed to be publishing in POA journals (Erfanmanesh & Pourhossein, 2017).

Research also reveals that developing countries contribute to the highest volume of research in POA journal growth. This trend has been led by India, followed by Iran, and then by developed countries, such as USA and Japan. POA journals are a global threat, irrespective of where they are spread across disciplines and geography (Perlin et al., 2018). Research states that the scholars who struggle to get published in quality journals during their career progression probably become the predators of predatory journals (Mills & Inouye, 2021). The rejection in the peer-review stage also encourages newer authors to choose a journal with limited peer review or no peer review. There is enough evidence that the

contribution of developing countries to POA journals has potential that cannot be ignored (Erfanmanesh & Pourhossein, 2017).

The literature review indicates that author motivation is the key factor for the exponential growth in publishing and is responsible for disseminating low-quality content to the scholarly world. Published literature emphasised the following factors leading to author motivation:

1. Performance-based research funding and promotion system
2. Publication pressure
3. Ability to do rigorous scientific research
4. Government policy

*Outcomes.* Performance-based research funding and promotion systems developed a ‘publish or perish’ culture to motivate authors to focus on research publication. The economy’s growth is correlated with sound research and government focus on education research, and funding the research is entirely viable. It has been suggested that the focus of the institutes is to be more about achieving quality over quantity, with the intention of creating measures for supporting scholars to produce quality research. Publishing pressure is encountered by academics in countries where the main indicator for measuring performance is the number of published research studies. The institutes should also focus on generating whitelists for scholars, as 17% of the scholars became the predators for publishing in predatory journals due to ‘unawareness’. It is important to specify a quick turnaround in the context of author motivation. While highly indexed journals take a long time to publish because of their existing extensive backlog, scholars are attracted to journals that require a quick turnaround time for publication. The research concludes that universities and institutions should work on a performance-based funding system and a performance-based promotion system. The research revisits the policies for research funding and promotions in the system. It is emphasised that institutions and policymakers should take enough measures to adjust the policies to support scholars to conduct sound scientific research. Institutes suggested having resources available for scholars’ continuing awareness and education of the predatory publishers. Universities and institutes should issue the whitelists and blacklists, and regular campaigns should be initiated by universities so that scholars can escape the trap of predatory publishers. Research suggests that a country that publishes too many papers in predatory OA journals leads to poor research standards from that country. It is important that institutes recognise that the requirement to amend the policies for supporting scholars to conduct sound research for the quality outcome is of paramount importance in the present age.

**Proposition 2:** Author motivation that is supported by a performance-based research funding and promotion system, publication pressure, the ability to do rigorous scientific research and government policy has a significant relationship with predatory OA publishing, which resulted in the outcome of the review of policies and procedures.

## Grey Literature

The evolution of junk science and its hazardous impact on research science is considerable. It is concerning that predatory publications are available in an open environment for reference and citation. A country publishing high volumes of junk science has a low quality of research (Alrawadie, 2020). Another study discusses the threat of junk science to scientific research in general (Cortegiani et al., 2019). Another study found that articles published in 2013 in 124 different journals were cited 1,295 times from 2013 to 2016. The citing authors tend to be inexperienced authors from Africa, Southeast Asia, South Asia and, to a lesser extent, experienced authors from the rest of the world (Frandsen, 2017). The study also supports that the papers published in POA journals may not necessarily be of poor quality, and thus citing them may not even be a problem of quality (Frandsen, 2017).

The literature review indicates that grey literature threatens the integrity of research science. The key factors contributing to the growth of predatory content are:

1. Junk science
2. New variations
3. Impact of predatory journals
4. Linear growth

Junk science is prevailing because grey literature is available to openly harm the integrity of research. Predators continue to prey on researchers, and the outcome is the exponential growth of grey literature. Jeffrey Beall reported 4,000 predatory journals in 2012 (Erfanmanesh & Pourhossein, 2017). According to Shen and Bjork, the number grew to 11,000 predatory journals in 2015. Other research further studies the behaviour of predatory open-access authors listed in blacklists (Cortegiani et al., 2019). POA journals follow fake publishing practices, claim to be legitimate and charge APC for publishing. POA journals do not follow required peer-review ethical practices. They do not offer necessary editorial services, carry fake locations, mistakes are often found on their websites, they carry journal titles of global impact, publicise fake or less-reputed impact factors, send spam emails and exploit academic identities. The main aim of predatory OA journals is to collect APC from scholars and publish articles without implying required peer-review and editorial practices. POA publishers prey on the scholars by sending fake emails, offer them the opportunity to be the editor of the journal and introduce a fake editorial board. Beall and Cabell's lists represent the primary data source for reference lists for predatory publishers and journals (Eykens et al., 2019). Beall's list was taken off the website in 2017 for unknown reasons and is now maintained by an anonymous scholar (Strinzel et al., 2019).

The growth of predatory publishing can be observed by the rapidly increasing numbers of published articles, from 53,000 in 2010 to approximately 420,000 articles in 2014. According to the current scope of the OA revolution by Plan S, transformative agreements culminated in new business models; 'publish and read' versus 'read and publish' models are expected to control the issue of predatory

publishers. However, the impact of Plan S on exponentially growing predatory articles is yet to be observed (Borrego et al., 2021).

**Outcomes.** The impact of grey literature and junk science is not unexpected. The prevailing junk science in the open system is like a chronic disease that would continue to spread if not controlled. Scholars continue to cite the content available openly without checking the legitimacy of the research. There is a recommendation to have a promotion or punishment system for publishing a research basis that reflects the quality of the journal. The promotion system is to be the outcome of publishing quality research, not having references to junk science. Provisions for punishment policies need to consider the deontological ethics of individuals taking full responsibility for good and bad research (Koerber et al., 2020).

**Proposition 3:** Grey literature is supported by junk science, new variations in predatory practices, the impact of predatory journals and linear growth and has a significant relationship with predatory OA publishing, which resulted in the outcome of the review of the policies and procedures of institutes.

### *Critical Relationships Among the Three Variables*

The three independent variables are significantly connected, and the dependencies can be specified as follows:

1. Research integrity in publishing is an area of foremost importance. Research integrity is the pedagogy of scientific research in publishing and sets the standards for the scholarly world to publish vital research. Authors motivated to publish more are expected to be controlled by high research integrity practices. Grey literature is expected to be controlled with the implementation of the evolving landscape and an enhanced scope of research integrity. Research integrity is negatively correlated with author motivation and grey literature.
2. The author motivation variable is the culmination of publication pressure and institution expectation to publish more. Author motivation to publish is dependent on following research integrity for publication. Applying research integrity practices in the research and publication process places the focus on stronger research instead of publishing more. Another independent variable, grey literature, is related to author motivation because grey literature is the culmination of an author's motivation for lack of research rigour and the aim of publishing quantity over quality.
3. Grey literature is the result of the author's motivation to publish quantity over quality. There is a linear relationship between both variables. Author motivation to incessantly publish for promotion and reward has formed grey literature. The independent variable, research integrity, is adversely correlated with grey literature because it aims to control the publication of low-quality or predatory research.

## Conclusion and Implications

Predatory OA publishing persists in open science and continues to become a global topic. Publishing pressure arises from policies for promotions and reward systems supported by governments and institutions, which motivate scholars to publish more. Pressure is such that few scholars choose to publish in predatory journals. The research-based promotion and funding system requires a review of policies and a shifting focus from 'more publications' to 'rigorous research' (Eykens et al., 2019). Junk science is the culmination of predatory content. It is alarming to have junk content in the open space. There should be more emphasis on the awareness of junk content (Alrawadieh, 2020). Evolving trends in the OA space continue to strengthen the publishing model. Publication ethics following standards set by the Committee on Publication Ethics is a must for each journal. The focus on robust peer review continues to be the key parameter for assessing the research. Open peer review is a recent development and a measure to uphold a high level of transparency and high research quality standards (Krawczyk & Kulczycki, 2021). The Plan S movement progressed transformative agreements with the 'publish and read' versus 'read and publish' models (Borrego et al., 2021). The movement is also expected to impact the increased scope of predatory business, as it will leave no scope for APCs directly from authors. Plan S acceptance continues to grow in developed countries. Governments from developing countries are required to embrace Plan S to control the practices of predators.

### *Implications for Business Research*

The study is qualitative and focuses on evolving scholarly publishing trends and the monotony of predators. The research studies the wealth of literature published in advancing academic publishing and predatory practices to understand the factors that would better control prevailing predatory publishers, rising in conjunction with OA publishing. The predatory research creates massive damage to the country's economy. The government provides research grants to institutes, and institutes further fund scholars for the research. Researchers pay author processing charges from a research grant, and in the case of predatory publishing, the funding generates revenue for predators and a loss to the country's reputation and economy.

The conceptual framework was developed to identify the research gaps and factors that would help control the publishing of predatory content. Research gaps were identified from the abundance of literature reviews for the scope of future studies. The study recommends that institutes and governments focus on reviewing current policies for research funding and promotion systems. Governments and institutes adopting Plan S movement in OA publishing and open peer review will limit the scope for predators and poor-quality research publication. The study could serve as a reference for institutes aiming to review the research funding and promotion system for improvisation in policies to produce sound research science.

### Limitations and Scope for Future Research

Research is limited to secondary data and is reliant on the published research in the area. The research focus is limited to the study of industry dynamics and the measures to control predatory publishing. While the study recommends that institutes and governments review policies surrounding promotion and rewards systems, no survey was conducted to find out the perspective of institutes or governments.

The study focuses on three independent variables. Several other independent variables found during the research can also be studied to control predatory publishing, for example, whitelists and blacklists, predatory publishing in regional languages, etc.

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