

Punitive provision to tackle predatory journals

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Predatory journal publication is reaching alarming levels in India. To prevent this, policy makers need to take punitive action. Recently UGC published a notice about CARE reference list of quality journals, criticized by scientific communities due to methodological flaws. Previously published UGC approve list of journals also criticized due to the inclusion of so-called predatory journals. This note discusses strategies to tackle predatory journals.

Publication in predatory journals in India is increasing and has become a threat for the scientific community¹. There have been several discussions among the scientific community on how to identify predatory journals and how to prevent researchers publishing in them^{2,3}. Now the time has come for punitive provision to tackle predatory journals rather than trying to identify them¹. Earlier, the University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi came out with a 'UGC approved list of journals' (<https://www.ugc.ac.in/journallist/>), faced a lot of criticism from the scientific community due to the inclusion of so-called predatory or dubious journals in that list¹. According to the UGC journal selection criteria (<https://www.ugc.ac.in/journallist/methodology.pdf>), any new journal which uses publication charges as a source of income can be part of the UGC list. As per UGC journal selection criteria (<https://www.ugc.ac.in/journallist/methodology.pdf>), any new journal despite charging publication fees can be part of UGC journal list if that journal's website contains complete instructions for authors/reviewers, mentions well defined peer review, publication process, ethics policies and states publication frequency and follow the same. A recently published methodology in *Current Science*¹ also had a methodological fault which permits a new journal to qualify in a journal list, because that journal can obtain the desired score six out of ten despite not being a member of a reputed association like COPE and charge fees for publication. Both these methodologies are unable to ensure the quality of the journal according to the criteria used. To overcome this problem UGC recently proposed to consider Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases to include journals for disciplines like science, engineering, technology, agricultural and biomedical science. For preparing a journal list other than the

specified five disciplines, UGC proposes to set up a Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics (CARE) and come up with a 'CARE reference list of quality journals' for all disciplines in the future (<https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/8091765-UGC-Journals.pdf>). Scopus and WoS are well-known databases accepted by the global scientific community for their strict journal selection criteria⁴. They cover most of the journals from different fields across the globe. WoS provides impact factor (IF)⁴, a well-known journal ranking indicator. According to WOS, any indexed journal receives the first-ever journal IF after three and half years of continuous publication. For example, if a journal was first published and indexed to WoS in 2016, it will receive its first IF in 2019 (Table 1). Scopus provides another journal ranking indicator called CiteScore⁴. A journal included in this database receives its first ever CiteScore after 4½ years of continuous publications, though CiteScore tracker is available from the first year of indexing.

For example, if a journal was first published and indexed to Scopus in 2016, it will receive its first ever CiteScore in 2020 (Table 1). Both scores indicate how the scientific community is utilizing knowledge generated by a particular journal using the citation analysis method; the only difference is that they use two different periods for citation calculation⁴. The scientific community can use these two indicators to better understand the utility and quality of a particular journal. Because Scopus has more titles included in its database, we can consider minimum five years of continuous publication to understand a new journal and its impact on scientific community. Now, the question may arise as to how this five-year band will address predatory journals?

Most of the so-called predatory journals are open access (OA) and use author pay model (APM) as their business strategy. This gives them financial sustainability to grow in volume. OA publication is not free⁵ and the only feasible option to generate income from predatory

Table 1. Impact factor and CiteScore calculation

Impact factor (IF) calculation: $D = C/A + B$

- A: Total number of citable items published in 2016 (first year).
 - B: Total number of citable items published in 2017 (second year).
 - C: Total number of citations received in 2018 for a citable item published in 2016 and 2017.
 - D: IF of 2018 for a journal calculated and published in the middle of the fourth year, i.e. in year 2019.
- Minimum 3½ years is required for any journal to obtain its first ever IF (<https://clarivate.com/webofsciencegroup/essays/impact-factor/>).

CiteScore calculation: $E = D/A + B + C$

- A: Total number of items published in 2016 (first year).
- B: Total number of items published in 2017 (second year).
- C: Total number of items published in 2018 (third year).
- D: Total number of citations received in 2019 for an item published in 2016, 2017 and 2018.
- E: CiteScore of 2019 for a journal will calculate and publish in middle of the fifth year, i.e. in year 2020. Minimum 4½ years is required for any journal to obtain its first ever CiteScore (<https://www.elsevier.com/editors-update/story/journal-metrics/citescore-a-new-metric-to-help-you-choose-the-right-journal/>).

journals is through APM³. Unlike traditional and stable OA journals, predatory journals do not have external funding sources like public funding, subscription fees, user consortia or sponsorship to maintain their economic sustainability, essential for any journal in the long run³. If academic or government agencies change their strategy and use five years of uninterrupted publication as inclusion criterion for journal selection for all academic purposes, then no researcher will consider such journals at least for the first five years of publication. It will directly or indirectly influence the business strategy of a predatory journal. This is because, the main aim of predatory journals is to earn money using APM, and not to disseminate knowledge among the scientific community^{2,3}.

The UGC notice dated 28 November 2018, also suggested academicians to avoid any form of association with any predatory or questionable journals. Academicians can use the first five-year band to develop an association with any newly launched journal as reviewer or editorial board member. This will be a

punitive action for those journals which will face shortage of academic support required to run any journal. Additionally, they can verify the journal's list of editors using the official web page and obtain information about the editors and their academic careers. Researchers can verify if journals provide the Open Researcher and Contributor Identification (ORCID) number of the editors/editorial board members. It also has a provision to include unpublished data and many more things related to researcher⁶.

All new journals are not launched for generating money and all OA journals are not predatory. There is a need for new journals due to increase in scientific production worldwide. The first five-year band will not be an issue for new journals backed by universities, professional bodies, communities, scientific societies or well-established publishers with economic stability. Due to the availability of academic support for review and other editorial processes, they are also able to manage procedural issues related to publication. New publishers can start with a stand-alone journal with low economic

burden, establish themselves among the scientific community and can then develop their portfolio of journals.

If we target business policies of predatory journals, it will surely control the mushrooming of such journals¹.

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