

Hijacked journals: A challenge unaddressed to the developing world

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During the last couple of years, much has been written about the menace of predatory publishing and suggestions like "Caveat emptor", that is, "Let the buyer beware" have been floating for authors to avoid publishing in such journals and publishers.^{1,2} However, journal hijacking, which is relatively a new and even more wicked scam, as compared to predatory publishing in the realm of scholarly publishing, remains unaddressed to the researchers of the developing world. For example, a title search in Scopus database, for "predatory journals", results in 142 hits but for "hijacked journals", it finds only 12 documents. The term "hijacked journals" was first coined by Dr. Mehrdad Jalalian in 2012.³ The initial reports of journal hijacking came about the *Wulfenia*, published by the Regional Museum of Carinthia in Klagenfurt, Austria; and *Archives des Sciences*, published by the Society of Physics and Natural History of Geneva (SPHN), in Switzerland.⁴ Currently, there are more than 100 scientific journals on different lists for hijacked journals.^{3,5} Hijacked journals are a phenomenon of creating fake websites that mimic authentic and reputable journals and their websites, and abuse the identity of those journals (i.e. Name and ISSN) — where authors are made to believe that their work will be published in a reputable journal.^{3,6} A similar phenomenon called journal phishing was described by Dadkhah et al in 2015, where a fake website similar to an authentic website is created by the cybercriminals, and sensitive information of the authors (such as credit card passwords) is gathered to make money.³

The target journals, in most of the cases, for hijackers are multidisciplinary in scope, usually published in a language other than English and/or published by small publishers, journals that are available in-print only, and journals without a high impact factor measured by Clarivate Analytics (formerly Thomson & Reuters).^{5,6} In some cases, forgers register the expired domains of reputable journals, which have ceased publishing, to launch new hijacked journals and continue publishing in their name.⁶

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The hijacked versions of the authentic journals flourish by promising quick publication, where peer review is light or non-existent.⁶ The ideal victims are early-career researchers in a dire need for papers for promotions or career advancement. In this context, hijacked journals send invitations to 'in-need' authors, whose information is retrieved from the websites of commercial, non-peer-reviewed journals, and asking them to publish in their journals.⁵ They often claim indexing in reputable databases as PubMed, Web of Science or Scopus. Another method adopted by them is to launch some conferences, where authors are promised that their proceeding papers will be published in reputable and indexed journals, but then publish them in hijacked journals.^{3,5,6} These journals publish several papers in an issue — as high as 1500 papers — because they usually do not respect the aim and scope of the original legitimate journal.³ As the number of papers in hijacked journals increases, there is a reduction in the number of papers published in legitimate journals. However, these journals are available for only a short period until the real journal threatens of a legal action against them.⁶ Thus, anything published in hijacked journals may be the "lost science". Further, hijacked journals will not have their contents indexed in databases such as PubMed, Scopus or Web of Science. Hence, the papers of victimized authors may not be recognized by other researchers.

The general assumption that hijackers target only the non-English journals or those from small publishers might apply to some but not all the cases. On January 5, 2019, I received an email that caused discomfort and worry to me. The subject of the email was "Illegal website which illegally copied the most of Biochemia Medica content". Biochemia Medica (<http://biochemia-medica.com>), one of the leading journals from Croatia was hijacked by the forgers. This journal, the official journal of the Croatian Society of Medical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine, is published in English without any article processing charges to the authors, and has indexing in several databases. This case shows that hijacked journals pose a serious risk to the scientific community and are now attempting to target the journals published in English. Apart from this, incidences of hijacking of journals published by well-known publishers have also been reported. For

example, International Journal of Game Theory (<http://www.springer.com/economics/economic?theory/journal/182>) of the Springer Nature, HFSP journal (now known as Frontiers in Life Science; <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tfls20>) of the Taylor and Francis, and the well-known Journal of the American Medical Association (<http://jama.jamanetwork.com/>) were cited as some of the hijacked journals.³ A few papers about the predatory publishing have been published in the Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association during the recent years, and the year 2019 began with an Editorial on this serious issue (they have not been cited here to avoid citation staking). I believe this editorial serves as the first step towards educating the readership of the Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association to avoid wasting their work and money by publishing in hijacked journals. Prospective authors and

readers are encouraged to go through the detailed list of publications about hijacked journals and relevant concepts, extracted from Scopus database, which may be found in Table.

There are some ethical implications of hijacked journals. These journals are involved in selling the papers for money — the scholarly black market.³ In this regard, researchers are cautioned to avoid relying only on the impact factor and such metrics for evaluating the journal quality. It is always good to do some preliminary searches and make sound decisions in terms of journal selection because it determines the legitimacy of an individual's work and improves its dissemination. In addition, papers published in hijacked journals or their findings may be hijacked by greedy authors.³ Therefore, researchers should behave ethically and should not try

Table:

Title#	Year	Journal
Detecting Hijacked Journals by Using Classification Algorithms	2018	Science and Engineering Ethics
How can emergency physicians protect their work in the era of pseudo publishing?	2018	Turkish Journal of Emergency Medicine
Questionable papers in citation databases as an issue for literature review	2017	Journal of Cell Communication and Signaling
Current and potential cyber attacks on medical journals; guidelines for improving security	2017	European Journal of Internal Medicine
Online-based approaches to identify real journals and publishers from hijacked ones	2017	Science and Engineering Ethics
Hijacked Journals In Agricultural Sciences And Related Areas	2017	Revista Fitotecnica Mexicana
How to recognize and avoid potential, possible, or probable predatory open-access publishers, standalone, and hijacked journals	2016	Prilozi
Hijacked journals, hijacked web-sites, journal phishing, misleading metrics, and predatory publishing: actual and potential threats to academic integrity and publishing ethics	2016	Forensic Science, Medicine, and Pathology
Hijacked Journals: An Emerging Challenge for Scholarly Publishing	2016	Aesthetic Surgery Journal
Characteristics of hijacked journals and predatory publishers: our observations in the academic world	2016	Trends in Pharmacological Sciences
An approach for preventing the indexing of hijacked journal articles in scientific databases	2016	Behaviour & Information Technology
Researchers beware of predatory and counterfeit journals: Are academics gullible?	2016	Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods
Similar names in academic literature as a tools to deceive researchers	2016	International Journal of Advanced Intelligence Paradigms
Types of hijacking in the academic world-our experiment in the scholarly publishing	2016	Library Hi Tech News
An introduction to journal phishings and their detection approach	2015	Telkomnika (Telecommunication Computing Electronics and Control)
Affiliation oriented journals: don't worry about peer review if you have good affiliation	2015	International Journal of Electrical and Computer Engineering
A new challenge in the academic world: earning real money and eminence by paper publishing	2015	Jordan Journal of Biological Sciences
Journal hijacking: A new challenge for medical scientific community	2015	Dental Hypotheses
The full story of 90 hijacked journals from August 2011 to June 2015	2015	Geographica Pannonica
Hijacked journals are emerging as a challenge for scholarly publishing	2015	Polskie Archiwum Medycyny Wewnetrznej
Fake conferences for earning real money	2015	Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences
Hijacked journals-threats and challenges to countries' scientific ranking	2015	International Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning
Warning: hijacked journals	2015	Polskie Archiwum Medycyny Wewnetrznej
Hijacked journals and predatory publishers: Is there a need to re-think how to assess the quality of academic research?	2014	Walailak Journal of Science and Technology
Predatory and fake scientific journals/publishers: A global outbreak with rising trend: A review	2014	Geographica Pannonica

The literature search was conducted, using Scopus, on January 12, 2019, using the "hijacked journal*" keyword in the Title-Abstract-Keywords field.

Note that this list maybe limited to the papers published in Scopus-indexed journals only.

#These papers have not been cited due to the journal requirements for the number of references.

to bypass the legitimate system. In addition, researchers should not deliberately publish in such journals, knowing that no one will notice and only they will be benefited. We, the researchers aware of the complex issue of predatory publishing and hijacked journals, have the responsibility of creating awareness about this issue among the emerging, naïve researchers, so that they may duly get the credit for their hard work and efforts. The journal hijackers are experts in hacking, and legal action is difficult to take place against them. Recently, Shahri et al have suggested the ways of 'detecting hijacked journals by using classification algorithms'; however, it might be difficult for a non-expert individual to understand and do it.⁴ Nevertheless, it is a worthwhile step towards a systematic approach for addressing this issue. The editors of journals from developing world, organizations monitoring higher education, and senior academics have the responsibility to create ways to hamper the growth of this dark side of academic publishing. Today, apart from the originality and novelty of the research, the major challenge requiring investigations is 'the selection of a legitimate journal for publication⁶.

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