

Copycats and impostors in science publishing: the case of *Current Science*

On 2 July 2017, an e-mail was received from a journal claiming to be *Current Science*, inviting prospective authors to submit papers with the promise of a two-week acceptance for the July 2017 issue. Apart from the name, other aspects appeared to be legitimate, such as the Thomson Reuters¹ journal impact factor, name of the editor-in-chief (EIC) and a physical postal address. The link to the journal website, however, reveals no editorial board and no published content. Having recently published in *Current Science*¹, a process that took well over a year to complete, from submission to publication, the claims of a two-week acceptance to publication seemed dubious, and the lack of published content was a red flag that this was perhaps a copycat or impostor journal. I immediately contacted the original *Current Science* (CS_o) EIC, R. Srinivasan, on his gmail account to request the validity of the information of that e-mail, and whether in fact this was the same *Current Science* or not. He

responded within hours, stating ‘This e-mail was not circulated by Current Science Association. It seems to be the activity of some predatory journal’. In the middle of July, *Current Science* issued a public ‘Predatory Journal Alert’ for its readership and authors where it was learnt that the impostor IP address originates from Turkey, while a second impostor claiming to be *Current Science* had an IP address originating from the Ukraine. In that alert, *Current Science* referred to these impostors as ‘fake’, ‘fraudulent’ and ‘predatory entity’.

India is a source of many predatory open access journals (POAJs), making academic validation of scientists difficult in the country because the scholarly validity of the publishing venue is difficult to verify². My own doubts, as well as the confirmation from the CS_o EIC indicated that this was not only a POAJ – ‘predatory’ because it misled academics into believing that it was a valid journal, but in fact a copycat (i.e. assuming a

close style, behaviour, or identity as the original), or impostor (i.e. claiming to be the original identity, using impersonating techniques to mislead the e-mail recipient). This may represent a new and blatant form of fraud within the POAJ movement, and slightly different from hijacked journals in which old websites or URLs of defunct or print-only journals are usurped to create a new website claiming to be the original identity³. There are several differences, and similarities, between CS_o and the impostor version (Table 1), one or two of which should be red flags for would-be authors⁴.

The Jeffrey Beall list of POAJs is now defunct, outdated and misleading, and cannot thus serve as a reliable source of scholarly information for academics to select a valid academic journal⁵. Consequently, academics must select their journals carefully, especially when imparting important data or scientific findings, to ensure that they are not supporting a predatory establishment with exploitative objectives, financial or other. In cases where a copycat or impostor POAJ is involved, this should include contacting the EIC of the valid journal, who should release a public notice to alert potential authors and readers that an impostor exists.

Table 1. Comparison of differences and similarities between the original valid *Current Science* (CS_o), and the copycat/impostor version (CS_i)

Aspect of journal or website	CS _o	CS _i
Journal URL	http://www.currentscience.ac.in/index.php	http://currentscience.org/index.php/CS/index
Publisher	Current Science Association	Claimed as Current Science Association
e-mail invitations?	No	Yes, claiming to be CS _o
Name of editor-in-chief	R. Srinivasan	R. Srinevasan
Editorial board	Yes	No
Published content	Yes, since 1932	None
ISSN	0011-3891	None stated
On-line submission system	Yes; http://www.currentscience.ac.in/csojs/index.php/cs	Yes; http://currentscience.org/index.php/CS/announcement/view/2
About the journal	http://www.currentscience.ac.in/php/about.php	Text copied from CS _o ; http://currentscience.org/index.php/CS/about
Instructions for authors	http://www.currentscience.ac.in/php/inst_authors.php	Text copied from CS _o ; http://currentscience.org/index.php/CS/about/submissions
Impact factor	The impact factor of the journal for the year 2015 is 0.967.	The impact factor of the journal for the year 2016/2017 is 0.843.*

*In the e-mail invitation, the listed impact factor of the journal is claimed to be of Thomson Reuters, which cannot be factually correct because the journal impact factor is owned now by Clarivate Analytics, which took over *Journal Citation Reports* in 2016 (ref. 6).

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3. Dadkhah, M., Maliszewski, T. and Teixeira da Silva, J. A., *Forensic Sci. Med. Pathol.*, 2016, **12**(3), 353–362.
4. Janodia, M. D., *Curr. Sci.*, 2017, **112**(12), 2361–2362.
5. Teixeira da Silva, J. A., *Sci. Eng. Ethics*, 2017 (in press); doi:10.1007/s11948-017-9905-3.
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