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.

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.

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.
journals is through APM\(^1\). 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 run\(^2,3\).

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 researcher\(^6\).

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 journals\(^1\).


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