Tips to avoid predatory journals and conferences

Scholars should learn to ask, “What is the motivation of this organization?”

The stakes are high for academics and the pressure to produce can be overwhelming at times. As a result, the number of predatory journals and questionable conferences is growing at an alarming rate. It can be tricky, even for a seasoned scholar, to spot a bogus venue for mobilizing our research and scholarship.

There are some differences between how predatory journals and conferences operate, but here are a few things they share in common:

**Motivated by money**

A key difference between bogus conferences and journals and legitimate ones can be tied to their motive for existence. If the primary mission of the organization is to advance knowledge and share new scientific and research findings, following an established and rigorous peer review process, it is likely credible. Scholars should learn to ask, “What is the motivation of this organization?”

**Unscrupulous marketing**

These predatory outfits regularly spam academics by the tens of thousands. The messages are often detectable by:

1. Poor grammar
2. Poor spelling
3. Hyperbolic language bragging about how prestigious the conference is
4. Flattery for the prospective contributor, to appeal to their ego or inexperience
5. No button to “unsubscribe” or opt out of future messages
6. Logos that look similar to those of credible publishers

**Lack of credibility**

Having articles or presentations that make an intellectual contribution to research and scholarship is inconsequential to the predatory publisher or conference. Their purpose is not to advance knowledge and so they don’t care much about the quality of the contributions they receive.

These are general qualities shared by predatory publications and bogus conference alike. There are also characteristics of each that are worth knowing about.
Top 10 indicators of predatory journals

1. Are not linked to or run by a credible scholarly, academic or technical society or association, though some pretend to be.
2. Send spam e-mails.
3. Brag about the high quality of the journal, which can include false claims about journal metrics and where it is indexed.
4. Features an editor-in-chief who also edits numerous other journals, from a variety of different disciplines.
5. Make false claims about where the journal is indexed (e.g. PUBMED).
6. Promise fast publication.
7. Promise an easy peer-review and process.
8. Have titles very close to those of highly respected legitimate journals, with only subtle modifications.
9. Claim to be based in major cities (e.g. London or New York), when they are really published somewhere else.
10. Make it difficult to find out who manages the journal.

Top 10 indicators of questionable conferences

1. Organized by a for-profit entity, rather than a credible scholarly or scientific society or association.
2. Combine a number of fields topics or disciplines into a single conference.
3. Spam prospective attendees to submit proposals and register. Often, these spam e-mails contain hyperbolic language about how prestigious the conference is.
4. Information about who is organizing the conference is either unclear or nonexistent; or the organizer is not well known or reputable.
5. Acceptances are promised with a very short turnaround time (often less than four weeks).
6. Conference name bears a striking resemblance to that of a credible or highly prestigious conference but has subtle minor differences in its name.
7. Guarantee your contribution will be published as an article in the journal associated with the conference. Like the conference, the journal is also predatory and organizers may later insist on additional article processing charges to publish your article.
8. Conference websites are unstable. They may change URLs or have no record of conferences in previous years.
9. Website text contains poor grammar or numerous spelling errors.
10. Fees seem quite high, compared to those run by non-profit scholarly societies or associations.

Graduate students and scholars alike need to make wise decisions about how to spend their time, money and resources, while protecting their professional reputation at the same time. In academia, reputation matters. We need to learn to be relentless about sharing our work in the most rigorous and credible venues and avoid predatory conferences and publications.

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