



All that glisters is not gold



Printing was introduced to Europe by Johannes Gutenberg more than 500 years ago. The arrival of the printing press and the use of movable type printing led to the era of mass communication and the information revolution. Among the rewards were easier dissemination of knowledge and improved literacy. The advent of the digital age of electronic communication and desktop publishing represented another major technological advancement. Publishing is now a lucrative, high revenue-generating industry and, as a result, it can easily be exploited. There are countless publications of varying quality and covering a myriad of subjects in existence.

Like an unexpected gift, when the unsolicited e-mail arrives in your inbox, the initial feeling is one of pleasant surprise at your good fortune. In laudatory terms and with equal flattery, the invitation to contribute a manuscript to a journal, write a chapter for a book, join an editorial board, present at a meeting/conference, or become an editor of a publication. Ego suitably massaged, pride magnified, good sense impaired, your curiosity is immediately provoked. The trap is set and about to be sprung. Welcome to the predatory scam of fake invites to a variety of purportedly academic, scientific or research venture proposals!

In scientific journal publishing, the open-access idea is a noble concept. Regrettably, the predatory scam of fake online open-access publication is an unintended consequence. These bogus publications often have inventive and mildly amusing titles. The journals or publishers involved in such activities do not adhere to quality publishing standards and have little regard for transparency. They solicit manuscripts indiscriminately and operate poor, lax or no peer-review processes. They are not really interested in the value and relevance of the topic or the scientific rigour of the research. They invariably require a

hidden fee to handle your scholarly masterpiece. Their sole, unprincipled objective is to fraudulently extract money from you.

The more sophisticated fake journals and publishers often resort to using knowledge of a real paper that you have previously published to entice you to submit manuscripts or work in the same field or subject. Far from being altruistic, their values are diametrically opposite to those considered sacred in academia or science. Commercially driven, operating questionable marketing methods, often based in surrogate countries to hide their true origins, these outfits all exist to defraud and embezzle money.

Similarly, fake or scam science conferences and meetings abound for profit. In exchange for payment, you are afforded a platform, an opportunity to expound your ideas, publicise your life's work or allowed wild speculation on esoteric topics or your pet subject, all to your heart's delight. To provide an air of legitimacy and authenticity, organisers of fake or scam science conferences and meetings may even hire the venue/s of prestigious institutions or universities to make it appear as if they are joint or co-operative events.

By publishing fake studies, predatory journals make them look like real science. Participation in fake conferences artificially elevates the status of an individual. Fake publications and scam conferences also help provide credentials and enhance the CV of those aspiring for career advancement or professional recognition. They offer false merit and unfairly assist the undeserving to secure jobs and promotions by making it appear that they have made and published legitimate or valid discoveries.

Predatory journals and fake conferences often target those in countries where there is limited access to, or opportunities for, higher training and further education. However, given the nature of

electronic mass communication, no one is immune. Information freely available in the public domain allows contact details, including e-mail addresses, to be easily harvested. Consequently, their tentacles have a global reach and it is a pervasive problem. These predatory journal publishers and fake event promoters are, ultimately, ruining science.

If and should social media pick up papers or conferences on untested, fake science – particularly on a health topic – it becomes fake healthcare news. Such fake, health-related news stories harm vulnerable patients, especially those desperately searching for treatment of their medical problem/s. Furthermore, by spreading misinformation it engenders distrust and undermines the confidence of the public towards healthcare professionals. Hence, it is far from a victimless crime and the damage caused extends beyond just financial loss.

Spam filters are useful to prevent unsolicited and unwanted e-mails reaching your inbox. Unfortunately, spam filters are reliant on user-defined rules and criteria; hence, can never be totally effective. *Think. Check. Submit.* is a campaign to help researchers hoping to publish their work assess the credentials of a journal or publisher and identify genuinely trusted journals for their manuscript. It is certainly worth visiting ThinkCheckSubmit.org to read the information and advice offered. However, the key to avoid falling into the traps of predatory journals and fake conferences is vigilance. Just remember, if it is too good to be true, then it probably is. All that glisters is not gold!



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