

South Asia has a worldwide reputation for being a center of predatory publishing: **Jeffrey Beall**

Jeffrey Beall is best known globally for his fight against predatory journals and dubious publishers. His crusading efforts have brought him appreciation worldwide. At the same time, he has faced criticism and fought legal cases for being acutely vocal about potential predatory journals listed in his blog- Scholarly Open Access. Nothing has deterred his mission even after he shut down his blog last year. His splendid work and strong concern for ethical publishing has inspired many professionals globally and made them his avid fans.



Open Interview brings you Beall's exclusive interview with **Santosh C Hulagabali**. In this interview, he has answered all pertinent questions with regard to Indian and Asian publishing practices, trends, issues, challenges and ways to mitigate the hurdles.

Indian academic community- especially library professionals have high regard for your fight against dubious publishing practices and your commendable efforts in creating awareness about the same. How do you feel about it?

I have received a lot of positive feedback from researchers all over the world and am happy that I've been able to help them avoid being victimized by predatory publishers and to raise awareness of the problem.

You wrote an article for Nature entitled, *Predatory Publishers are Corrupting Open Access*¹. How do you see the other side of the coin i.e. close access or traditional publishing?

Yes, most dubious publishing practices involve open access journals. The reason is that the subscription model has a built-in validation feature. When a subscription journal starts publishing low-quality articles or gains a reputation for not conducting a proper peer review, libraries and other subscribers will cancel their subscriptions. So, such journals always have a strong incentive to maintain publishing ethics and ensure scientific integrity. This validation feature doesn't exist with open access, because there are no subscriptions.

Are open access journals more prone to predatory issues than the close or traditional publishing mode? Or do they have similar vulnerabilities?

Yes, open access journals are much more prone to corruption than are journals using the traditional model. The only exception might be open access journals that use the platinum (not gold) model. In this model, authors are not charged to publish in the journal. There is no exchange of money between author and publisher, and this removes the temptation on the part of the publisher to accept unworthy papers for publication.

Where do you see India on the map of predatory or questionable publishing practices?

South Asia has a worldwide reputation for being a center of predatory publishing.

What impression the western academics have about the open access journals being published in Asia-Pacific, especially in India?

Most researchers in the west receive multiple spam email solicitations to submit articles to predatory journals every day. The emails are persistent and annoying. Many originate in South Asia. Thus, the researchers have mixed or negative opinions of open access journals, especially those that abuse email communication to advertise their fraudulent services.

David Moher, of Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, says that it is not just India but even the United States is next to India in publishing papers in illegitimate journals². What is your take on this?

There are some predatory publishers based here in the U.S., but in my experience, most of these are operated by immigrants to this country, and they use their North American base to market the journals to researchers in their home countries of Africa and Asia who need 'international' publications to get academic credit at their universities back home in Asia and Africa.

Also, many publishers create companies in the United States- state of Delaware and use a Delaware address to make it appear they are based in my country. Anyone can create a company registered in Delaware by visiting a website and paying a small fee. The registration companies allow those who create new companies to use their addresses. So, many predatory publishers who claim to be based in the U.S. are not and are using deception to trick people, such as Moher.

Predatory publishers of India and rest of the world. How different are they?

In his novel *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy said, "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." I would adapt this and say, "All journals of high integrity are alike; each predatory journal is predatory in its own way."

Can you cite any one or two major Indian publishers or firms that you specifically underline them for their predatory publishing practices?

OMICS International.

In India, universities are authorized to recommend list of journals (both open and close) to University Grants Commission (UGC), an apex supervisory body for universities and colleges in India. UGC has thus prepared the consolidated and dynamic list. The ‘UGC approved list of journals’³ is accessible on UGC’s portal. With the increased complaints, UGC has kept on removing questionable/fake journals from its list. These retracted journals are not only of Indian publishers but also the publishers of the rest of the world. Surprisingly, 4300+ journals have been removed so far⁴. How do you see this development?

The practice of using a ‘whitelist’ of approved journals is often flawed, especially if the list is created by bureaucrats in the same country the list is used in. No matter how careful the creators of the list are in selecting legitimate journals for the list, there will always be some that are predatory or that operate like predatory journals. Researchers quickly find these ‘easy’ journals and submit articles to them for academic credit.

Is it that difficult for ‘some of the experts’ recommending journals to UGC to identify dubious journals? Do they lack scientific literacy to recognize the publishing fraud or is it a deliberate practice? How do you see this?

Again, the use of a whitelist is problematic, especially when the process of creating the list is stained by politics and favoritism. No matter how much effort is put into making the list reliable, over time it will prove ineffective.

In the recent past, the journals in gold open access have increased substantially possibly due to UGC linking publication credits to academicians as base for their promotions⁵. Is it a good move to link publication scores with promotions perhaps that has led to the mushrooming of predatory journals and building of pressure in academia to ‘publish or perish’?

No. Because it is so easy and fast for researchers to publish in corrupt journals. The number of publications should not be used as a criterion in academic evaluation. Researchers should be evaluated based on the quality and impact of their work.

Like UGC in India, is linking of publication credits for promotions by any statutory or regulatory bodies prevalent in other countries? Can you cite examples, if any?

Most countries use external measures in order to avoid favoritism and corruption. For example, a country (or individual university) might say that academic credit is only granted for articles published in journals that are included in Web of Science or Scopus. In my country, and many others, decisions regarding valid journals are not made at the national or state level. The evaluation is highly decentralized and done at the university level, so each university has to establish its own standards.

What is your ‘personal opinion’ on linking promotions with number of publications?

It's a very bad idea that will lead to people getting promotions when they are unworthy of the promotions.

Another important issue is- UGC has stopped giving credit for the papers published in a conference proceeding⁶ with ISBN! Now it has become a trend in academics that many of the UGC-listed journal-publishers approach the conference organizers to publish conference papers with them as a 'special issue'. It has become a lucrative business for such publishers. And some conference organizers easily fall prey to such dubious and 'seasonal journal publishers' although the publishers simply 'print' with no publication ethics. How do you see such development?

It's a horrible development and underscores the weaknesses of using whitelists. The predatory publishers will always try to find ways to cheat the system, and the most successful ones will be those who invent new and clever ways to cheat. This is one of the weaknesses of a whitelist, especially a whitelist created by the government.

Publishers often threaten those who are vocal about the dubious publication practices. You have lived up to criticism and faced them boldly. How one should deal with this and continue creating awareness?

Whenever you threaten an open access publisher's income by exposing its corrupt practices, they will do everything to fight back. They will do everything possible to try to discredit their critics, and the 'researchers' who take advantage of the easy publishing offers, of the predatory publishers, will become the publishers' biggest defenders. There is no easy way to counter this, and as the corrupt publishers become larger, they have more resources to attack their critics, such as hiring public relations personnel and attorneys who fight for the publisher.

What kinds of issues and challenges, in your opinion, are concerned with Indian open access publishing?

Deception, lack of transparency, profiteering, violation of publishing ethics, lack of scientific integrity, abuse of email for spamming, and the like.

What collective efforts are highly essential to do away with the wrong practices of open access publishing in India? Any suggestions for the statutory bodies or academic institutes?

I don't see any easy or fast solutions to the problem. I focused my work on identifying predatory publishers and journals and alerting researchers to them. We need to respect freedom of the press, so creating new laws that restrict publishers is unwise. Eliminating the system of payments from authors to publishers would go a long way in cleaning up scholarly publishing.

Any positive remarks or impressions about Indian open access publishers?

I focused my work on corrupt and predatory publishers, so I am unable to answer this question.

What is your message to the Indian authors writing for open access journals?

Don't submit your work to predatory or low-quality journals.

As mentioned before, Indian library and information professionals feel proud of you because you belong to librarianship and also for your tireless work in open access publishing. What is your message to them?

Librarians add value to information. Be innovative. Develop and offer needed services that students and researchers want and need.



Note: All answers/ views expressed in this document are of the interviewee.

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