

AWARENESS OF PREDATORY JOURNALS AMONG ACADEMICS OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE SCHOOLS FOR QUALITY RESEARCH IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN NORTH-WEST, NIGERIA

By

MUHAMMAD ABUBAKAR BANDE (CLN)

and

ALIYU JAFARU SHINKAFI (CLN)

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the awareness of predatory journals among academics of library and information science (LIS) schools in federal universities in North West, Nigeria. It has three specific objectives and three research questions that guided the study. The research is both quantitative and qualitative. The population of the study is 124 academic staff of LIS schools from four universities. These are; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU), Bayero University, Kano (BUK), Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto (UDUS) and Federal University Dutsin-Ma (FUDMA) all in North West, Nigeria. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaire and interview schedule. A total of 120 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to academic staff, however, the number returned was 102. The interview schedule was set and administered on four senior lecturers, one from each university. As for the method of data analysis the data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed using frequency, mean and standard deviation with the aid of SPSS version 25. The findings of the study revealed that the extent of awareness of some of the features/ characteristics of predatory journals is low; lack of awareness, desperation at the thought of missing of promotion and pressure to publish in international journals were among the factors influencing the academics publishing in predatory journals among others. It was recommended that researchers should carefully evaluate the credibility and reputation of the journals they considered for publication by investigating the journal's website for clear information, proper peer-review process, checkmating the genuinely editorial members etc.

Keywords: *Predatory Journals, Awareness, Academics, Library and Information Science, Nigerian Federal Universities*

Introduction

Scientific journals play an important role in sharing the data collected through scientific methods and the results of their analysis with academia and the global community. Scientific journals use editorial and peer-review processes to make sure that the research they publish is original, accurate, and developed systematically. The quality of these processes also reflects the

overall quality of the scientific knowledge produced in an end product (Labbe & Labbe, 2013). When research has not undergone a series of critiques from editorial and peer-review, it will be identified as fake and unreliable.

It is evident nowadays that unscrupulous ailments emerged in the name of publishers, journal editors hunting researchers to publish articles in their journals with their deceptive International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), editorial board members etcetera known as “Predatory Journals”. According to Ajuwon and Ajuwon (2018), this kind of publishing is an exploitative business strategy that entails charging authors article processing fees without offering the editorial, peer review, and publishing services expected from genuine journals. Predatory journals was first identified by Jeffrey Beall, a Professor who was a communication librarian at Auraria library, university of Colorado, United States in the year 2008 (Beall, 2016).

The literal meaning of predatory refers to an animal that naturally preys on others or a person who ruthlessly exploits others. Based on the aforementioned claim, predatory journals have similar viewpoints. According to Grundniewicz, et al. (2019), predatory journals and publishers are entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices. Similarly, Mali and Mahajan (2021) asserted that predatory journals lack the authentication of legitimate scholarly journals such as peer review, editing, editorial boards, editorial offices, and other editorial standards, imposing a number of new ethical issues in publishing research papers. Numerous ethical issues such as lack of editorial and publishing standards, misuse of research funding, no reliable research literature, and misrepresentation are

linked with these journals. In fact, Abdullahi and Azhar (2022) described predatory journal as one that seeks financial gain from researchers/academicians. It is a dubious publishing business strategy. They charge authors for publication but do not provide the necessary editorial and publishing services. Therefore, science and research suffer as publication standards deteriorate.

It is one of the roles of librarians to inform, educate and prevent researchers in an academic environment from fake news which predatory publishing is part of it and to equip them with the ability to evaluate genuine journal or publisher to be sent their articles to for publication. Librarians have a key role to play in educating users about predatory publishing. Predatory publishing can be described as low quality, amateurish, and often unethical academic publishing that is usually Open Access (OA). Understanding predatory publishing helps authors to make more informed decisions about where to publish. In the process of educating our academics and researchers, librarians can set the ground for important conversations that encourage critical thinking about the scholarly communication processes.

Statement of the Problem

Concerns about predatory journals are becoming more prevalent in the academic publishing sector. These journals can harm authors' reputations if they fail to adhere to acceptable practices for both peer review and publication. They are also known for their aggressive solicitation tactics, lack of transparency, and deviation from recommended practices.

Several studies have been conducted on the awareness of predatory journals among academic staff, authors, researchers, postgraduate students in an academic environment with aim at preventing them from publishing in predatory journals. However, similar study has not been carried out in universities in North West, Nigeria. This study therefore, intends to specifically

investigate the awareness of predatory journals among academics of Library and Information Science Schools for quality research in federal universities in North West, Nigeria with aim at bridging the research gap.

Research Questions

1. What is the extent of awareness of predatory journals among academics of library and information science (LIS) schools in federal universities in North West, Nigeria?
2. To what extent does awareness of predatory journals contribute for quality research among academics of library and information science (LIS) schools in federal universities in North West, Nigeria?
3. What are the factors influencing academics of library and information science (LIS) schools publishing in predatory journals in federal universities in North West, Nigeria?

Review of Literature

Conceptual Framework

It is helpful to contextualize predatory publishing as an aspect of evaluating publishers and the quality of scholarship (Mali & Mahajan, 2021). Scholars have pointed out criteria for recognizing predatory journals. These include but not limited to; haste publication without thorough review, exorbitant publication fees, frequent messaging urging an author to submit manuscript among others. Similarly, Beall (2016) reported that a number of authors have proposed a set of criteria that can be used to identify predatory journals. Thus, lack of rigorous control of scientific quality of the submitted manuscript due to the absence of or minimal nature of the peer review process, and efforts made by publishers to attract authors and encourage them

to submit their manuscripts by aggressively e-mailing them, advertising rapid review processes and creating a false image of a reputable journal, providing falsified impact factors or fake editorial members. Tella (2020) also stated some characteristics of predatory journals which include rapid publication, cost in article processing, lack of peer review, aggressive advertisement that influence authors into publishing with them. Nwagwu (2013) added that predatory journals or publishers have invisible location, their editorial boards consisting of unknown people, poor editorial quality of published papers among others.

According to Berek (2020), in order to recognize predatory journals, researchers should be versed in official science metrics, current scientific rankings, and stay up to date with scientific databases. This is because predatory journals tend to manipulate these metrics and rankings. If we notice one of the following patterns, we might begin to suspect something:

1. If the journal is not indexed by competent scientific databases.
2. If journal website does not contain information about the editorial board.
3. If there are non-academic advertisements on the webpage.
4. If the website of the journal does not contain information on the address and contact details of the editorial board.
5. If the manuscript's review time (Article Publication Time) is suspiciously short etc.

Related Empirical Studies

Deseiye et al. (2023) embarked on an empirical analysis of library professionals' awareness and perception of predatory journal outlets among academic librarians in selected Nigerian universities. The researchers employed a survey research design that integrated both

qualitative and quantitative methods. Using purposive sampling, 50 academic staff were selected to be administered the questionnaire for data collection. Additionally, the interview schedule was prepared for the principal librarian from each university. The study's findings indicate that academic librarians are cognizant of the existence of predatory journals and understand the adverse consequences associated with publishing in them. The research recommends the implementation of an effective mentoring programme for academic librarians, focusing on proper guidance for publishing research in reputable journals. The previous study is similar to the present one as both are on the awareness of predatory journals. The study differs in terms of population and geographical scope.

Similarly, Grgic and Guskic (2019) carried out their research on Croatian scientists' awareness of predatory journals. A descriptive survey design was used. The population of the study is 90, with 56 from the natural and social sciences and 34 from librarians. The instrument used for data collection was an online questionnaire with 14 questions. And frequency and percentages was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that majority of scientists have heard about predatory journals but are not sure how to identify them. The similarities between previous and present study is that both are investigating the awareness of predatory journals among researchers. However, the studies differs in the population, content and location.

Conlogue, Gilman, and Holmes (2022) conducted a study on open access and predatory publishing: a survey of the publishing practices of academic pharmacists and nurses in the United States. The researchers used descriptive survey design. A 26-item questionnaire was programmed in Qualtrics and distributed electronically to approximately 4,500 academic pharmacists and nurses, 347 of whom completed questionnaires (~8%). Pairwise correlations

were performed followed by a logistic regression to evaluate statistical associations between participant characteristics and whether participants had ever paid an article processing fee (APF). The findings revealed that participants who had published more articles, were more familiar with predatory publishing, and who were more concerned about research metrics and tenure were more likely to have published in open access journals. Moderate to high institutional research intensity has an impact on the likelihood of publishing open access. The majority of participants who acknowledged they had published in a predatory journal took no action after realizing the journal was predatory and reported no negative impact on their career for having done so.

Methodology

Based on the review of related empirical study, the researchers adopted both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The population of the study is 124 academic staff from the department of library and information science in federal universities in North West, Nigeria. These are Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (59), Bayero University, Kano (32), Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto (8) and Federal University Dutsin-Ma (21) respectively. The instrument for data collection were questionnaire and interview schedule. A total of 102 copies of questionnaire were returned from the academic staff of the department while interview schedule was set and administered on senior lecturers, one from each university. The data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed using frequency, mean and standard deviation in a 4-rating scale with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 25). The average mean of 2.50 was considered accepted while any mean below the average mean was rejected.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the extent of awareness of predatory journals among academics of library and information science schools in federal universities in North West, Nigeria?

The data for answering this research question was presented in Table 1 below

Table 1: Mean responses of the respondents on the extent of awareness of predatory journals among academics of library and information science (LIS) schools in federal universities in North West, Nigeria

S/N	Item statements	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	\bar{X}	S.D	Remarks
1	A journal that primarily aim at making profit rather than promoting quality research is a predatory journal	27	51	19	05	2.98	.80	HE
2	A journal that lacks rigorous peer-review process is a predatory journal	27	51	19	05	2.98	.80	HE
3	A journal that engages in fraudulent practices with fake editorial board is a predatory journal	24	54	19	05	2.95	.78	HE
4	A publisher that attracts authors and encourage them to submit their manuscripts by aggressively e-mailing them is a predatory journal	01	05	29	67	1.41	.63	VLE
5	A journal with an unknown editorial members is a predatory journal	00	00	26	76	1.25	.43	VLE
6	A journal that publishes articles within 24 hours is a predatory journal	30	50	15	07	3.01	.85	HE
Cluster Mean						2.43	.71	LE

Key: VHE= Very High Extent, HE= High Extent, LE= Low Extent and VLE= Very Low Extent

The result of the study, as presented in Table 1, shows the extent of awareness of predatory journals among academics of LIS schools in federal universities in North-west, Nigeria. The result shows that academics of LIS schools are aware of some of the features of predatory journals with high extent of mean and standard deviation ranging between 2.95 – 3.01 and SD= .78 – .85 which is above the (2.50) accepted average mean on the 4 items out of 6. However, the cluster mean of 2.43 shows that the extent awareness of predatory journals among academics of LIS schools in federal universities in North-western Nigeria is low.

Research Question 2

To what extent does the awareness of predatory journals contribute for quality research among academics of library and information science schools in federal universities in North West, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which awareness of predatory journals contribute for quality research among academics of library and information science (LIS) schools in federal universities in North West, Nigeria

S/N	Item statements	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	\bar{X}	S.D	Remarks
1	Awareness helps academics and researchers to avoid publishing in disreputable outlets	18	62	17	05	2.91	.73	HE
2	Creating awareness against publishing in predatory journals promote research integrity	16	60	22	04	2.86	.71	HE
3	Awareness of predatory journals make researchers to publish high-quality journals which could be cited by prominent scholars	17	53	20	12	2.74	.87	HE
4	Awareness of predatory journals prevent the risk of diminishing the visibility of research results	21	55	18	08	2.87	.82	HE
5	Creating awareness against publishing in predatory journals emancipates researchers from the damage of their reputation and credibility	23	56	15	08	2.92	.82	HE
6	Creating awareness against publishing in predatory journals curtails misleading idea, false information in academic writing	23	50	19	10	2.84	.88	HE
Cluster Mean						2.85	.80	HE

Key: VHE= Very High Extent, HE= High Extent, LE= Low Extent and VLE= Very Low Extent

The result of the study, as presented in Table 2, shows the extent to which awareness of predatory journals contributes to quality research among academics of library and information science (LIS) schools in federal universities in the North West of Nigeria. The result indicated that awareness of predatory journals contributes immensely to quality research among academics, with a high extent of mean and standard deviation ranging between 2.74 – 2.92 and

SD= .71 – .88 which is above the (2.50) accepted average mean on the 6 items. So also the cluster mean of 2.85 shows the high extent.

Research Question 3

What are the factors influencing academics of LIS schools publishing in predatory journals in federal universities in North West, Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean responses of the respondents on the factors influencing academics of LIS schools publishing in predatory journals in federal universities in North West, Nigeria

S/N	Item statements	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	S.D	Remarks
1	Lack of research proficiency	00	00	29	73	1.28	.45	SD
2	Lack of awareness	27	53	17	05	3.00	.79	A
3	Desperation at the thought of missing of promotion	24	56	17	05	2.97	.77	A
4	Inpatient of some authors as a result of long waits for reviews from reputable journals	27	53	17	05	3.00	.79	A
5	Inadequate knowledge about journals in specific subject areas/ disciplines	00	00	29	73	1.28	.45	SD
6	Pressure to publish in international journals	30	50	17	05	3.03	.81	A
7	Slow and ineffective editorial processes of Nigerian based open access scholarly journals	00	02	29	71	1.32	.51	SD
	Cluster Mean					2.26	.65	D

Key: SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, D= Disagree and SD= Strongly Disagree

The result of the study, as presented in Table 3, shows the factors influencing the academics of LIS schools publishing in predatory journals in federal universities in the North West, Nigeria. The factors include lack of awareness, desperation at the thought of missing out on promotion, and pressure to publish in international journals with an agreed mean and standard deviation ranging between 2.97 – 3.03 and SD= .77 – .81 which is above the (2.50) accepted average mean on the 3 items. However, the remaining items were below the average mean, therefore, they were rejected.

Major Findings of the Study

1. The findings of the study revealed that academics of LIS schools in federal universities in the North West of Nigeria were aware of some of the features and characteristics of predatory journals. However, their extent of awareness is low.
2. The study also found that awareness of predatory journals has a significant contribution to quality research among academics in LIS schools at federal universities in the North West of Nigeria.
3. Furthermore, the study found that lack of awareness, desperation at the thought of missing promotion, and pressure to publish in international journals were among the factors influencing academics publishing in predatory journals.
4. The result obtained from the interview found that some academics are aware of predatory journals and their characteristics; however, they deliberately publish their papers in the same journal because they know there is no penalty from their respective institutions.

Recommendation

1. Researchers should carefully evaluate the credibility and reputation of the journals they consider for publication by investigating the journal's website for clear information, a proper peer-review process, checking the genuinely editorial members, etc. In addition, establishing an awareness campaign by relevant stakeholders can be used to mitigate the impact of predatory publishing.
2. Researchers should always focus on the quality and impact of their work rather than solely on the desire for promotion.

3. The university management should enact a policy and direct the promotion committee to reject journals published by predatory publishers.

Conclusion

The researchers investigated the awareness of predatory journals among academics of LIS schools in federal universities in the North West of Nigeria. The study revealed that, though some of the staff are aware of them, a significant number of staff are not aware of the journals. The study also revealed that awareness of predatory journals contributes immensely to quality research. The research concluded that the factors influencing academics publishing in predatory journals were lack of awareness and desperation at the thought of missing out on promotion, among others.

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