

## What Do You Need to Know About Predatory and Pirated Journals?

CÉSAR JIMÉNEZ-YAÑEZ

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4018-3126>

Universidad Autónoma de Baja California  
[jimenez.cesar@uabc.edu.mx](mailto:jimenez.cesar@uabc.edu.mx)

ZICRI COLMENARES-DÍAZ

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1384-737X>

Universidad Autónoma de Baja California  
[colmenares.zicri@uabc.edu.mx](mailto:colmenares.zicri@uabc.edu.mx)



Although the subject of predatory and pirated journals is something that should draw our attention and be carefully reviewed, it is important to contextualize and understand why it has come to this point before analyzing its details. Scientific articles are the concrete evidence of knowledge production and, nowadays, a mandatory requirement for disseminating research results. Structural modifications that brought the neoliberal wave in the '90s produced a significative and gradual change in the conception of what is understood as the knowledge society, where the reforms of public policies that are linked with the development of research and teaching became an echo of academic capitalism, creating the idea of a university with a business vision, where scientific production has an economic value. In this new scenario, people involved in teaching and research must act in a context full of changes:

[...] the implementation of national accreditation practices; the change in economic compensation for university professors based on academic productivity; the growth of scientific journals and publications; new roles within universities as journal coordinator or editorial director; the increased pressure to index journals in the ISI Web of Science or Scopus databases and the reduction in public funding (Montes & Mendoza, 2018, p. 3).

Therefore, at present, the phrase “publish or perish” has become some kind of gruesome joke and an idea that accurately reflects reality, a burden that shows the academy’s evolution in terms of the publication of scientific articles. Over the years, the changes and structural measures adopted modified the scientific field, from being able to publish a single product in any academic journal to having to publish several in high-impact journals, to the point where “institutions and universities frequently use the number of publications to an individual’s credit as the measure of competency (...) during recruitments” (Rawat & Meena, 2014, p. 87). Thus, to access certain stimuli and guarantee their hiring, professors/researchers must constantly publish articles in international quality journals. This logic, set in motion by public policies and endorsed by educational and research institutions, obeys the possibility of accessing economic resources; the better positioned the institution, the greater the recognition and possibilities. In other words, the need to publish is linked to the above, where the academy is subject to “the creation and imposition of all kinds of rankings and hierarchies, accreditations and recognition of academic quality” (Maldonado, 2016, p. 2), to position itself concerning to other institutions, and it is that

[...] a very important part of the funds that support the university budget [...] are granted by the different administrative and research bodies, based on the number and quality of the articles that their researchers-professors publish in high-impact scientific journals. (Hernando, 2019, p. 4).

In general terms, as long as professors/researchers publish articles in quality, high-impact journals, universities will receive accreditations, recognitions, and classifications that are often linked to an increase in their budgets, which means that the greater the production, the greater the profit. So, directly or indirectly, professors/researchers are pressured to enter a vortex of publication. Given this need to publish, a real demand is born, where companies appear offering, in theory, what everyone is looking for: to publish in a journal very quickly while meeting the minimum quality criteria. This is how what is known

as “predatory journals” are born and, conversely, “pirated journals”, another type of fraud, emerge.

Predatory journals are a “business model (with signs of fraud) that has had great growth in recent years” (García-Puente, 2019, p. 81) since they offer to make publishing easier –with previous payment– and without totally fulfilling the requirements of the traditional processes (certification, evaluation, and arbitration). Pirated journals, on the other side, are those that hack the identity of other journals, that is to say, these create a website that looks similar to the recognized academic journals, charge for publishing, and since these are “ghost” journals, the article is never published. Thus, it is necessary to identify their characteristics to prevent professors/researchers who need to publish from paying journals whose sole purpose is to enrich themselves.

Taking as a basis the processes and procedures of a traditional scientific journal endorsed by an academic institution, some of the characteristics and differences of predatory and pirated journals were identified. The most relevant aspects to consider are presented in the following table:

**Table 1.** Characteristics and differences between traditional academic journals and predatory and pirated journals.

JOURNALS			
Characteristics	Traditional	Predatory	Pirated
International Standard Serial Number (ISSN)*	Yes, regularly from the country where the institution is located	Yes, regularly from East, North, and South Asian countries	Yes, but it corresponds to the ISSN of the identity of the supplanted journal
Institutional affiliation	Yes	No	No
Cost per publication	In some cases, article processing charges (APC)	Yes, always	Yes, always

Periodicity	Regularly annually, half-yearly or quarterly	Regularly monthly	According to the identity of the supplanted journal
Time of publication	From 6 to 8 months	From 5 to 30 days	No publication
Peer review	Yes, regularly double-blind	It is offered, but never send opinions	There are no opinions
Type of publication	Disciplinary	Multidisciplinary	According to the identity of the supplanted journal
Indexation	Yes, in verified and known databases	Indexation is not usually available, and if there is any, it is "predatory indexing", which is not verified	The information is sent according to the identity of the supplanted journal
Legal aspects	Yes	Yes, in some cases, false or non-verifiable information	According to the identity of the supplanted journal
Editorial standards	Yes	Yes, regularly, these are not required	According to the identity of the supplanted journal
Reject rates	Between 70 and 90%	No rejection	No rejection
Persistent identifier	Yes, ORCID, DOI, and, in some cases, ROR**	Yes, only DOI, in some cases, and do not link to ORCID	No, because these do not publish
Web pages or sites	Yes, regularly, the domain associated with the institution and country of origin	Yes, regularly, the domain is: .com, .net, or .org	According to the identity of the supplanted journal

Invitation to publish	No, calls are regularly opened	Yes, e-mails are sent out inviting to publish	Yes, e-mails inviting to publish are sent in some cases
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**Source:** Own elaboration, 2022.

\* The International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) is an international register that identifies periodic publications and consists of an eight-digit code. Each country has its own regulations regarding the assignation of this register.

\*\* It is the acronym for Research Organization Registry, a registry of research organizations. It is considered the ORCID of research institutions.

As shown in Table 1, all traditional academic journals have an ISSN and an academic institution that supports them; they do not intend to make a profit, on the contrary, their purpose is to improve scientific knowledge, provide quality information, and support authors to disseminate their research works. In certain cases, these journals may charge Article Processing Charges (APCs), which are basically fees requested to make the papers available for open access. The periodicity may change, but the most commonly used are annual, half-yearly, or quarterly, while bimonthly or monthly are the least common. There are also those of continuous publication or preprints. Due to the nature of peer-reviewed journals, issues usually have a certain number of articles, due to the evaluation time (6 to 8 months on average).

Another important aspect that identifies traditional academic journals is their type of disciplinary publication. That means that they are specialized in certain topics, which means that multidisciplinary does not distinguish them. As for indicators, they regularly do not publish an impact factor, in case of having one, they only mention the accreditations, databases, indexes, catalogs, and directories to which they are attached. Moreover, in some cases, they put the image of Scimago or Web of Science in which the quartile where they are located can be seen and have a link for users to go to the page where they will find more information.

Regarding legal aspects, traditional scientific journals publish all the detailed contact information, address, and legal aspects to be considered. In the case of Mexico, journals are under the obligation to publish a legal band that indicates their last update, serial number of the reservation of rights, ISSN, names of those responsible, fiscal

addresses, and the licenses used. Finally, the editorial standards established are detailed, including style manuals, formats, structure, and estimated times for the editorial process.

In contrast, predatory journals are not supported by an academic institution but, sometimes, by an unverifiable or fictitious company. They try to profit by speeding up the editorial process, meaning they accept the article almost immediately to get paid. The traditional peer-review process is not carried out; although it is announced, opinions and editorial corrections are usually not sent, considering that the more accepted articles, the better the income. This is why, in most cases, their periodicity is monthly and with a high number of articles published per issue. Even special issues are created to receive more articles.

In their pages, predatory journals make visible an impact factor that is endorsed by a predatory database; they do not offer information on accreditations, and the legal aspects are diffuse since the location and address information are often different from the one found in the terms and conditions. It is always announced that their articles will have a DOI<sup>1</sup> as a quality indicator when, in reality, it is not associated. A relevant aspect of this type of journal is that they constantly send e-mails to authors inviting them to submit their articles or even participate as an editor. One of the main characteristics of predatory journals is that they do publish accepted articles and tend to last for years circulating on the web; in fact, some of them decide to take the right path and start certification processes with valid databases. The underlying problem with this type of publication is the published information, which is not checked or corrected.

As for pirated journals, they supplant the identity of other journals, which means they create a URL or web address similar to a legally established journal and offer the same services, with the difference that they charge for publishing; and, even though they have similar characteristics to predatory journals, the main difference is that the articles are never published. Therefore, their purpose is to steal, so to avoid falling into these two types of fraud, we recommend to:

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<sup>1</sup> The Digital Object Identifier (DOI) is a numeric key purchased from a company. The most used is Crossref (after payment of an annual membership fee) to identify a digital object, in this case, the article. It is considered a persistent identifier.

- Review the available list of predatory journals at: <https://beallslist.net>
- Visit the free database pages linked to the academic world, where journals that have been certified can be found, among which the following can be mentioned:
  - Scimago Journal & Country Rank: <https://www.scimagojr.com/>
  - Web of Science: <https://mjl.clarivate.com/home>
  - Directory of Open Access Journals (doaj): <https://doaj.org/>
  - Scientific Electronic Library Online (scielo): <https://www.scielo.org.mx/>
  - Redalyc (*Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina y el Caribe, España y Portugal*): <https://www.redalyc.org/>
- Comply with the suggested steps of <https://thinkchecksubmit.org/> to identify trusted editors.
- Use the Information Matrix for the Analysis of Journals (MIAR) to verify the existence of the ISSN, the link with the original website and its accreditations and indexation: <https://miar.ub.edu/>

Lastly, it is necessary to reflect on the scenario that professors/researchers face today and the conditions imposed by academic capitalism. "Publish or perish" seems to be a simple joke like so many others, but in reality, it is a radiography of a gruesome joke of postmodern slavery, where the popular saying "tell me where you publish and I'll tell you how much you're worth" can easily be adjusted. How public policy and institutions have adopted approaches to give economic value to research and knowledge production are outside the intrinsic value of what is meant by the natural development of knowledge and its timing. In this situation, as in any other commercial process, business niches are generated, where profit is not made from a person's work but from that person's need.

Predatory and pirated journals are evidence of how broken and fragile the validation system of scientific production is, where, without doing much, they offer what is needed: selling a way to release pressure. It is necessary to be very careful when we receive an e-mail inviting us to publish and want to submit our article, our work; so, as a rule, the journal's authenticity must be verified, because otherwise, we will not only be losing money but also credibility. We invite you to carefully review each journal in which

you plan to submit your work so that when you choose it, you will have full confidence that it is a genuine scientific journal.

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