

Open Access Journals and Phishing

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Recently, many hundreds of new supposedly academic journals have appeared on the web. Their publishers take advantage of the 'publish or perish' syndrome. These journals, identified by Librarian Jeff Beall as "predatory", on account of their aggressive recruitment of authors and submissions, is enabled, he argues, by very low barriers to learned publishing. All that these post office boxes need is a computer, a website and a bank account.

The state publication subsidy (previously SAPSE, now DoHET) as a regulatory device, has shielded South African academics from the worst excesses of what Lars Bjørnshauge names as "questionable" journals and publishers now running rampant through the Net. Such phishing journals are open access online equivalents of 419 scams. None are on the DoHET lists. Where 419s promise huge rewards to victims to warehouse fictional millions in their accounts, 'predatory' or 'questionable' journal publishers just phish for small amounts to be paid into their bank accounts.

I first learned about this publication phishing phenomenon after an international conference my Centre had hosted in 2012. All 600 delegates listed on the programme received personalized letters from an unknown publisher and anonymous editor (first name only) from an unlisted address inviting submission to one of their journals. The International Association for Media and Communication Research responded by issuing a cautionary notice that this publisher was unknown to it and did not have authority to phish its members' email addresses. I had to personally intervene to persuade PhD some students not to respond.

These publishers have generated titles that will accept anything and everything, each listing sometimes upwards of 350 titles, hosted on often untraceable IP addresses, mostly claimed to be somewhere in the USA to suggest legitimacy.

The signs that journals are engaged in phishing expeditions include:

- i) the author will be invited onto the editorial board, no matter their academic standing;
- ii) inducements are offered, e.g., cash prizes, free membership of a bogus disciplinary association, or discounts on "article processing";
- iii) physical addresses are not provided;
- iv) potential authors are encouraged to plagiarise an already published article from a legitimate journal, whether one's own or one penned by others;
- v) meaningless titles like "Journal of Advance Research" or International "Journal of Technoledge", abound;

- vi) titles sport grammatically incorrect and poorly designed websites, sometimes cloned from legitimate journals with the same or similar titles;
- vii) authors who publish on these sites often do plagiarise content from bona fide journals;
- viii) predatory journals sometimes offer 48 hour review turnaround and publication within a month (but only after payment has been received);
- viii) authors are invited to nominate referees, Mom and Pop will do;
- ix) editorial board members are not named, or if they are, high profile unwitting academics might find that they are listed, and/or phishing letters to potential authors are issued in the names of well known academics not connected to such journals [check whether your name has been cloned] ;
- x) some traceable individuals from reputable universities edit scores of such journals and serve on the boards of hundreds more;
- xi) bogus impact factors are provided, and some identify phony indexing organisations that claim to assign impact factors;
- xiii) these journals dupe anti-plagiarism software;
- xiv) the publishers sport bizarre company names.
- iv) the claim is made that publication in one of these journals will see high citations, fast turnaround, and fast tracking of one's career. It was in these kinds of journals that the AIDS denialists first published their counter-narratives as the legitimate journals sensibly declined to consider their claims.

A new business model has now emerged, what are called Super Closed Access Journals, linked to some bundled library subscriber packages, available via a few undiscerning libraries. One company advertising "The Best Scholarly Journals" tries to restore academic confidence by stating in bold that the review process will take four months, but take care to employ your own professional proofreader (who does not mind phishing). Some publishers have taken to purchasing legitimate titles and then repurposing them into questionable journals. Life Sciences Journal is one such example, recently de-listed from Scopus when it quadrupled its annual numbers not including another 12 special issues, now publishing up to 60 articles per number.

Allied to this massive publication phishing is conference phishing. Bogus conference websites with seemingly legitimate organizers whose false names and pictures are plastered on websites invite papers to be published in the journals supposedly published in tandem with the conference. Going this route certainly means that one will pay, publish, pay AND perish.

As I said, a clear DoHET benefit is the shielding South African-based authors from being phished. The regulation of predatory or questionable publishing is itself an issue

amongst some commentators. Aspects of Beall's (<http://scholarlyoa.com/>) regular postings on the subject are critically engaged by others (see <http://citesandinsights.info/civ14i4.pdf>), some of whom who are working to create registration opportunities for bone fide scholarly open access journals

The questionable online phishers should not be confused with the Academy of Science for South Africa's own open access platform, SciELO. These are legitimate journals doing legitimate things. They have gone through a non-commercial route which has its own benefits and problems. In this initiative each journal is responsible for itself, as SciELO is just a platform, and as such issues its own metrics that can be trusted. It has a physical address in a Pretoria government department and working phone numbers. Many other open access journals are performing well also and obviously can be trusted even if they are not DoHET-listed or on SciELO.