SHORT COMMUNICATION

ResearchGate is no longer reliable: leniency towards ghost journals may decrease its impact on the scientific community

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Abstract

ResearchGate has been regarded as one of the most attractive academic social networking site for scientific community. It has been trying to improve user-centered interfaces to gain more attractiveness to scientists around the world. Display of journal related scietometric measures (such as impact factor, 5-year impact, cited half-life, eigenfactor) is an important feature in ResearchGate. Open access publishing has added more to increased visibility of research work and easy access to information related to research. Moreover, scientific community has been much interested in promoting their work and exhibiting its impact to others through reliable scientometric measures. However, with the growing market of publications and improvements in the field of research, this community has been victimized by the cybercrime in the form of ghost journals, fake publishers and magical impact measures. Particularly, ResearchGate more recently, has been lenient in its policies against this dark side of academic writing. Therefore, this communication aims to discuss concerns associated with leniency in ResearchGate policies and its impact of scientific community.

Keywords: Impact factor, Journal, Open access publishing, Ethics in publishing, Research misconduct.

Introduction

Social networking plays a very eminent role in the modern era of globalization. By its introduction to scientific community through academic networking sites like ResearchGate, Academia.edu and Mendeley; researchers around the globe have been attracted more to it and have been able to display and share their research work. Open access publishing has added more to increased visibility of research work and easy access to information related to research, and scientists have been highly inspired by this, with reputable organizations taking initiatives and getting involved in developing the scenario further in a better way. However, there has also been a dark side to academic writing due to emergence of fake publishers, magical scientific indicators (that do not really exist in real terms in the research world) and bogus websites. The researchers almost always feel proud and eager to display their scientometric indicators to the scientific community but this notion has been blurred by introduction of academic pollution (in the form of predatory journals and fake impact organizations) in research world particularly, if this pollution is able to find a space in platforms like the ResearchGate. This communication aims to discuss concerns associated with leniency in ResearchGate policies and its impact on the scientific community.

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ResearchGate

ResearchGate was initiated in 2008 as an academic social networking site aiming to help researchers cooperate, communicate and share information.[1] An important feature of ResearchGate is social network support, which helps effective scientific communication among its members.[1] It ensures that the publications are visible and accessible to the scientific community.[2] Recently, Bill Gates and others have invested 35 million US$ in ResearchGate.[3] This reflects a significant interest in social networking tools in the field of scientific communication. Currently, ResearchGate reports over 8 million users and it appears to be the most popular social networking site. The substantial contribution comes from fields of medicine, life and physical sciences. Moreover, social sciences and humanities are less represented in it.[1] ResearchGate leads over the other academic networking sites like Academia.edu and Mendeley by providing various user-centric interfaces to scientific audience resembling Facebook and LinkedIn.[1,3] ResearchGate is free, and it allows its members to upload or list their publications on their profile page with their brief information.[1] Metadata on publications, article level metrics and the recent initiative "RG score" is also available for each member.[1,3] On the journal level, ResearchGate displays current impact factor of journals and other scientometric indicators.

Open Access Publishing and Ghost Journals

With the goal to accelerate research and remove barriers in accessing research, open access publishing officially started in 2002 and gained immense popularity.[4] Presently, there are over 10,000 journals registered in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) receiving significant contribution from researchers around the world.[4] These journals are freely accessible to readers, with varying range of article processing

charges (APCs), supported by associations and organizations, and flexible to authors from low or middle-income countries.

Over the last few years, research community has been a victim of cybercrime-the dark side of scientific writing. This "academic pollution" had targeted many scientists after the emergence of predatory and hijacked journals. Jeffery Beall in 2010 presented the term predatory journals to the research world with 20 predatory publishers in his first list which has risen to over 700 in 2015 (Beall's List of Standalone Journals: https://scholarlyoa.com/individual-journals/).[5] Predatory journals exhibit questionable academic quality and unprofessionally exploit the open access model.[4,6] Another term "hijacked journals" was coined by Mehrdad Jalalian in 2012.[7] These journals mislead the researchers by abusing the name and ISSN of reputable journals. They have grown from 3 to 90 titles from 2011 to 2015 at a growth rate of 9000%.[8] Most of these journals are managed in low and middle income countries like India, Pakistan, and Nigeria with addresses from UK and USA claimed by them.[9] Predatory and hijacked journals, I call them "ghost journals", are primarily focused on money making with little to no peer-review system and editorial board with poor or no established academic credibility.[9] Moreover, they claim being indexed in many non-scientific sites like Docstoc and Scribd.[6] Hijacked journals are more likely to receive contributions than predatory journals because of their titles mimicking reputable journals.[10] In most of the cases, non-English journals and those journals with difficult to find website are good options for hijackers. Moreover, they are present temporarily (after being threatened for legal action by original journal) unlike predatory journals.[10] These ghost journals and publishers are not registered legally by any agency or institution however, most of the predatory journals even display impact factor on their websites and claim to have been listed in well-known agencies like SCOPUS and Web of Knowledge where they in fact, never appeared.[8,9] The menace of predatory journals is evident from increasing number of spams and emails received by members of scientific community.[9] Most often, young and inexperienced researchers who are anxious to get recognized by the scientific community and expand the list of their research papers, get invitations by ghost journals to publish their work and are the common victims of these ghost journals.[9] Moreover, the authors victimized by ghost journals mostly are from developing countries such as India, Pakistan, Nigeria and some African and Middle Eastern countries.[11] The main reason behind this is the low-standard submission acceptance and quick and easy publishing model used by these journals. There have been significant contribution by Jeffrey Beall to the recognition of predatory journals and Jalalian on the topic of hijacked journals through compilation of the list of such journals.[7,12]

Magical Impact Agencies

Recent appearance of questionable agencies and websites is a serious consequence of predatory journals (Table-1). These websites claim to measure the impact of scientific journals by providing bogus magical impact

Figure-1: A predatory journal with Impact Factor displayed on ResearchGate.

Figure-2: A predatory journal given space to publicize itself on ResearchGate.

Table-1: Websites providing magical impact factor.*

Scientific Journal Impact Factor (SJIF)	http://www.sjifactor.inno-space.net/or http://sjifactor.com/
CiteFactor?	http://www.citefactor.org
African Quality Centre for Journals	http://aqcj.org/index.html
International Scientific Institute (ISI)-journal impact factor (IF)	http://www.scijournal.org
American Standards for Journals and Research (ASJR)	http://www.journal-metrics.com/
Institute for Science Information (ISI)?	http://isi-thosonreuters.com and http://www.isithomsonreuters.org/
Directory of Journal Quality Factor (now called Quality Factor)	http://www.qualityfactor.org/index.html
Global Impact& Quality Factor (GIF)	http://globalimpactfactor.com
International Institute of Organized Research (I2OR)	http://www.i2or.com/
Scientific Indexing Services (SIS)	http://sindexs.org
Eurasian Scientific Journal Index (ESJI)	http://esjindex.org/index.php
Open Academic Journals Index	http://oaji.net
Advanced Science Index	http://journal-index.org
International Services for Impact Factor and Indexing (ISIFI)	http://www.journalimpactfactor.in/
International Impact Factor Services	http://impactfactorservice.com
IndexCopernicus	http://journals.indexcopernicus.com/?page=10&id_lang=3
Journals Impact Factor (JIFACTOR)	http://www.jifactor.org/
Infobase Index	http://www.infobaseindex.com/
International Society for Research Activity (ISRA)-Journal Impact Factor?	http://www.israjif.org
Impact Factor Services for International Journals (I.F.S.I.J.)	http://ifsij.com/
Journal Influence Factor (JIF)	http://www.journalsconsortium.org
Directory of Indexing and Impact Factor (DIIF)	http://www.diif.org
International Journal Impact Factor (IJIF)	http://www.internationaljournalimpactfactor.com/
The Global Institute for Scientific Information (GISI) Journal Impact Factor (JIF)	http://www.jifactor.com
International Institute for Research-Impact Factor Journals (IFJ)	http://www.impactfactorjournals.com/
International Scientific Indexing (ISI)	http://isindexing.com
Jour Informatics	http://www.jourinfo.com/
Einstein Institute for Scientific Information (EISI)	http://journalimpactfactor.co.in
General Impact Factor (GIF)	http://generalimpactfactor.com
Science Impact Factor (SIF)	http://scienceimpactfactor.com/
Council for Innovative Research (CIR)	http://cirworld.org
Pubicon Science Index**	http://www.pubicon.org/#
Universal Impact Factor	http://www.uifactor.org
Technical Impact Factor (TIF)	http://www.timpactfactor.com/index.html
Directory of Research Journal Indexing (DRJI)	http://www.drji.org

*The details have been extracted from the following sources:

1. Misleading Metricshttps://scholarlyoa.com/other-pages/misleading-metrics/[Accessed on 3rdDecember 2015 and 5th April 2016]

2. Gutierrez FR, Beall J, Forero DA. Spurious alternative impact factors: The scale of the problem from an academic perspective. Bioessays. 2015;37(5):474-6.

**These websiteshave been inactive now.

factor.[6,9] They typically misguide the researchers by using similar names to the reputed scientometrics and misuse the expression "Impact Factor".[6]

ResearhGate and Academic Pollution

In the recent years, ResearchGate has been lenient in its policies and has created a space for predatory journals to enter the website. Some of the journals displaying fake impact factor on their website (previously mentioned) are available in ResearchGate with an impact factor-a misleading point for scientists who rely on ResarchGate. One reason for this may be related to the researchers who are unaware of the quality of the journal of their published work (either it is reputable and genuine journal or a fake/ghost one), readily sharing their work on ResearchGate for increasing its visibility to their peers. Particularly, articles published in predatory journals are equally visible on ResearchGate as that of reputable journals. Another reason, that I suspect in this case, is absence of policies by ResearchGate on accepting manuscripts — they probably do not check or filter the uploaded content. This may be part of the explanation for the problem of identifying ghost journals and their content on ResearchGate. Moreover, journals listed in the Beall's list of predatory publishers can also be found on ResearchGate with an impact factor (Figure-1 and 2).

Some of the examples of ghost journals found on ResearchGate are mentioned in Table-2. This may possibly

Table-2: Some ghost journals available on ResearchGate with an impact factor.#

Journal*	Hyperlinks
International Journal of Scientific and Engineering Research (IJSER)	http://www.ijser.org/ https://www.researchgate.net/journal/2229-5518_International_Journal_of_Scientific_and_Engineering_Research
Global Journal of Engineering Science and Research Management (GJESRM)	http://www.gjesrm.com/index.html https://www.researchgate.net/journal/2349-4506_Global_Journal_of_Engineering_Science_and_Research_Management
International Journal of Applied Research & Studies (iJARS)	http://www.ijars.ijarsgroup.com/ https://www.researchgate.net/journal/2278-9480_International_Journal_of_Applied_Research_and_Studies
Asian Journal of Chemistry	http://www.asianjournalofchemistry.co.in/Home.aspx https://www.researchgate.net/journal/0970-7077_Asian_Journal_of_Chemistry
Asian Journal of Empirical Research‡ (AESS publishers)	http://www.aessweb.com/journals/5004 https://www.researchgate.net/journal/2224-4425_Asian_Journal_of_Empirical_Research
International Journal of Advances in Pharmaceutical Research	http://www.ijapronline.org/index.php https://www.researchgate.net/journal/2249-7226_INTERNATIONAL_JOURNAL_OF_ADVANCES_IN_PHARMACEUTICAL_RESEARCH
International Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences	http://www.ijppsjournal.com/ https://www.researchgate.net/journal/0975-1491_International_Journal_of_Pharmacy_and_Pharmaceutical_Sciences
International Journal of Pharmacognosy and Phytochemical Research (IJPPR)	http://ijppr.com/ https://www.researchgate.net/journal/0975-4873_International_Journal_of_Pharmacognosy_and_Phytochemical_Research
International Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences and Research (IJPSR)	http://ijpsr.com/ https://www.researchgate.net/journal/0975-8232_International_Journal_of_Pharmaceutical_Sciences_and_Research
International Journal of Physiotherapy (IJPHY)	https://www.ijphy.org/index.php https://www.researchgate.net/journal/2348-8336_International_Journal_of_Physiotherapy
World Applied Sciences Journal	http://www.wasj.org/ https://www.researchgate.net/journal/1818-4952_World_Applied_Sciences_Journal
International Journal of Civil Engineering and Technology (IJCIET)‡ (IAEME publishers)	http://www.iaeme.com/ijciet.asp https://www.researchgate.net/journal/0976-6308_International_Journal_of_Civil_Engineering_and_Technology
Acta Medica International	http://www.actamedicainternational.com/ https://www.researchgate.net/journal/2349-0578_Acta_Medica_International
Jökull†	http://www.jokulljournal.is https://www.researchgate.net/journal/0449-0576_Jokull
Bothalia- African Biodiversity & Conservation†	http://www.abcjournal.org/index.php/ABC/index https://www.researchgate.net/journal/0006-8241_Bothalia-African_Biodiversity_and_Conservation

#All webpages were accessedbetween4th-6thApril 2016

* I omit many ghost journals that have been added to ResearchGate without an impact factor.

† Hijacked Journals

‡Journals that are not listed in Beall's list of predatory publishers but I suspect them being predatory because their publishers have been included in Beall's list of predatory publishers.

The information in this table has been compared with details in Beall's list of predatory journals and publishers, available at: https://scholarlyoa.com/individual-journals/and https://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/[See the supplementary material for additional information].

lead to a suspicion that ResearchGate is no longer reliable to scientific community and in fact, is giving room to ghost journals to get recognized as reliable and good quality journals. If it persists longer, ResearchGate is soon going to lose its attractiveness and impact on the scientific community. It is worth saying that more researchers will be victims of these ghost journals if this is done-a point to step forward and take action. The necessary actions can be taken at both levels i.e. by the researchers and by those responsible for ResearchGate. Authors should be cautious before submitting their work to any journal. All the members of scientific community should be aware of the Beall's list of predatory journals and Jalalian's list of hijacked journals. Secondly, journal selection should not be solely based on the

impact factor as it is not the sole criteria for assessing journal quality, other factors like acceptance rate, editorial board, quality of articles published, publisher, and APCs of the journal should also be taken into consideration. "Be iNFORMEd: Checklist" by Duke University is an important resource in this context (http://guides.mclibrary.duke.edu/beinformed). It is important to mention that the impact factor has been misused to assess the quality of journals since it was meant to be used by libraries to select which journals to purchase and which not to. This metric should not be presented on the first page of reputable journals as it may be misleading to inexperienced researchers to distinguish between the scientific and ghost journals. Finally, authors may also try for journal selection resources like Think Check Submit Guide (http://thinkchecksubmit.org/), Edanz Journal Selector (https://www.edanzediting.com/journal-selector), Elsevier Journal Finder (http://journalfinder.elsevier.com/), Find the right journal - BioMed Central (http://www.biomedcentral.com/submissions/find-the-right-journal), Springer journal selector (http://www.springer.com/ gp/authors-editors/journal-author/journal-author-helpdesk/preparation/1276), JournalGuide by Research Square (https://www.journalguide.com/), JANE-journal author name estimator (http://jane.biosemantics.org/), and EndNote Web Match (https://www.myendnoteweb.com/EndNoteWeb.html?func=journalDetails&cat=details&). Moreover, experienced researchers and supervisors should inform and teach young researchers on this issue. On the other hand, those responsible for ResearchGate should set some policy and parameters for quality check of uploaded content based on the Beall's list of predatory journals, Jalalian's list of hijacked journals and Journal Citation Reports of Thomson and Reuters (http://wokinfo.com/products_tools/analytical/jcr/). Meanwhile, ResearchGate officials should block the content of ghost journals mentioned in Beall's list and Jalalian's list and not listed in JCR of Thomson & Reuters.

Conclusive Remarks

Scientific community and networking platforms like ResearchGate should take a serious note of the fact that considerations given to ghost journals and putting them in the row of reliable and quality journals might create an alarming situation in future. This dark side of academic writing should be hampered, before it finds more space and prevails, as it would not only affect the scientists only but also the community as a whole.

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