

COMMENTARY

The Perils of Tempting Predatory Conferences

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Publishing a manuscript in a scholarly journal with a peer-review process and presenting at a trustworthy conference are worthy accomplishments. Furthermore, the number of scientific communications frequently serves as academic success and is used to provide academic supports, grants and funding.^{1,2} This leads researchers and academicians under extreme pressure and makes them vulnerable to both predatory journals as well as such conferences.³

A scientific conference often affords key platforms for researchers to disseminate their research work, acquaint with new developments in a specific field, and receive vital inputs from the peers in the field. Good conferences ensure a confluence of experts who can initiate new thought processes in the minds of new investigators and kindle creativity.⁴ Such conferences assure to assist the communication between new researchers and experts so that the exchange of ideas takes place.⁴ It is often more educative to appreciate the challenges and difficulties as well as the voyage of the leading researchers. Considering the reality that abstracts presented in conferences are possibly represent new information, an abstract submitted to a conference goes through several steps of peer review. Initially the reviewers assess the submitted abstracts and select the abstracts that fulfil certain

criteria. Unlike full research papers, the reviewers have to adjudicate the eminence of the research work from an abstract of 200 to 300 words. There are many challenges at this phase of peer review.⁴ Structuring an abstract goes a long way. It is important that the abstract is drafted carefully in anticipation of challenges of peer review in a conference. The authors need to make sure that their brief abstract provides sufficient information on essential particulars for the reviewers to make a reasonable judgment. Thus, the quality and the consequence of the abstract to the theme of the conference are also essential for selection.⁴ A poorly written abstract is more likely the reason for rejection rather than the demerits of the study itself.

Good conferences often bring out the selected abstracts as a supplement in a peer reviewed journal. In such cases, the journal is expected to be associated in the initial peer review of the abstracts. However, the method of abstract selection is often opaque even in good conferences. In several cases, the authors do not get feedback from the reviewers and cannot submit a revised abstract. Without a critical assessment, flawed results and conclusions would cloud the existing scientific literature. Predatory conferences are the offshoots of predatory publishing.⁵

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Received: 03 November 2020

Revised: 08 November 2020

Accepted: 09 November 2020

Published online: 01 January 2021

Citation: Das SK. The Perils of Tempting Predatory Conferences. J West Bengal Univ Health Sci. 2021; 1(3):5-7

While poor quality meetings, often called fraudulent or predatory conferences, are emerging threats to scientific information dissemination that is rapidly expanding and has mislead hundreds of researchers.⁶ These predatory conferences are not arranged by scholarly societies, but by profit-making event organizers.⁵ Various schemes are used by these conference arrangers to extract money from the researchers such as organizing conferences at attractive tourist places with multidisciplinary scope, provocation to submit a research paper to be published at the earliest or to become component of an editorial board/editor-in-chief.⁷ Predatory conference planners use electronic spams to actively court authors soliciting them to submit an abstract to present at a conference.^{8, 9} Misleading conference accreditation is another method used to deceive researchers.¹⁰

Invitations from potential predatory entities, usually individuals or companies, rather than that an organisation or a scientific community, were often distinguished by the presence of grammatical errors, the absence of sender's contact information, use names identical to reputable conferences, use generic terms such as 'global', 'international' or 'world', and ask substantial fees to presenters and have little concern for scientific value.¹¹ Predatory conferences allow poor quality submissions; the abstracts are not reviewed, and insists delegates to register in order to get their abstracts accepted. New comers in the academic field are easy victim to such initiatives. Such conferences list names of individuals in the committees without even taking proper consent. Even eminent speakers are listed without their knowledge and may not really contribute in the conference. Predatory conferences also publish abstracts in predatory journals and at the surface, it is hard to differentiate the good from the bad for the average young researchers.¹²

Predatory conferences appear a high-profit business.¹³ The World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology, as well as the OMICS Publishing Group are well known organisers of predatory conferences. The Federal Trade Commission even initiated a case against OMICS (FTC sues OMICS group, 2016) in 2016.¹⁴ In another instance, the New York Times reported that scientists recruited to present at a conference called Entomology-2013 misguidedly believed they were to make a presentation to the leading professional association of entomologists.¹⁵ In fact, the impressive conference was named Entomology 2013 (without the hyphen). The speakers for the fraudulent conference were invited by e-mail and later charged a fee for the privilege.¹⁵

Unwelcome invitations from potential predatory publishers and conference organisers are common, even following a single publication as a corresponding author. One study showed that, one of the researcher had received two hundred and ten invitations from a potential fraudulent conference from across the globe such as Europe (97, 46.2%), North America (65, 31.0%), Asia (20.4%) or other continents (5, 2.4%) and came from 18 meeting organisation groups (range 1 to 137 invitations per organisation) in one year using a single email address.¹⁶ London (26, 12.4%), Dubai (17, 8.1%), Rome (14, 6.7%), Amsterdam (13, 6.2%), Barcelona (12, 5.7%) and Las Vegas (12, 5.7%) were the cities where the conferences were held the most frequently. The terms international, global or world were used in 178 (84.7%) meeting names.¹⁶

Academic institutions and funding agencies need to acknowledge the incidence of predatory entities and educate researchers early. It was Jeffrey Beall who coined the term "predatory meetings".¹¹ Beall's lists of predatory journals and publishers help to distinguish between predatory and legitimate publishers. Similarly, James

McCrostie's criteria are used to assess if a conference should be considered as potentially fraudulent.⁶ There is a blog for bogus conferences.¹⁷ Both Beall's blog and The Chronicle of Higher Education warn readers about bogus conferences.¹⁸ Another website listing bogus conferences is called Con-ferences.¹⁹

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