mag. Miro Pušnik, CTK

Unethical Practices in Academic Publishing: How to Recognize Them and How to Deal With Them

University of Nova Gorica

The Open Library: Centre for Quality Assurance in Scientific Communication operates within the framework of the Action Plan for Open Science (measure 6.2 ReZrIS30) and is funded by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation.

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2. Circumstances in which these practices arise.
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5. Tools for verifying the credibility of scientific journals.
6. Examples of unusual practices by some publishers.
7. How to avoid predatory publishers.

WORLD VIEW *A personal take on events*

J. SANCHEZ

Predatory publishers are corrupting open access

Journals that exploit the author–pays model damage scholarly publishing and promote unethical behaviour by scientists, argues **Jeffrey Beall**.

When e-mail first became available, it was a great innovation that made communication fast and cheap. Then came spam — and suddenly, the innovation wasn't so great. It meant having to filter out irrelevant, deceptive and sometimes offensive messages. It still does.

The same corruption of a great idea is now occurring with scholarly open-access publishing.

Early experiments with open-access publishing, such as the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* and BioMed Central, were very promising. Set up more than a decade ago, they helped to inspire a social movement that has changed academic publishing for the better, lowered costs and expanded worldwide access to the latest research.

Then came predatory publishers, which publish counterfeit journals to exploit the open-access model in which the author pays. These predatory publishers are dishonest and lack transparency. They aim to dupe researchers, especially those inexperienced in scholarly communication. They set up websites that closely resemble those of legitimate online publishers, and publish journals of questionable and downright low quality. Many purport to be headquartered in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada or Australia but really hail from Pakistan, India or Nigeria.

Some predatory publishers spam researchers, soliciting manuscripts but failing to mention the required author fee. Later, after the paper is accepted and published, the authors are invoiced for the fees, typically US$1,800. Because the scientists are often asked to sign over their research is disappearing. Now there is a journal willing to accept almost every article, as long as the author is willing to pay the fee. Authors, rather than libraries, are the customers of open-access publishers, so a powerful incentive to maintain quality has been removed.

Perhaps nowhere are these abuses more acute than in India, where new predatory publishers or journals emerge each week. They are appearing because of the market need — hundreds of thousands of scientists in India and its neighbouring countries need to get published to earn tenure and promotion.

Here, the problem is not just with the publishers. Scientists themselves are also to blame. Many are taking unethical shortcuts and paying for the publication of plagiarized or self-plagiarized work.

Honest scientists stand to lose the most in this unethical quagmire. When a researcher's work is published alongside articles that are plagiarized, that report on conclusions gained from unsound methodologies or that contain altered photographic figures, it becomes tainted by association. Unethical scientists gaming the system [illegible] and promotion [illegible]

The competition for author fees among fraudulent publishers is [illegible] science communi[illegible] market, legitimate open-access publishers are being forced to [illegible] publication times [illegible] process, which takes time to do properly.

To [illegible]ckle the problem, scholars must resist the temptation to publish quickly and easily. The research community needs to use scholarly

SCIENTIFIC LITERACY **MUST INCLUDE** THE ABILITY TO RECOGNIZE **PUBLISHING FRAUD.**

Vir: Predatory publishers are corrupting open access (2012) Nature, 489 (7415), pp. 179. https://dx.doi.org/10.1038/489179a

What are untrustworthy publishing practices?

Publishing practices that do not fully or partially comply with the principles of scientific publishing.

Four basic principles of scientific journals (Zuckerman, Merton, 1971. Patterns of evaluation in science. Minerva, Vol. 9, No. 1 (January 1971), pp. 66-100 (35 pages), Mabe, 2012. Does journal publishing have a future? Academic and Professional Publishing, pp. 413 -440):

- regulated copyright and intellectual property,
- effective dissemination,
- quality criteria with appropriate review procedures,
- appropriate archiving.

Minimum requirements of scientific journals

Transparent and credible peer-review system and editorial policy.

Consistent adherence to the structure and typology of scientific works (e.g. IMRAD).

Transparent editorial board and editorial policy.

Archiving and ensuring permanent accessibility.

Appropriate citation and referencing of other sources.

Appropriate dissemination (e.g. indexing in well-known bibliographic collections).

Global Academic Publishing Market

Before the pandemic, the international scientific literature market was worth approximately $28 billion (it is expected to reach a similar level again in 2023).

The annual growth in the number of publications is approximately 5%.

Open access publishing models are growing faster than traditional publishing models.

The projected revenue growth for the period 2019 to 2022 is 11.5%.

Approximately 10,000 publishers, approximately 5,000 of them are indexed in Scopus.

Approximately 33,000 titles of scientific journals in English (approximately 9,400 titles in other languages).

Annual growth in new titles is approximately 3%. (source: STM report, 2018 and 2021, https://www.stm-assoc.org/).

Simple Problematic Practices

Predatory journals: journals that appear to be legitimate but do not have a proper review system or have an inadequate one. Predatory journals often cite false and misleading metrics about their impact. As a rule, open publications in these journals are associated with lower APC costs.

Predatory publishers: publishers that publish predatory journals.

Misleading metrics: often fabricated metrics with impressive names, often reminiscent of credible metrics.

Predatory scientific conferences: conferences organized outside standard procedures (editorial board, peer review of contributions, etc.).

Hijacked journals: misleading websites that are designed to look like copies of original scientific journals.

Complex Problematic Practices

Questionable practices of some gold journal publishers:

- frequent reports of doubts based on questionable review systems,
- publication speed.

Circumstances that enable this:

- funding requirements for open access,
- eligible costs for open access only in gold journals,
- evaluation of scientific research based on the number of publications (paper mills),
- generally lower rejection rates at some publishers.

Bad Jokes


SCOPUS PUBLICATION
Ashley Andrew · 16 September at 00:03 ·
CALL FOR PAPERS
Accepting Articles For The Month Of September-October In Scopus Indexed Journals With Guaranteed Publication.
We Offer Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 Quartile.
ACCEPTING ARTICLE FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER IN 30 to 40 DAYS
SCOPUS
WEB OF SCIENCE
SPRINGER NATURE
PUBMED
ISI
NOTE : We Deal only with the top publishers such as ELSAIVER, WILEY, SAGE, TAYLOR & FRANSIC etc.

Criteria for Identifying Untrustworthy Publishing Practices

Checking of persons involved in the publication of the selected journal or publishing house.

Checking of organisational aspects of the management of the journal or publishing house.

Integrity and transparency of the editorial board.

Bibliometric and bibliographic aspects.

Other.

Checking of Persons Involved in the Publication of the Selected Journal or Publishing House 1

The same person often appears as editor, and the editor is also listed as the owner of the publishing house.

Editorial boards are duplicated among journals from the same publishing house.

Editorial boards are often not listed.

Information about the members of editorial boards is incomplete (for example, their institutions of affiliation are not listed).

Checking of Persons Involved in the Publication of the Selected Journal or Publishing House 2

Editors and members of editorial boards have no references in the field of research.

Editorial boards do not have a sufficient number of members (e.g. only 2 or 3), and often the names are fictitious.

Information about the country of origin of the editors is often not provided, especially in cases where the international orientation of the journal is emphasised.

Editorial boards often consist only of men.

Checking the Organisational Aspects of the Management of the Journal or Publishing House 1

There is a clear lack of transparency and clarity in the operation (unclear information about the publisher's address, telephone contacts, etc.).

There are no systems for the permanent identification of digital objects and for managing online links (ISSN, DOI, URN, etc.).

The licensing policy is unclear and contains contradictory clauses.

Licence agreements are not based on recognised standards for open access publishing.

There are frequent cases of already published works being withdrawn (retraction) from the journal, even without formal explanations.

Any corrections and clarifications are often not published.

Works are often not marked with information about their publication status (e.g. crossmark).

Checking the Organisational Aspects of the Management of the Journal or Publishing House 2

Publishers' websites include links to established scientific conferences and scientific associations with which they have no connection and of which they are not members to increase their credibility.

Journal titles are not indexed in well-known and credible databases of scientific periodicals (Ulrichsweb, DOAJ and others).

Information on APC prices is incomplete and contains a lot of ‘small print’.

Publishers demand payment of APCs and, at the same time, the transfer of material copyright to the publisher.

They demand the transfer of material copyright to the publisher upon submission of the work, rather than upon acceptance for publication, as is customary.

Online search engines are often unable to index the content (e.g. an article cannot be found using Google or similar tools).

Documents are often protected in such a way that plagiarism cannot be analysed (e.g. PDF ‘copy proofs’).

Integrity and Transparency 1

The title of the journal is not consistent with its mission and the scientific field it covers, or it covers too broad a field with the aim of attracting as many authors as possible (e.g. Journal of Education).

Publishers often use words such as ‘Network’, ‘Center’, “Association”, ‘Institute’ and similar terms in their names and journal titles.

The publisher combines two or more terms in the journal title that do not belong in the same context in terms of content.

The title of the journal misleadingly reflects its geographical origin (e.g. Canadian, but published in India).

Integrity and Transparency 2

Publishers mislead with information about impact factors and the indexing of journals in well-known citation indexes. We are talking about so-called false impact factors, such as the Universal Impact Factor (UIF), Global Impact Factor (GIF) and Citefactor, which are not actually valid.

Publishers mislead with statements about the indexing of journals in international bibliographic databases.

Publishers send requests for reviews to individuals who are not qualified to write reviews, often in the form of mass unsolicited mail.

Publishers ask authors for suggestions of possible reviewers and use them without checking their scientific credibility or conflicts of interest.

Publishers do not specify mechanisms for preventing and detecting plagiarism, self-plagiarism, manipulation of graphic elements, etc.

Misleading Citations

Bibliometric isolation or frequent citations from smaller scientific journals that are not indexed in citation indexes, frequent citations from the same environment in which the journal is published (e.g. from the same country, from journals of the same publisher, etc.).

Forms of mutual and circular citation, known as citation cartels, are common.Self-citation at the journal title level occurs. If the journal is indexed in well-known citation indexes (JCR, SJR, SNIP impact factors, etc.), there may be an unusually rapid increase in these impact factors.

A large number of citations that are not relevant in terms of content (so-called fabricated citations).

Membership in International Associations and Initiatives

Is the publisher a member of any initiatives, e.g.:

- Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE),
- Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ),
- Open Access Scholarly Publishers' Association (OASPA)?

Is the journal hosted, for example, on one of the INASP online platforms (for journals from Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Central America or Mongolia) or on African Journals Online (AJOL, for African journals)?

Is the publisher a member of any other initiatives?

Misleading Metrics

Misleading metrics are often fabricated metrics with catchy names, often reminiscent of credible metrics.

The metrics website is not transparent and does not provide detailed information.

Metrics providers charge a fee for inclusion in the database.

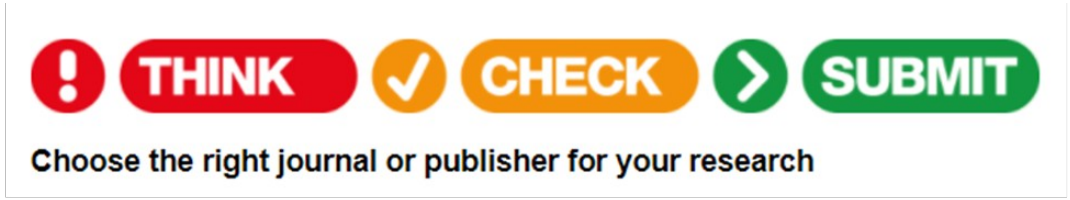
The values of indicators often increase every year for all journals.

Google Scholar is often used as the data source for calculating values.

Frequent use of the term ‘impact factor’ in the name.

The methodologies used for calculation are often non-transparent and inconsistent.

Tools for Identifying Simple Problematic Practices



PREVERITE

Pri izbiri revije se sklicujte na ta seznam in preverite, ali je revija vredna zaupanja.

Ali vi oziroma vaši sodelavci poznate to revijo?

- ☐ Ali ste že prebrali kakšen članek v tej reviji?
- ☐ Ali je enostavno najti najnovejše članke v reviji?
- ☐ Ime revije: ali je ime revije enako imenu druge revije ali ga je mogoče zlahka zamenjati z njim?
- ☐ Ali lahko preverite informacije o reviji na portalu **ISSN**?

Ali lahko zlahka prepoznate založnika in stopite v stik z njim?

- ☐ Ali je ime založnika jasno prikazano na spletni strani revije?
- ☐ Ali lahko stopite v stik z založnikom po telefonu, elektronski in navadni pošti?

Ali revija jasno predstavi recenzentski postopek, ki ga uporablja?

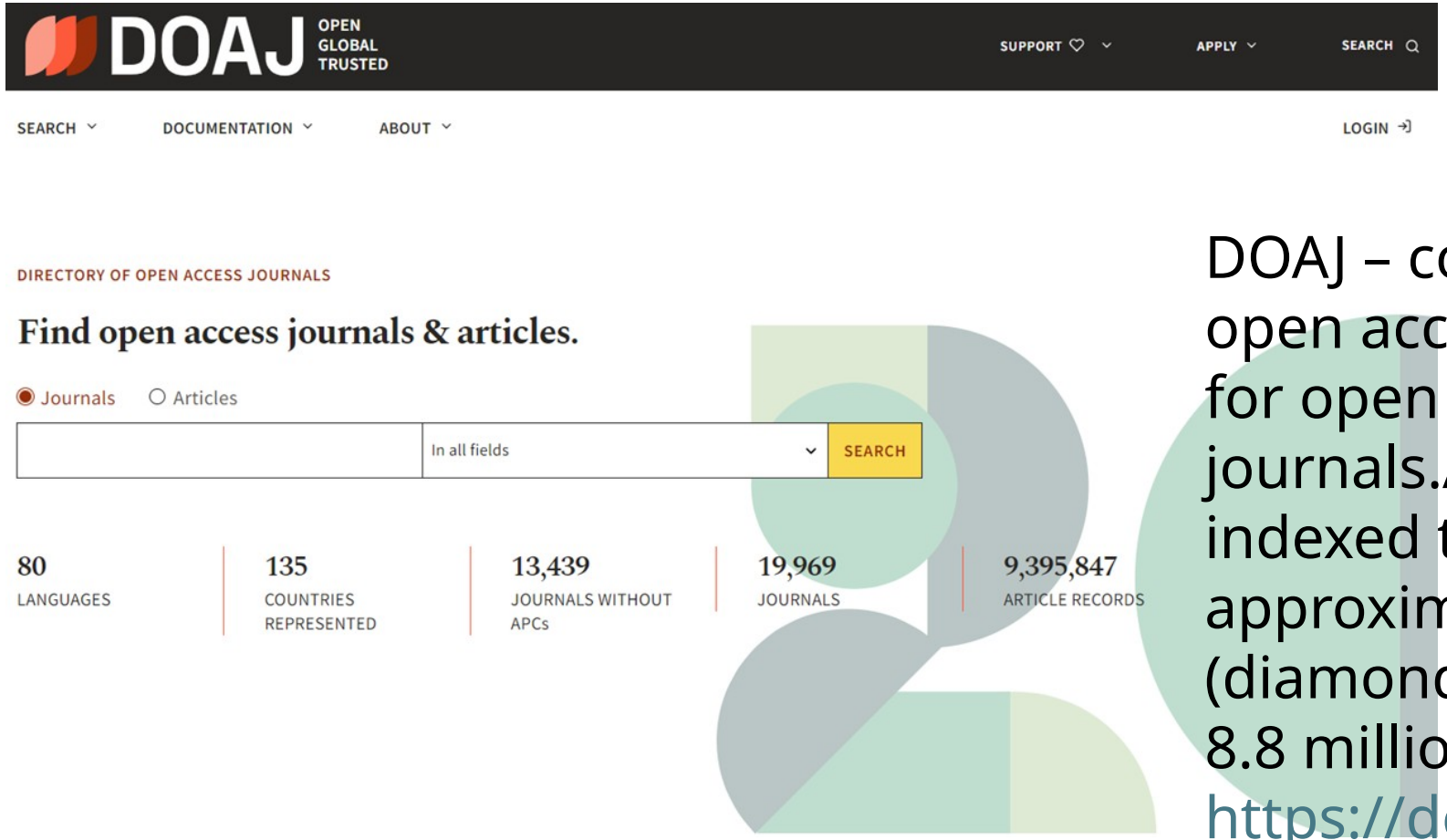
- ☐ Ali je na spletni strani navedeno, ali postopek vključuje neodvisne/zunanje recenzente in koliko recenzentov pregleda članek?
- ☐ Ali založnik ponuja recenzije s strani strokovnega uredniškega odbora ali raziskovalcev z vašega področja?
- ☐ Ali revija zagotavlja sprejem članka (objavo) ali zelo kratek čas recenziranja?

Ali so članki indeksirani in/ali arhivirani na znanih mestih?

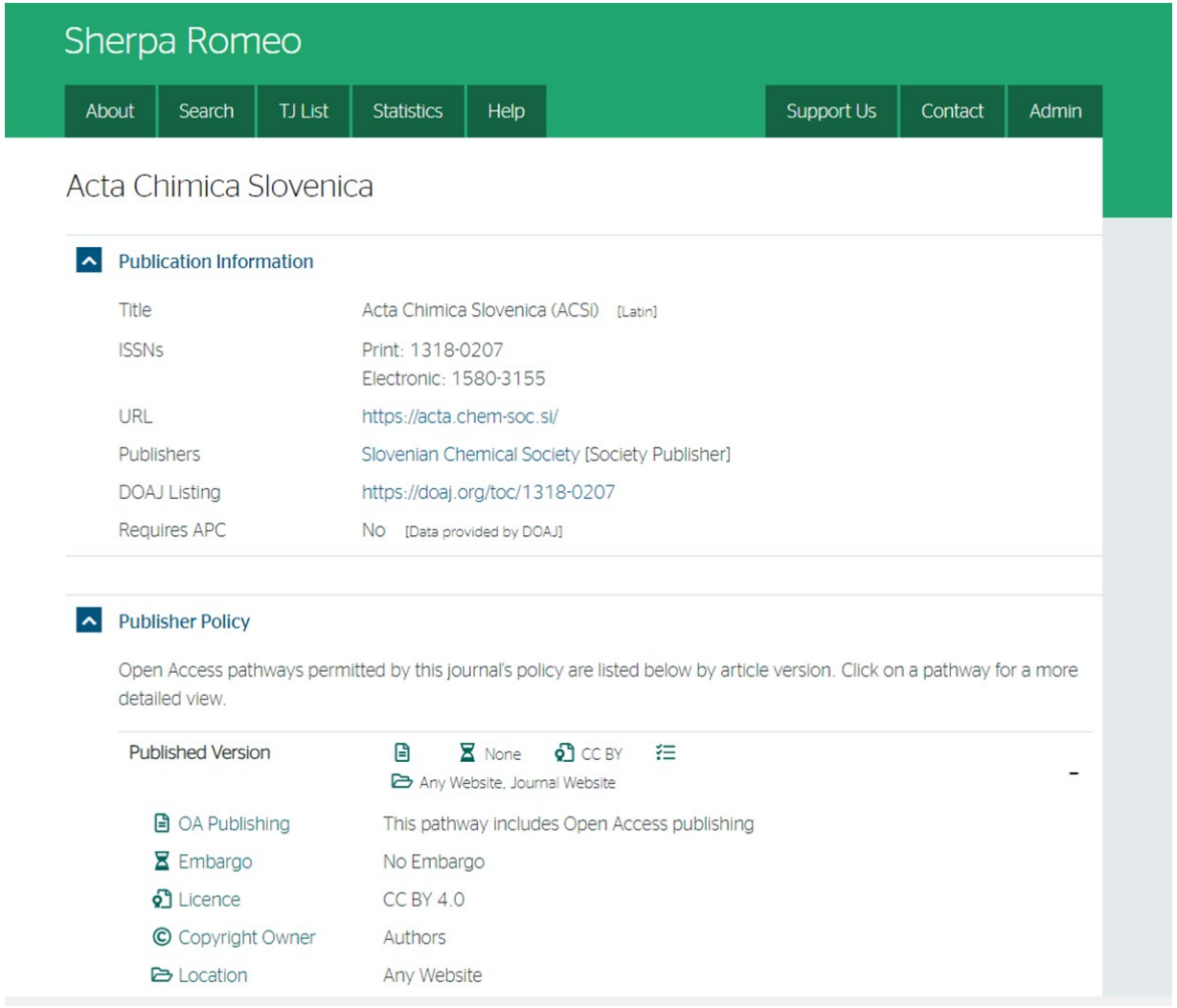
Bosnian >
Bulgarian >
Catalan >
Croatian >
Chinese (Simplified) >
Chinese (Traditional) >
Czech >
Danish >
Fijian >
Finnish >
French >
Galician >
German >
Greek >
Hausa >
Hindi >
Hungarian >
Icelandic >
Indonesian >
Italian >
Japanese >

Checklist of requirements and criteria for the credibility of scientific journals.

https://thinkchecksubmit.org/



DOAJ – comprehensive index of open access journals.Quality filter for open access journals.Approximately 19,000 indexed titles, of which approximately 12,000 are APC-free (diamond journals).Approximately 8.8 million indexed publications.
https://doaj.org/



Sherpa Romeo: a database of open access policies of publishers and journals from around the world. Each registered publisher or journal is reviewed and analysed by a team of experts, who, where possible, provide summaries of self-archiving permissions and the rights that authors have for each journal. https://v2.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/

https://maps.google.com/

Lists of Predatory Journals and Publishers

Beall's List https://beallslist.net/

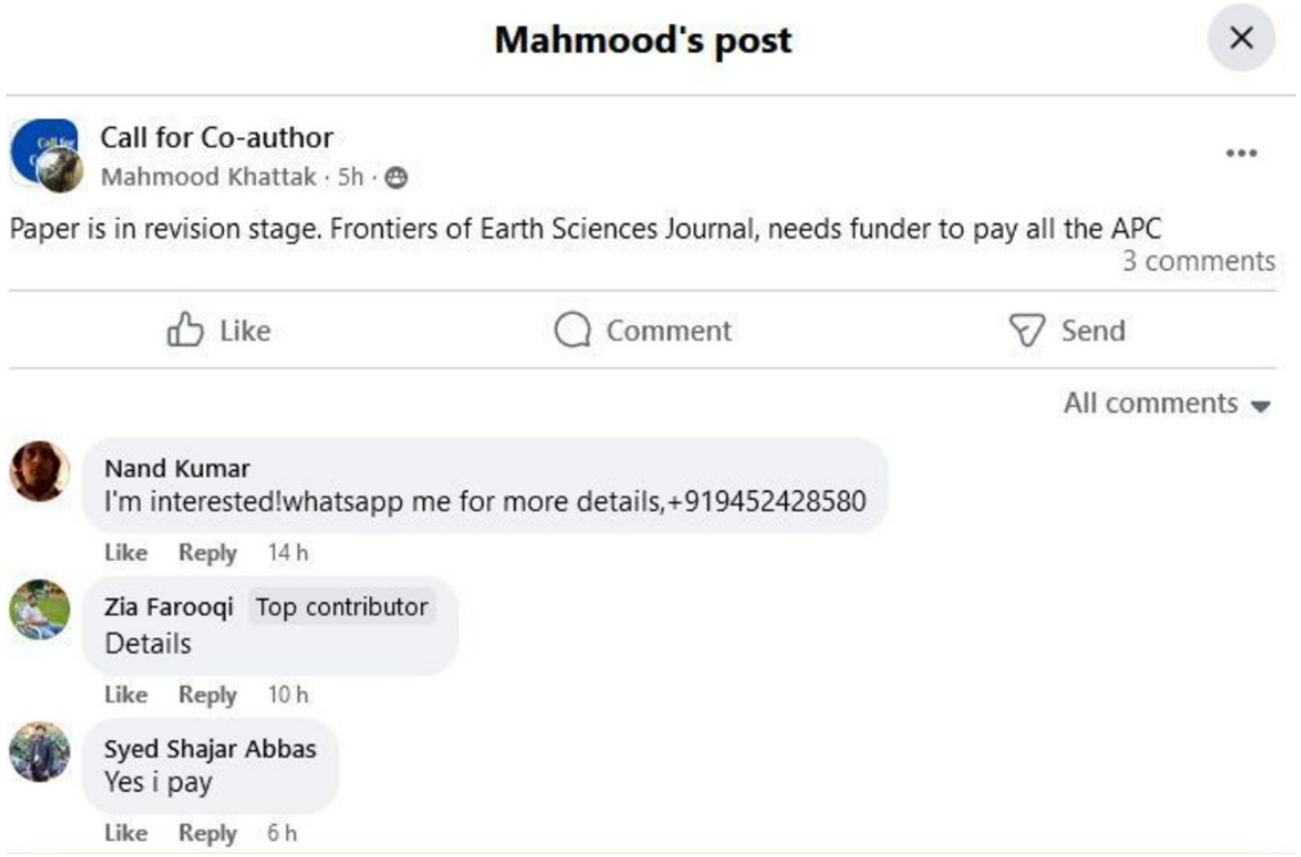
Predatory Reports https://predatoryreports.org/

Predatory Journals https://www.predatoryjournals.org/the-list

Publishing with Integrity https://twitter.com/fake_journals

Complex Problematic Practices

Purchase of Authorship in Exchange for APC Payment



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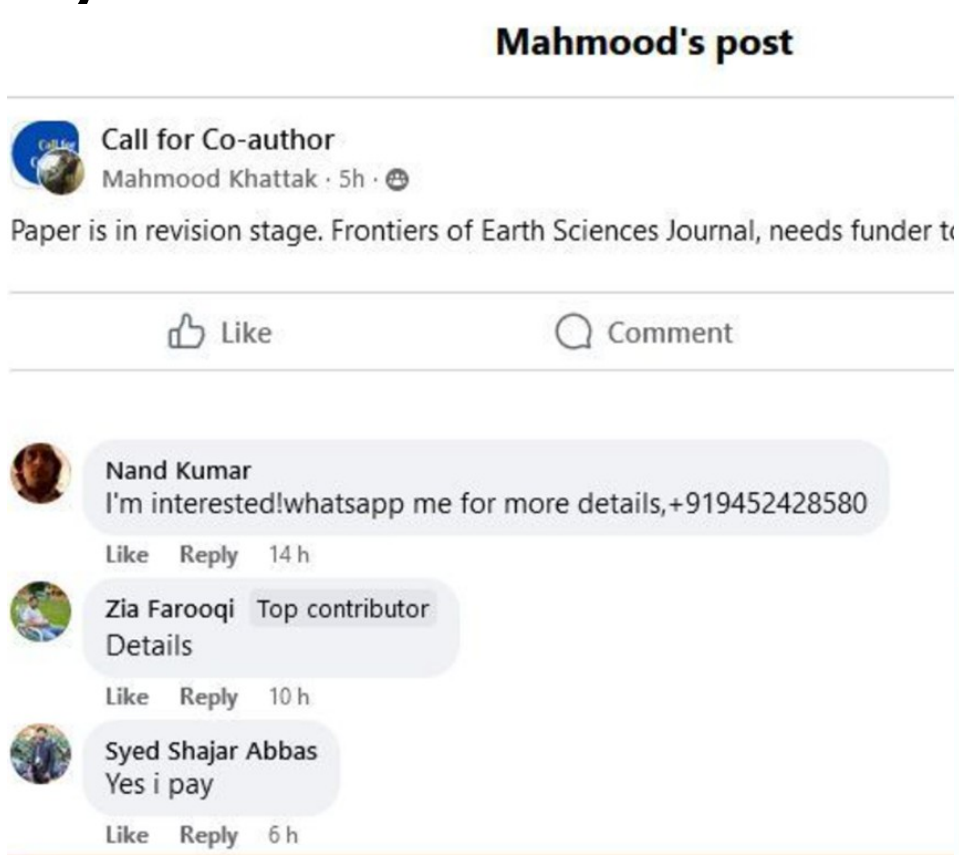
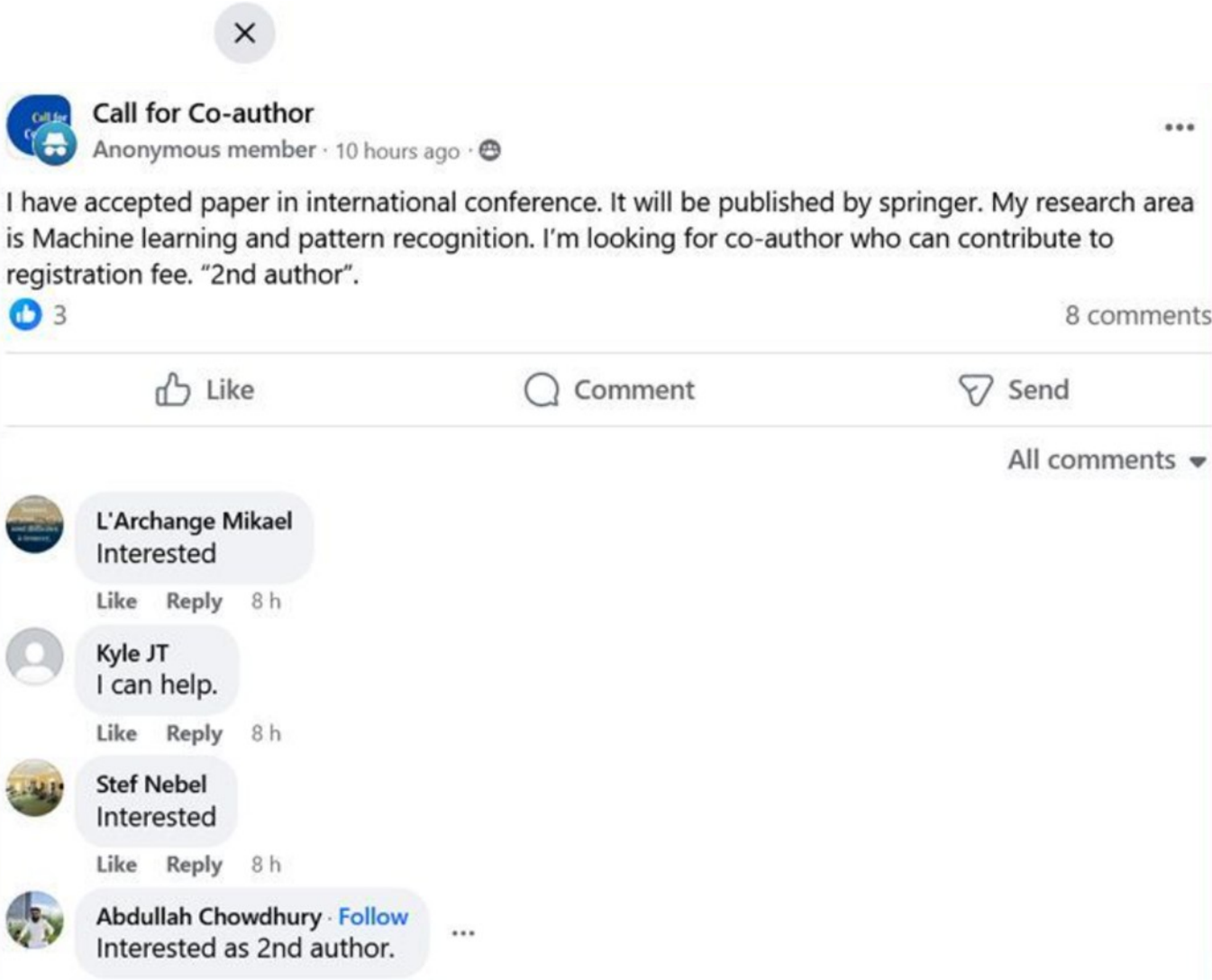
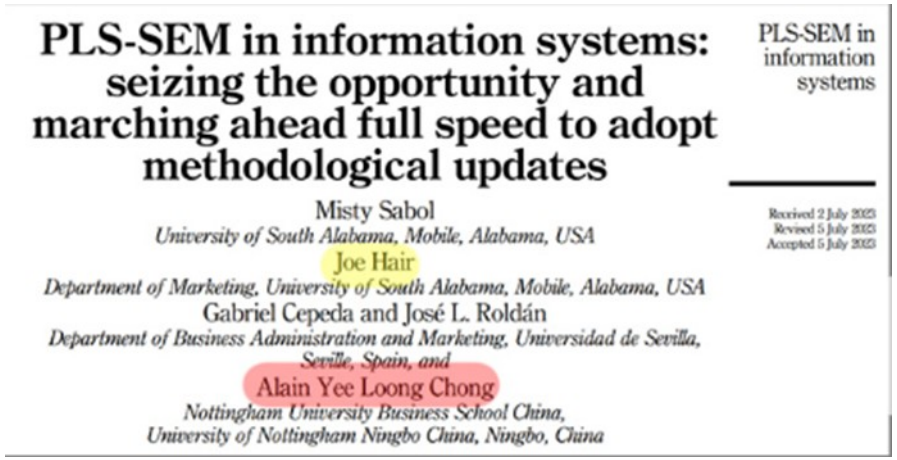




Controversial Practices of Editorial Boards



PLS-SEM in information systems

PLS-SEM in information systems: seizing the opportunity and marching ahead full speed to adopt methodological updates

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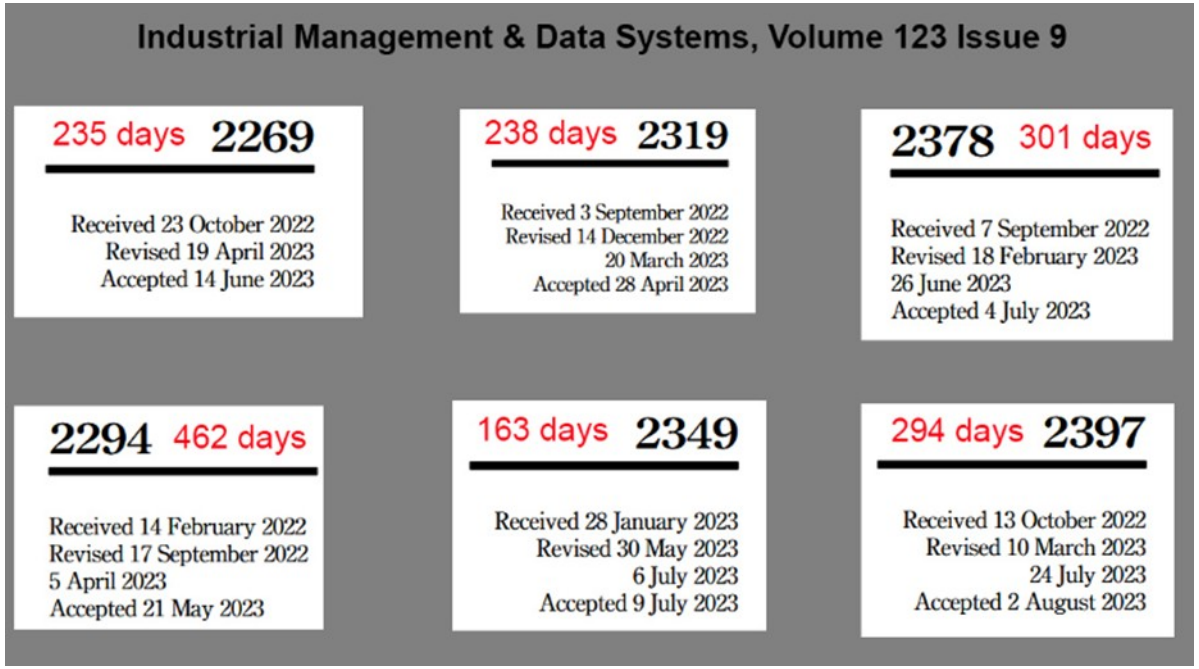
Received 2 July 2023
Revised 5 July 2023
Accepted 5 July 2023

Received 2 July 2023
Revised 5 July 2023
Accepted 5 July 2023



Industrial Management & Data Systems, Volume 123 Issue 9

235 days **2269**
Received 23 October 2022
Revised 19 April 2023
Accepted 14 June 2023

238 days **2319**
Received 3 September 2022
Revised 14 December 2022
20 March 2023
Accepted 28 April 2023

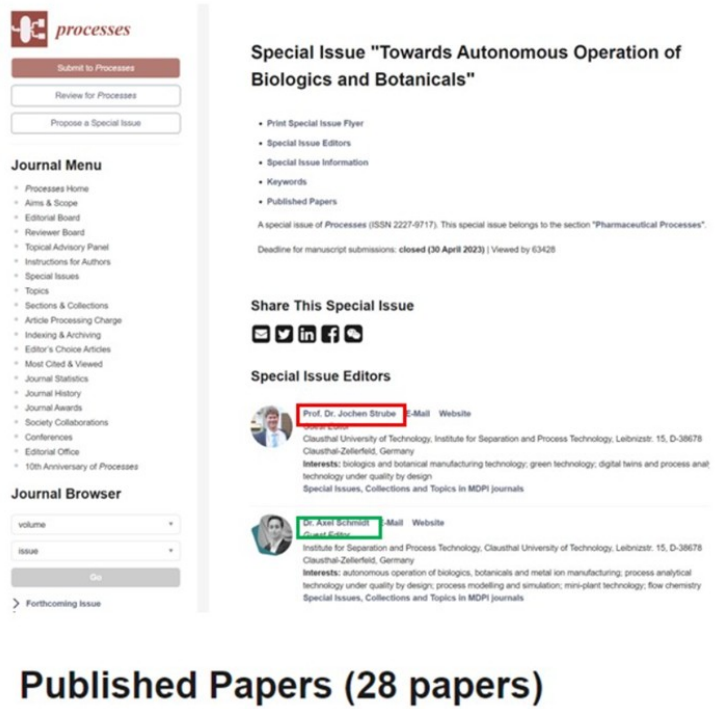
2378 301 days
Received 7 September 2022
Revised 18 February 2023
26 June 2023
Accepted 4 July 2023

2294 462 days
Received 14 February 2022
Revised 17 September 2022
5 April 2023
Accepted 21 May 2023

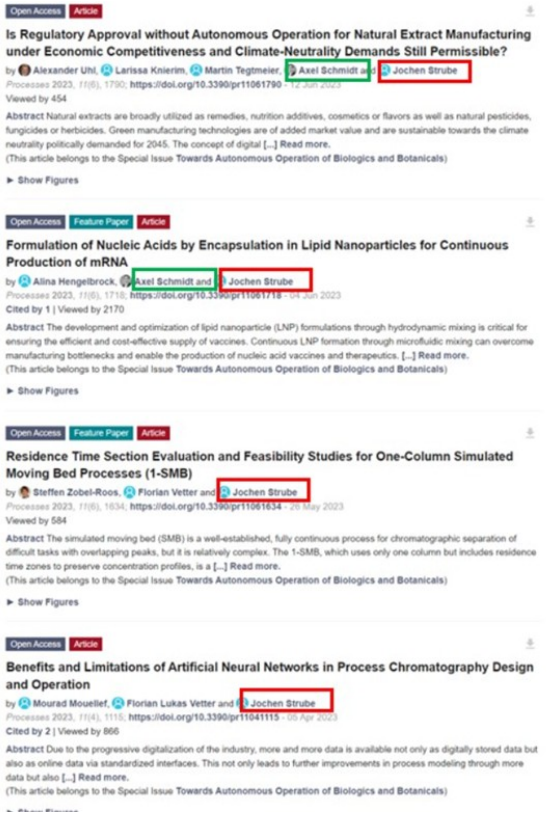
163 days **2349**
Received 28 January 2023
Revised 30 May 2023
6 July 2023
Accepted 9 July 2023

294 days **2397**
Received 13 October 2022
Revised 10 March 2023
24 July 2023
Accepted 2 August 2023

Special Issues



Published Papers (28 papers)



Editor and co-editor of a special edition wrote 26 articles for the special edition.

FAQ: “Is MDPI a predatory publisher?”

This debate has been going on for years, ever since Jeffrey Beall added the publisher to his list.

Circumstances conducive to the proliferation of such publishers:

- funders' requirements for open access publications,
- the unwritten rule of “publish or perish” is linked to the speed of publication,
- evaluation systems often encourage a large number of publications,
- high APCs in hybrid journals,
- some policies (Coalition S, Horizon Europe) do not allow individual payment for openness in hybrid journals.

Positive Aspects of MDPI

MDPI publishes numerous journals indexed in Web of Science, some with a high impact factor (18 journals have an IF higher than 4).

Many, if not most, articles are of high quality.

Editors include renowned researchers from almost all fields, who often report positive reviews.

MDPI publishes open access journals in their entirety, so it does not contribute to the highly profitable income and double charging of traditional publishers.

MDPI's editorial offices work quickly, reliably, and professionally; publication on the website is fast, efficient, and smooth—all of which is difficult to say about other traditional publishers.

Several MDPI journals are included in the criteria used by various countries for the most demanding evaluations of research and researchers.

Problematic Aspects of MDPI

MDPI is known for aggressively sending unsolicited emails to researchers to edit special issues, often in scientific fields in which the recipients are not active.

In 2018, the entire editorial board of Nutrients, one of MDPI's most prestigious journals, resigned en masse due to pressure from the publisher to lower quality standards in order to secure more publications.

It is difficult to claim or reject with certainty that MDP is a predatory publisher, but a number of facts and circumstances give rise to such speculation.

Unusual Facts and Circumstances at MDPI

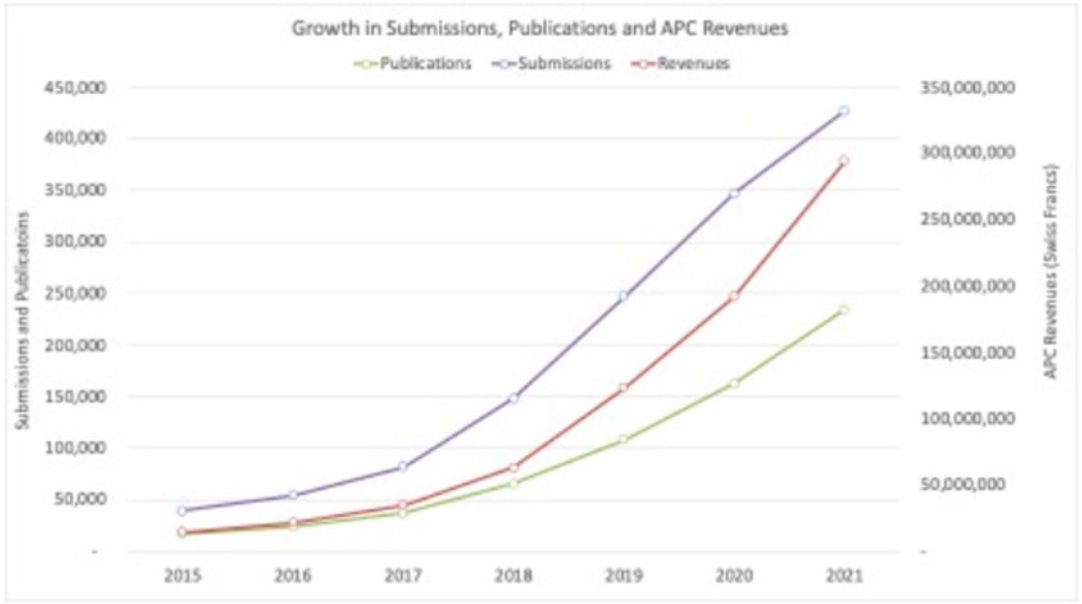
Rapid growth of the number of journals.

Unreasonably high number of special issues.

Unusually short time to acceptance.

Allegations of lowering quality standards.

Rapid Growth



Source: https://danbrockington.com/2022/11/10/mdpi-journals-2015-2021/

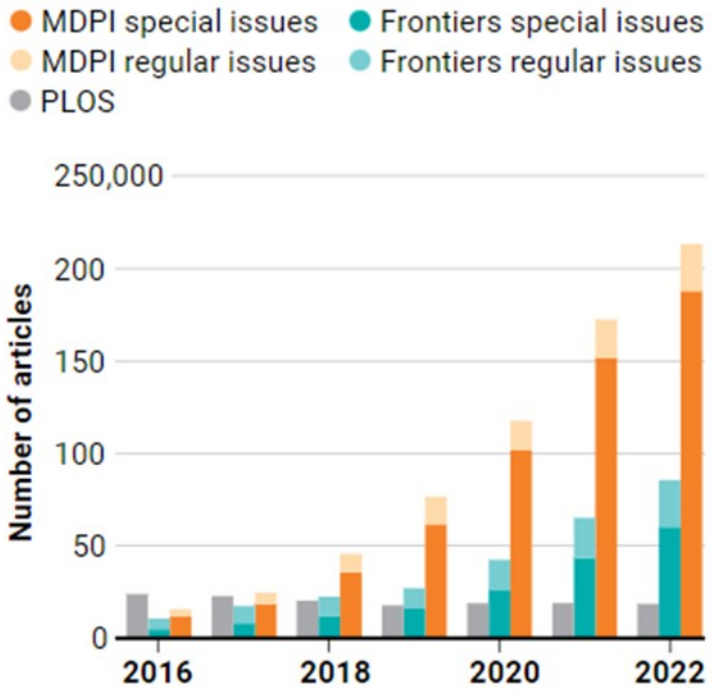
When something sells so quickly, the answer is trivial: demand.

Judging by what MDPI sells, there is clearly a large and growing demand.

But what are they selling that their competitors are not?

- MDPI sells a high acceptance rate for articles and very fast publication in special issues of journals that have a relatively high impact factor.
- Most MDPI journals accept about 50% of articles. Although this is far from predatory practices (which would be 100%) and shows that MDPI journals also reject articles, the acceptance rate is an order of magnitude higher than that of most traditional publishers.
- The impact factor, while not at the highest level, is respectable and growing.

Special Issues



Data for Hindawi were not included in this analysis.

(GRAPHIC) C. BICKEL/*SCIENCE*; (DATA) PAOLO CROSETTO/FRENCH NATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In 2022, nearly 100 MDPI journals with impact factors published more than 17,000 special issues containing 187,000 articles.

Virtually all of MDPI's growth in recent years can be attributed to special issues.

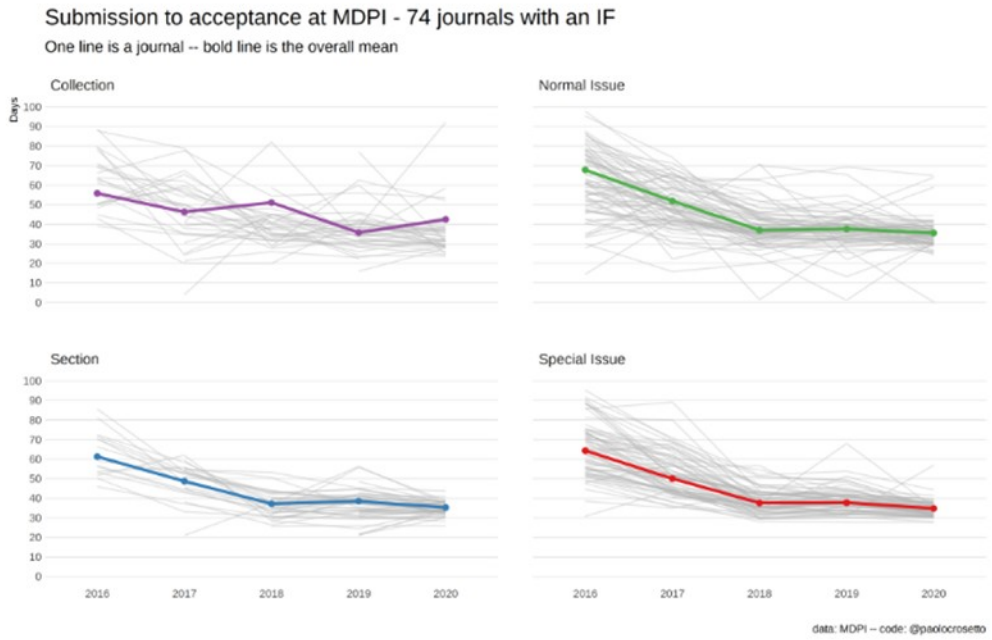
Skeptics worry that this practice is particularly vulnerable to manipulation by guest editors.

Guest editors are not invited by the editorial boards of journals, but directly by the publisher through mass invitations.

An extensive network of special issues ensures that you will find a special issue tailored to your needs—otherwise, you can always accept MDPI's invitation and customize it to your liking. The impact factor of the original title is high and will benefit you in evaluating your work.

Vir: Science, https://www.science.org/content/article/fast-growing-open-access-journals-stripped-coveted-impact-factors

Time to Acceptance



Source: https://paolocrosetto.wordpress.com/2021/04/12/is-mdpi-a-predatory-publisher/

In its 2020 annual report, MDPI states that the average time to first decision is 20 days.
Paolo Crosetto draws four main conclusions:

1. There is no significant difference between regular, special issues, sections, and collections
2. MDPI has managed to halve its processing time between 2016 and 2020.
3. In addition to reducing the average time to publication at the publisher level, differences between individual journals are also decreasing.
4. Approximately 17% of all articles in MDPI in 2020—that is, 25,000 articles—were accepted within 20 days of submission, including revisions. 45%—that is, 66,000 documents—were accepted within 30 days.

Lower Quality Standards.

Table 2: Papers Published in Different Rejection Rate Categories

Rej Rate	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<40	2,533	2,962	5,497	11,224	10,730	23,726	86,087
40-49	1,560	5,320	8,423	11,421	19,486	38,206	87,363
50-59	8,679	8,228	14,063	22,205	46,482	76,259	54,328
>=60	4,607	7,019	8,692	20,875	30,997	24,312	6,158
Total	**17,379**	**23,529**	**36,675**	**65,725**	**107,695**	**162,503**	**233,936**

Table 3: Estimated APC from Different Rejection Rate Categories (000s CHF)

Rej Rate	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
1 <40	2,102	2,71	5,200	10,775	12,275	27,997	108,297
2 40-49	1,295	4,873	7,968	10,964	22,292	45,083	109,903
3 50-59	7,204	7,537	13,304	21,317	53,175	89,986	68,345
4 >=60	3,823	6,429	8,223	20,040	35,461	28,688	7,747
Total	**14,425**	**21,553**	**34,695**	**63,096**	**123,203**	**191,754**	**294,291**

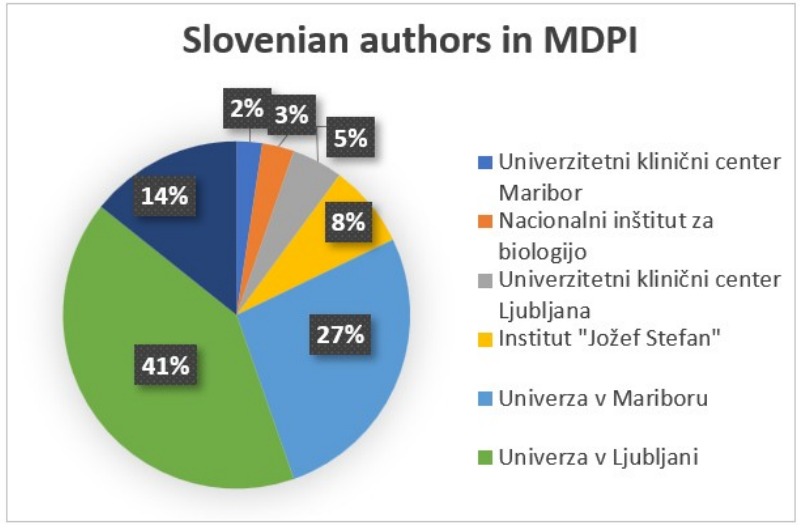
Table 4: Number of journals in each rejection rate category

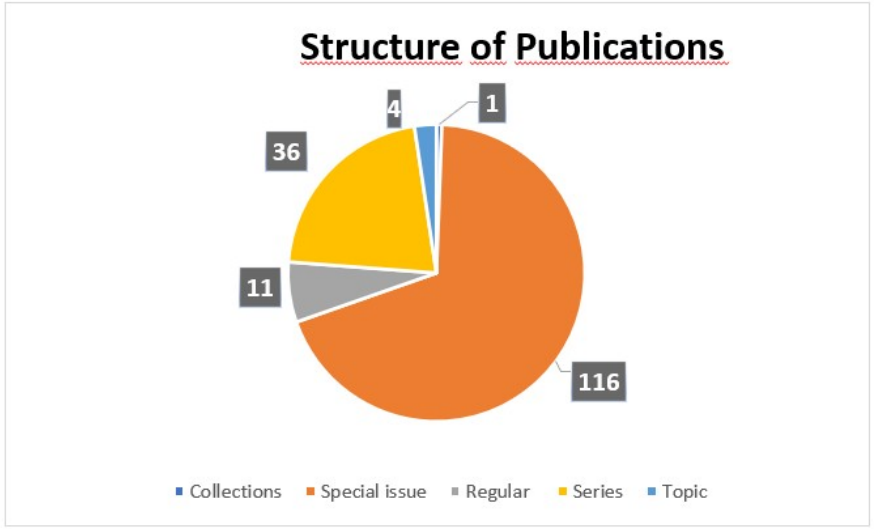
Rej Rate	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
1 <40	44	56	65	73	63	73	92
2 40-49	26	32	48	37	39	51	61
3 50-59	45	26	26	37	49	47	32
4 >=60	33	41	37	50	46	35	21
Total	**148**	**155**	**176**	**197**	**197**	**206**	**206**

The growth in the number of publications is partly due to lower rejection rates. Journals with low rejection rates generate a larger share of MDPI's publications and revenues.
Approximately 45% of the MDPI journals analyzed had rejection rates below 40%. Contributions to these journals account for nearly 38% of publication fee revenue.
Journals with a rejection rate of more than 50% account for just over 25% of revenue.
Inclusion in Web of Science does not affect the rejection rate. The average rejection rate for journals included in the WoS list was 42.7%, while for journals not included in the list it was 41.6%.

Source:
https://danbrockington.com/2022/11/10/mdpi-journals-2015-2021/

Slovenia and MDPI





Data on publications by Slovenian authors in MDPI in the second half of 2022 and the first half of 2023:

- 169 publications.
- Highest APC €3,084, lowest €144, average APC €1,596.
- Average number of days from submission to acceptance for publication 41 days.


Questions?
Thank You!