Scholarly production on predatory publishing a Systematic review

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***Abstract*—This article provides a systematic review of research studies on so-called 'predatory' publishing, a new but fast-growing area of research, with a particular focus on the awareness of prospective authors about so-called 'predatory' publishing. The Systematic review aims to identify of the research reported in this paper was evaluated within the context of efforts to understand and combat predatory publishing, a new but fast-growing area of research. It integrated the trends observed in scholarly production in predatory publishing, with a particular focus on the volume and distributed over time within different journals. It also looks at the composition of the predatory publishing literature in terms of the type of the study, methods, topics, field of the study, and contexts where research was conducted. Data were extracted from Science Direct, Taylor & Francis, and Wiley open access database and identified 299 articles for evaluation published in 285 journals. The result demonstrates that the literature on predatory publishing with 40.4 % of studies published from 2015 to 2024. Only 26.42% reported empirical research, and majority of these were quantitative studies with weak statistical test. Medical journals carried the most articles. We conclude that predatory publishing is future development, and it is was surprising to find no studies in leading higher education journals, and this study reveals a research area that is still continuing.**

***Index Terms*—Scholarly production, Predatory publication, Predatory journals, ethics, Open Access.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Academic publishing has significant role in the higher education. There has been a rapid increase in the publishing of scientific literature since the 1950s. This could be the impact of the overall developments in the scientific domain and because the rating of scientists began to be done based on their scientific publications.(Nayanthara & Sulochana, 2023) For example, the current University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations require that a research scholar must have at least two publications in a recognized journal (i.e. which has ISSN number) prior to submission of the doctoral thesis. Similarly, appointments and promotions in teaching and research institutions need a certain minimum number of publications in research journals. These regulatory measures were aimed to improve the quality of research. However, these apparently well-meaning regulations have, more often than not, become counter-productive because their mode of implementation has focused primarily on quantity while quality is largely ignored. Consequently, a good number of 'research publications' do not provide any new knowledge since they were published only for the purpose of counting. The old slogan ''Publish or perish'' is probably more to the point than ever before, nowadays further underlined by the increasingly common practice of letting bibliometric data steer the allocation of faculty funding at universities, which means that apart from the individual's career-interest in publishing, there is additional pressure to publish from one's department (Eriksson&Helgesson 2017).In academia, research and publication stand as pivotal indicators of scholarly achievement. The assessment of academic staff, particularly in higher education institutions, extends beyond teaching activities to encompass their research and publishing endeavors over time. Evaluations conducted by institutions and international organizations for the recognition and reward of academics heavily rely on the output of research and publication. In parallel with momentum it gained, predatory publishing has received heightened attention in the last couple of years, both in the form of editorial and empirical studies. Forming a new field of study, distinct but related literature steams have examined a range of topics such as (Godskesen et al., 2022; Macháček & Srholec, 2022; Martinino et al., 2024;

Perlin et al., 2018),awareness of scholars about predatory journal (Akanmu Aboyade et al., 2024; Martinino et al., 2024; Shrestha, 2021; Wali et al., n.d.; Zhang et al., 2022), Predatory publishing by authors (Akanmu Aboyade et al., 2024, 2024; Bell, 2017; Chung & Kim, 2024; Cuciureanu, 2025; Dobusch & Heimstädt, 2019; Donev, 2021; Eko & Koerber, 2020; Eriksson & Helgesson, 2017; Garanayak & Ramaiah, n.d.; Gasparyan et al., 2016, 2017; Happe, 2020; Inouye & Mills, 2021; Koerber, n.d.; Koerber et al., 2023; Kurt, 2018; Macháček & Srholec, 2022, 2022; Maistry, 2019; Memon, 2019; Mills & Inouye, 2021; Nayanthara & Sulochana, 2023, 2023; Nwagwu, 2015; Okwu & Oladokun, n.d.; Perlin et al., 2018, 2018; Schultz et al., 2023; Shrestha, 2021, 2021; Shrestha et al., 2020; Wali et al., n.d., n.d.; Xia, 2015), just to name few. Regardless of this attention, however, to date, no effort has been made to examine through bibliometric analysis, the field of predatory publishing intellectual identity which, as with any field, is shaped and reshaped primarily by what is published and in which outlets "present an arena where dialogue about scholarly production and the nature of the field takes place."(Oplatka, e2012).These reviews offer invaluable insights into the maturation of any field (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2019). In an effort to do so, this systematic review maps the terrain of knowledge produced on predatory publishing and synthesizes trends in this rapidly growing to guide further research. It is guided by the following questions.

RQ1. What is the volume of journals reviews and journal articles on predatory publishing in journals indexed by Google scholar, Science Direct and Taylor & Francis?

RQ2. How has the volume of journal publication on predatory publishing changed over the time?

RQ3. What is the composition of predatory publishing literature in terms of type of study: empirical and non-empirical?

RQ4. What is the composition of research articles on predatory publishing in terms of the methods employed?

RQ5. How is the predatory publishing literature distributed across the journals?

RQ6. What is the distribution of research articles on predatory publishing in terms of the research context?

RQ7. What is the composition of research articles on predatory publishing in terms of the topics explored?

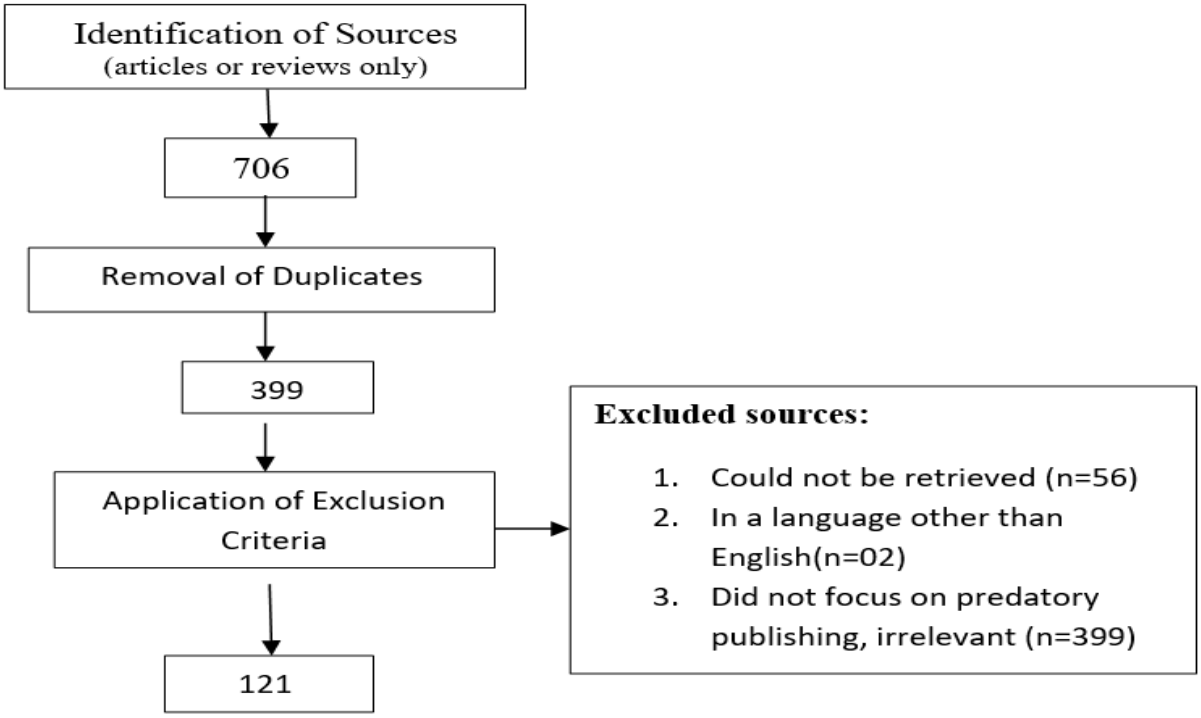
RQ8. What is the distribution of research articles on predatory publishing across the field of study?

II. METHODOLOGY

This systematic review was carried out using three databases: Science Direct, Taylor & Francis, and Wiley. These databases were searched electronically for journal articles published from 2015 to 2024 using the keywords "predatory publishing," "predatory publication," "predatory journals," "pseudo scholarly," "fake publishing," "fake publication," and "deceptive publishing." Only journal articles and reviews published in English were included, while other publications including books, book chapters, conference proceedings, editorials, notes, and alike identified by the databases were excluded from the outset. The use of these keywords yielded a total of 650 articles, the bibliographic data of which were exported to and saved in an Excel file. The data exported included the authors, year of publication, journal title, type of publication (article or review), language of publication, and abstracts. Once all the articles were exported, the papers categorized as review and articles were combined, and the duplicates were manually searched for and removed. On completing this stage, 365 journal articles remained, 64 of which were excluded for surface-level features of accessibility (n = 62) and language (n = 02). The titles and abstracts of the remaining 121 articles were reviewed manually for perceived relevance to identify those that discuss predatory publishing as the main topical theme; they were grouped as "definitely relevant," "may be relevant" and "not relevant"; full texts of the articles classified as "may be relevant" were read in greater detail to ascertain whether they were relevant or not. Following this phase, a total of 121 journal articles were identified as relevant and were included in the review. Figure 1 summarizes the steps in the identification and screening of sources. While reading the full texts, research articles reporting studies that were based on data collected and analyzed were identified and coded as "empirical." Articles

reporting studies in which no data were collected and analysed were coded as "non-empirical." At this stage, the subject area of the journals was also noted for each journal article. To classify the subject area of the journals, the journal website was visited, and the subject categorizations of the databases used in this review were checked. In cases where the subject area was differently categorized, the categorization which best reflected the scope of the journal provided in the journal website was used. Additionally, research context, research method, focus of the study, and the field of the study were extracted from the empirical articles. Descriptive statistics were used to identify patterns of knowledge production on predatory publishing.

Figure 1 Summary of the steps in the identification and screening of sources



Findings

With the intention of highlighting patterns in scholarly production on predatory publishing rather than synthesizing the results of the studies, the databases of 121articles were examined. Here we present these patterns.

Volume and distribution of studies on predatory publishing across journals

The search yielded 121 records; 42 (14%) of these were non-empirical, while 79 (26.42) were empirical research studies. As can be seen in Fig. 2, although empirical studies were found to have significantly increased in number in recent years, non-empirical studies, also demonstrated an exceptionally sharp and consistent increase in the growth rate of publications over the 10-year period from 2015 to end of 2024.

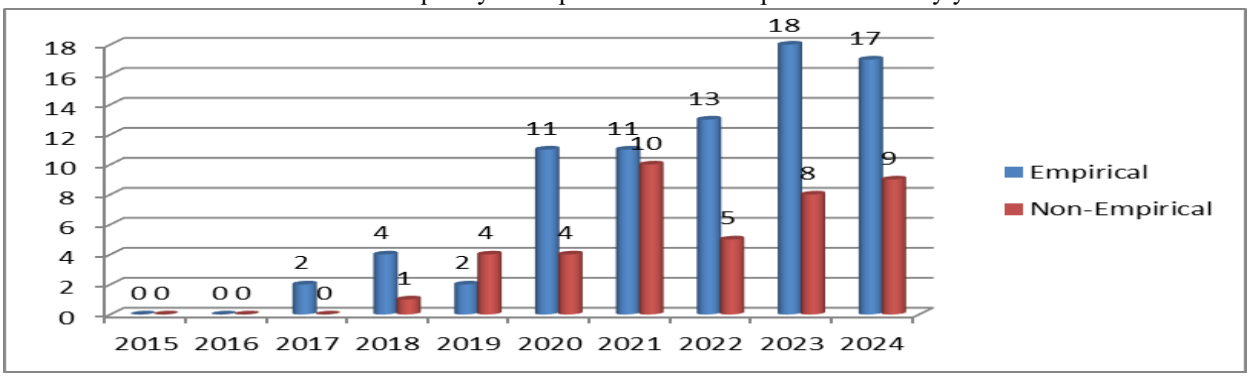
Table 1 Frequency of journals by subject area with one or more article on predatory publishing

Journal subject area	Frequency	Percentage
Accountability	1	1.26
Arts & Humanities	6	7.8
Culture and linguistics	1	1.26
Defense & Security	1	1.26
Education	1	1.26

Environment	2	2.53
Food studies	1	1.26
Foreign Affairs	3	3.79
Gender, culture, race and class	1	1.26
Geography	2	2.5
History	3	3.79
Information science	1	1.26
International Communication	1	1.26
Law	3	3.79
Library Science	13	16.5
Management	1	1.26
Media and communication studies	2	2.5
Medical Science	9	11.39
Multidisciplinary	7	8.8
Natural Science	1	1.26
Neurosciences	1	1.26
Philosophy	1	1.26
Political policies	1	1.26
Scholarly communication and publishing	9	11.39
Science	3	3.79
Science & Technology	3	3.79
War	1	1.26
Total	79	100

Table 1 examines of all journals in terms of subject area demonstrate the majority focus on (n=13; 16.5%), followed by medical science (n=9; 11.39%) and Scholarly communication and publishing (n=9; 11.39%).

FIGURE 2 Frequency of empirical and non-empirical articles by year



Research Methods

Empirical articles (n=79) were classified according to the research methods they used-quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and mixed methods light. One article (Memon, 2018) was excluded from this analysis because it did not have a methods section. Hence, the number of articles included in this analysis was 78. Follwing the distinction made by Creswell and Plano-Clark (2017), studies where "qualitative items are an add-on to a quantitative instrument and do not result in a rigorous context based qualitative data set" (p.73) were classified a mixed methods light. Quantitative studies (n =58; 45%) represented the vast majority of empirical studies, followed by qualitative (n= 9; 7.02 %), mixed methods light (n=6; 4.68%) and mixed methods studies (n=05; 3.90%) suggesting a highly skewed distribution towards quantitative methods and overwhelming preference for quantitative studies among scholars. The overwhelming influence of quantitative research in the predatory publishing knowledge base becomes more evidence when mixed methods light studies, where the quantitative strand has more emphasis, are taken into consideration.

Descriptive	Percentage
Mean	3.9
Standard Error	0.897071
Median	2.5
Mode	1
Standard Deviation	4.011825
Sample Variance	16.09474
Kurtosis	1.167813
Skewness	1.456127
Range	13
Minimum	1
Maximum	14
Sum	78
Count	20

Research topics and research contexts

The full texts of 79 empirical articles were read in detail throughout and classified according to topical foci and research context. No predetermined conceptual framework was used, and the analysis was informed by emerging codes and themes; studies could be assigned to more than one theme. This analysis yielded 11 topics of varying degrees of popularity as Table 2 reveals, with the most common foci being the open access perceptions of predatory journals (n=25;31.64%) and views about predatory publication (n=18;22.78%); the rest were relatively marginalized as is shown in Table 3.

Table 2 Frequency and percentage of empirical articles by topical foci.

Focus	Frequency	Percentage
Open Access perception	25	31.64
Views about predatory publication	18	22.78
Identification of predatory journals	16	20.25
A Case study of predatory journals in predatory publishing	5	6.32
Research Integrity on journals	3	3.79
Fake authorship	3	3.79
Misinformation, disinformation, and fake news: lessons from an interdisciplinary, systematic literature review	3	3.79
Scholarly articles and the impact on the traditional publishing models	2	2.53
Impact factor on predatory journals	2	2.53
Articles publishing charges	2	2.53

Table 3 Frequency and percentage of studies by field of study.

Field of study	Frequency	Percentage
Library Science	14	17.72
Media and communication studies	12	15.18
Medical Science	10	12.65
Multidisciplinary	7	8.86
Arts & Humanities	6	7.59
Science & Technology	6	7.59
Foreign Affairs	3	3.79
Geography	3	3.79
History	3	3.79
Law	3	3.79
Environment	2	2.53
Food studies	1	1.26
Accountability	1	1.26
Culture & Linguistics	1	1.26
Defense & Security	1	1.26
Education	1	1.26
Management	1	1.26
Natural sciences	1	1.26
Philosophy	1	1.26
Political policies	1	1.26

Table 3 reveals A significant number of these studies (n=14; 17.72%) focused in library science, secondary carried out by Medical and communication studies (n=12; 15.18%), next continuity of medical science (n=10; 12.65%), Arts & humanities, Science & Technology carried out (n=6; 7.59%); Foreign Affairs, Geography, History, and Law (n=3; 3.79%); the Environment (n=2; 2.53%); the remaining are (n=1; 1.26%).

Fig 3 Frequency of studies by research context (Countries are divided using the country classification of the United Nations)

Developed countries		Developing countries		Countries in transition
Australia	4	Iran	1	
Austria	1	Brazil	1	
Canada	2	China	1	
Denmark	1	Ghana	2	
Germany	5	Saudi Arabia	1	
Spain	1	South Africa	4	
USA	11	Turkey	2	
Sweden	5	Colombia	1	
UK	18			
France	1			
Finland	2			
Ireland	3			
South Korea	3			
London,	1			
Netherlands	1			
New Zealand	1			
Poland	2			
Portugal	1			
Qatar	1			
United Arab Emirates	1			
Uruguay	1			

Reveals the country level analysis highlights the 29 countries have been featured in 79 articles where the research context is provided.

III. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Interest in the study of predatory publishing is fast growing and has received attention of an unprecedented scale, particularly in the last 10 years. The sharp increase in the volume of research observed over a decade time span is a clear indication that this is a new but highly promising field of study which is expected to sustain its popularity among scholars and across diverse fields for the foreseeable future. Despite the recent dynamic research activity evident in the corpus of studies examined, the predominance of non-empirical studies has continued, which is a negative trend and a clear indication that the knowledge base on predatory publishing needs to advance beyond opinion a sound knowledge base "requires 'ground descriptions' and 'data-based analysis' of existing practices" (Hallinger & Hammad, 2019).Though the rise in the frequency of empirical articles is appositive trend, research studies are yet to reach a critical mass to guide policy initiatives and support development through understanding of predatory practices across societies. This volume of research on predatory publishing on predatory publishing is distributed exceptionally thinly across publication outlets, which highlights the continued absence of major journals dedicated to the discussion of predatory publishing, a clear indication that the knowledge base is highly fragmented. That a small number of journals have recently started to publish multiple articles on predatory publication gives reason for hope that this is soon to change. A crucial finding, with respect to the

journal subject area, is the lack of discussion about predatory publishing in higher education journals in which only one articles was published to date. We find it particularly surprising that no article was published in higher education journals such as Higher Education, studies in Higher Education, or Higher Education Research and Development. We find this hard to explain because research is an important function of higher education institutions, and publishing is a requirement scholars of any hue need to fulfill.

The analysis of the research methods used in empirical studies demonstrates heavy overreliance on quantitative methods and weak statistical tests. The knowledge base is thin, particularly on quantitative studies. The use of weak statistical tests, which have limited capacity to offer policy-relevant finding (Shengnan Liu, Philip Hallinger, 2018), indicates that literature on predatory publishing is yet to mature in terms of the statistical methods employed, while the exceptionally small proportion of qualitative studies shows it suffers from significant limitations with regard to developing an in-depth understanding of predatory publishing and the reason why scholars engage in predatory practices. This suggests that the literature would undoubtedly benefit from fostering a stronger empirical foundation based on more advanced statistical analysis and more qualitative studies that have the potential to offer context-specific, policy-relevant findings.

Another contribution this review offers is the identification of the topics evident in the literature, including the Open Access perception, Views about predatory publication, Identification of predatory journals, Case study of predatory journals in predatory publishing. A large variation in predatory publishing scholarly production exists across topics and fields, which is a clear indication that researchers from a broad spectrum of academic fields provide insights into predatory publishing. Though this is a positive trend, there are only four topics and one field where there is a concentration of studies; a lack of a critical mass of studies exists in the majority of the topics and the fields identified, which limits what is known about predatory publishing to small number of topics and fields.

The review also found that the majority of the empirical studies were not contextualized; studies which focused on a specific research context were thinly distributed 29 countries and failed to focus on institutional contexts, the only exception being the study conducted in a small business school (Pyne, 2017).This reveals the lack of a critical mass of studies on specific contexts, which is a limitation in itself as "knowledge is neither context-independent nor politically indifferent and constrained by social factors and context of power"(Oplatka, 2016).A sophisticated understanding of the context which shapes behaviors of the individual is both necessary and essential for developing insights into how predatory publishing practices "unfold in the different cultural, institutional and organizational contexts" (Hallinger, 2018).This review reveals that the available literature on predatory publishing is yet to develop a "sustained focus on a set of issues by multiple scholars working in different contexts over time" (Hallinger & Chen, 2015).

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