Think. Check. Submit - a review

UKSG eNews 418

30 Mar 2018

Bev Acreman, Interim Executive Director UKSG

Back in 2015, I was working at BioMed Central and Deborah Kahn (then EVP Publishing, BMC) and I were talking about the rising number of incidents of researchers complaining about having been 'duped' by so-called predatory journals – see Rick Anderson's post, ['Should We Retire the Term "Predatory Publishing"?'](#) – and the concomitant impact that was having on legitimate open access publishers and on the researchers themselves. We felt that there should be a coordinated industry response to help researchers choose the journals to publish in, so we reached out to a number of organisations including ALPSP, INASP, DOAJ, OASPA, STM and, of course, UKSG amongst others (see the [full list](#)), and arranged a meeting to see if there was another way of helping researchers to help themselves which didn't involve a 'whitelist' or 'blacklist' and wasn't only focused on open access. We also recognised that while there was pressure to publish within the academic community, there will always be researchers who will use such journals for quick publication. (Serhat Kurt, ['Why do authors publish in predatory journals?'](#))

From the very beginning the unique perspective INASP brought was vital: see Andy Nobes' excellent article in Research Information ['Critical thinking in a post-Beall vacuum'](#). To those critical of duped researchers, Nobes says, "Imagine what it is like for a researcher with English as a basic second language, who is looking for a journal in which to publish their first research paper? They will probably not spot grammatical errors (the most obvious 'red flag') on a journal website, let alone the more subtle nuances of journal speak."

We restricted our target audience to the researchers, although we recognised that the situation was also impacting on "genuine but potentially low-quality" journal publishers from the global south too. "The damage caused by the application of extremely generalized criteria for predatory publishing is significant to say the least. As much as the damage is universal, it is the global south that has taken the greatest knock." (Reggie Raju, ['Predatory publishing from a global south perspective'](#))

In the early days of the campaign we came up with what we felt was a simple checklist that authors could use to evaluate a journal before they submitted. We also produced a simple [video](#) to illustrate the checklist and encouraged people to link/copy widely. It seems that we were meeting a need in the community, as our visitor stats show:

2015: 21,000 visits and 147,000 page views

2016: 82,000 visits and 563,000 page views

2017: 289,000 visits and 1.8 million page views

Our top ten visiting countries since we started are as follows:

1 United States

2 Ukraine

3 China

4 France

5 Great Britain

6 India

7 Canada

8 Russian Federation

9 Netherlands

10 Italy

And while at first glance this may look biased towards the global north, we hope the numbers of visitors in the global south will build due to one of the unexpected consequences of our campaigns: that people take the time to translate the pages into their languages (31 at the time of writing) including Mongolian, Indonesian, Vietnamese, Tamil, Farsi and Kazakh (see the full list).

However, we still have work to do to make sure our checklist stays relevant and reflects the author experiences. In a recent AuthorAid writing MOOC, our INASP colleagues heard first-hand a specific example of a potential limitation of the checklist, when in response to the check action "Ask your supervisor and senior colleagues" a Nigerian researcher stated that he knew of several senior colleagues who have themselves published in predatory journals. Further discussion at the AuthorAid partners meeting in December felt that the checks were useful, but had insufficient detail, so we will need to work on those in the coming months.

UKSG is pleased to be involved in supporting this initiative as part of our remit of connecting the knowledge community. If you are interested in helping with the project, please do share the resources with your network, follow @thinkchecksub and send us your suggestions!

In closing, I would recommend that those of you attending our annual conference should look out for Helen Dobson's breakout session 'Should we really be worried about predatory publishers?' (breakout 24).