Reviewer's report

Title: "Predatory" Open Access - An overview

Version: 2 Date: 26 May 2015

Reviewer: Marion Broome

Reviewer's report:

The question posed in this paper are interesting and important to the continuing discussion of open access journal publishing. The approach taken to collecting data to answer the questions was clearly time consuming and thorough given the parameters the authors provided. However, the organization of the paper is often disjointed and rambles in sections (ie. introduction and discussion), while in others intermixes content across sections (e.g. findings and discussion). There are too many unnecessary derogatory statements and many statements (ie. methods) left unsourced. I hope my comments below are helpful to the authors in any revision of their paper.

Major compulsory revisions:

Introduction

The introduction to this paper is 6 pages long and the reader gets lost in much of the rambling philosophical discussion about definitions of predatory journals with the authors proclaiming their objections to the term without really convincing the reader of their logic. Six pages without a concise purpose statement is too long for the average reader and I would suggest that much of this content, especially that of authors’ opinions, be moved to the discussion section if appropriate. The first page of the introduction and section on earlier research is useful and should be retained. The style also needs revision as it is very informal.

Research questions should follow the purpose statement. However, the 7 RQs could be reduced to broader conceptual categories. It is not clear why some RQ compare data on these journals over time, while others seem to only describe current state.

Methods:

The first paragraph includes a confusing discussion of illness and symptoms. A more straightforward presentation of Beall’s list of the journals should be presented. The authors also intermix findings in this section describing method—another confusing tactic. Findings should be grouped together.

The sampling description is highly technical and no citation is provided for the original source for this method. The authors allude to some problems with this sampling plan but do not elaborate not justify their choice.

Data collection
Grammatical issues throughout eg. “data was”

Needs subheads or better organization for the reader to understand the various fields of data collected and how it was organized

Findings

Under journals the authors estimate that 7% of predatory journals are indexed in Bealls-by what criteria was this estimate made? What did they mean by ‘overlap’

Field of science. The authors suggest some additional analyses should have been made and reported about the papers classified under general category. Presumably they have that data and should include it here.

Articles published

In this section there are several inconsistencies. The first is that in the text the authors state that Table 1 includes data without taking empty placeholders in account and yet Table 1 title is “Annual average article per stratum excluding empty placeholders” suggesting they did take them into account by excluding them. They also state there was a linear increase (grew steadily) but this was only true (according to data in the table) for two of the journal categories.

Authors origin, APC charges and publishing speed

In these sections the authors intersperse comparison of their data with that of previous research which is better left for the discussion section instead of distracting the reader with this discussion in one part of the findings. Although the table content should not be repeated in the text for each of these sections a more detailed presentation of the data summary could be added and the comparison with other literature saved for discussion.

Discussion

The opening paragraph is inappropriate. A summary of the overall findings should be added and ‘overzealous’ comments restricted. After reading the first paragraph, which discounted their method and left one wondering why they took such careless approach left me wondering why I would recommend this paper for publication if the authors themselves cant provide a reasoned argument to support their own method. The rest of the discussion seesaws between criticism of J. Beall and cogent discussion of more constructive approaches taken by others dealing with Open Access movement. There is no conclusion section and the authors do not offer any insight into what is next in terms of policy or even future research.

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the
statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests