Clues to quality of journals

Experts do not always agree on the most appropriate place to publish or present a particular piece of research, but all agree that this choice is important, especially for early-career authors, both

a) to meet professional goals, such as tenure review and grant funding, and
b) to reach the audience you want to reach by publishing or presenting.

Fake/ predatory/ fraudulent journals reinforce APCs but without Peer Review & don’t provide publishing services e.g. quality control, licensing, indexing into indexing services/databases, content preservation and might not be full Open Access. Those journals are not limited to the open access model; there are reports about it also in the world of traditional journal publishing.

So, how to avoid publishing in a journal with low quality or fake journal?

1. Ask for Advice regarding experiences with journal/ publisher: ask experts (contact us) and/or research colleagues or ask via research network (hints for dubious ones: poor grammar, same website with different URLs, dead links, spam invitation mails, no or fake contact/ physical location, physical address displayed & correct? see [2]

2. Journal's name congruent with mission & geographical ("Swiss", "European" → congruent with editors/papers? or topical relationship (content resp. origin should meet the journal’s name) (dubious: name similar to a well-known one)

3. Check the Impact: use following tools for getting an impression of the impact 

a) JIF Journal Citation Reports claimed JIF correct? Check JCR (no bogus impact factor/ self-calculated? See [7]

h5 index

journal impact factor: = number of times an articles were cited in the last 5 years

Number of articles cited during the last 5 years / Number of articles published in the last 5 years

b) Scopus’ Journal Analyzer that we also purchased for such reasons (for details see tutorial: https://service.elsevier.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/14181/supporthub/scopus)

c) SCIglo Journal & Country Rank

Please keep in mind that not all journals are listed due to a) discipline, b) the journal’s age or other factors. Additionally, alternative metrics measure the relevance in Web2.0 / Social Media & Google:

d) Alternative Metrics (analyzing the mentions in Social Web etc.)

e) Google Scholar Metrics may also be helpful (for authors’ impact: GoogleScholar uses h5-index)

All in all, please keep in mind that the Journal’s Impact Factor does not show perfectly the relevance/ quality of an article, see warning sign above and ref. [8]

4. Scope & audience (e.g. researchers): should be well-defined, scope is either transdisciplinary (e.g. Nature, Science) or specified? (corresponding with the articles' content?), geographical scope mentioned? (corresponding with editors/papers?), primary audience named? Journal has no bogus certification to claim quality e.g. bogus SIS

5. Size/ Subscribers: how many copies sold? How many university libraries have a subscription? (ca. 2500 top universities worldwide, check EZB for European subscribers)

6. ISSN & JIF displayed (“No “Index Copernicus Value”, a dubious value, or other misleading metrics”: stated ISSN /JIF existing & correct? check ISSN & JIF via JCR (a new journal can’t have a JIF: if claimed= false JIF)

7. Check the directories ZDB / EZB / DOAJ: a) journal referenced in journals’ database/ Zeitschriften-datenbank ZDB (comprises all printed and electronic journals)? b) an eJournal should be listed in the Electronic Journals’ Library EZB (shows access info)

c) an Open Access Journal should be listed in the DOAJ /Directory of OA Journals

If a journal is NOT indexed in these directories, you should look very critically to it. We suggest asking colleagues like us (see [1]) who are familiar with these issues for several years

8. Publication history: long-established = bigger outreach, consistently/ regularly published? Avoid journals with “light content”-issues or pseudo-science content/ journal and avoid journals that claim to be the “leading journal”


10. Open or closed (=behind paywalls) access: access ways stated see [3] dubious: copyproof & locked PDF for complicating plagiarism checks, crawling e.g. via search engines not allowed, see [5] openly accessible for an extra fee?=HybridOA

11. Gold Open Access (via Article Processing Charges APC) or Green OA (deposit in repository): check in case of GoldOa: which fee & can costs be covered by a funder? Is there a waiver for low-income countries? check GreenOA-possibility: deposit in repository with embargo or instantly? (Check Sherpa/ROMEO)

12. Check the Publisher e.g. via Sherpa/ROME0: Publisher/Journal does not hide who they are? Is Publisher well-known (not only claimed? see [n]) & run by an important scholarly body (=prestigious journal) → might be pretended & not a real NPO) or commercially-run? Are duplicated editorial boards in different journals? see [8] What else does it promote (non-academic of blinking ads?)/produce? Contact is journal/publisher-affiliated (no @gmx etc. no contact form? see [n]) and physical address displayed & correct? check via GoogleMaps (predatory publishers use a virtual office or proxy business as physical address see [n]) & check via whoisIP.

Editorial Board incl. roles/responsibilities: displayed & true? Is editorial board made up? made-up names/ positions/ without persons' knowledge/permission? Editorial Board has sufficient members (more than 10members) Geographical diversity (esp. with international claim)? Are they well-known in your research area (do they
work in your academic field & are associated with strong academic programs/institutions? [Details given & correct?] & still actively-publishing important cited papers? [One of the quality metrics for scholars is the h-index, see this Scopus blogpost]. Publisher’s founder not part of all journals' Editorial Boards? Editors not publishing in their own journal? see a)

- Transparency in Publishing operations:
  - Publishing operations & manuscript handling must be well-described (=high ethical/professional standards) see b) submission process, c) peer review, d) authors/reviewers guidelines, e) publication contract, f) digital preservation of published content (if not: papers disappear), g) copyright policy poorly written or misleading claims? → predatory see h).

- Correction/retraction: good copyediting & proofreading? Correction-rate compared to similar journals? Retracted articles existing and what are the retraction reasons? → frequent corrections/errata=no thorough editorial practices, many retractions=ineffective strategies against fraud or malpractice, removed papers without statement=stealth retraction

- Sufficient resources/strategies against misconduct/fraud: retraction policy/reporting guideline? e.g. plagiarism-screening-tools if insufficient, the journal(s) suffer from plagiarism, self-plagiarism, image manipulation etc.

- Publication Fees (& no submission/handling fee? author has to pay even if paper is not accepted see i): clearly stated fees or charges (e.g. pages, colored images) & can be easily found? (median fees see j) predatory journal: $100, OA-journal: $1866, subscription-based: $300), dubious: APC-payment before submission, options for paying APCs (for future articles), not too focused on the payment of fees? In case of OA Journal: Many OA-journals use an "author pays"-procedure/ GoldOA (see k) currently unofficial HZI's publication fund's criteria on Open Access. Publication fees doesn't mean it's a low-quality/journal but high APCs/ article processing charges are the motivation for recent frauds and "fake" journals.

- Publishers should be an OASPA-Member following OASPA's Membership Criteria see l) & m)

- Publisher's operations: publisher-for-profit or non-profit? (falsely claimed, relationships with other for-profit companies hidden or obscured? Links to legitimate associations to borrow legitimacy). Publisher began operation with only a few journals (dubious: large fleet from the beginning, template to quickly create each journal's home page see n)

- No spam mails: asking for peer-review, submitting papers (done also by good ones!) or for suggesting reviewers

- Content indexed in legitimate abstracting & indexing services (Scopus, PubMed, DOAJ, JCR): claimed indexes correct? → check claims/resources (might be falsely mentioned to rise submissions see o)

- Acceptance/Rejection Rates: acceptance rate included in the "information for authors" area of the journal or journal homepage? (Normally, higher quality journals have lower acceptance rates and higher rejection rates. Inverted U-relationship –medium rejection rates are best for authors, low rejection rates = journal is desperate or unknown and thus will also accept weak content)

- Peer Review & Author/Reviewer Guidelines (original/copied?): Review type: single (=inadequate) double-/ triple-blind/ open-peer review? Post-publication peer review? → review type should be stated see p) Review quality & duration? should be conducted by at least 2 reviewers=experts in specific topic (dubious: reviewers suggested by author see q) Details in: editorial policies, instructions for authors/reviewers, "about this journal", article preparation instructions

- Time from submission to decision: appropriate time? (dubious: rapid publishing promised)

- Time from submission to publication online: appropriate time, e.g. some months to 1 year → indicates well-organized production process (dubious: rapid publishing promised)

- ePublication approach: "continuous online" publication? Published as final versions? Articles arranged into issues? TOC & search/browse-features available see r? Published in print or digital only? (Please note: printed issues are also necessary due to German copyright-regulations as document delivery (e.g. by libraries) for a scientific purpose is only allowed via copying from a printed issue), "Online first" offered? (reaches potential audiences faster)

- Transparency in Publishing operations:
  - Printing issues are necessary here? Due to many excellent articles (gaps of two years), long backward might indicate over-acceptance by the editors

- Reference style: How standard is the reference style used by the journal? Does it have an own reference style which is also offered in a reference manager? (If not or not with all required aspects, use a nearly similar one). Use a reference manager like Endnote or Mendeley to get the paper in the same basic approach as the journal.

- Article type (what types offered?) & length limitation: what is the maximum length? (length can vary: research notes (~2000+ words) to full article, longer articles might lead to additional costs) Is the favored article type a higher-rated or lower-rated for the so-called "performance-related bonuses"/"financial incentives for value-added"?

- Similar articles: Do articles exist with similar content/theories/results? The journal should cover papers dealing with similar topics but not so much so that a submitted paper might be rejected based on those reasons

- Additional features offered? (See below)

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If something is missing, please let us know: Bibliothek@... We hope this checklist helps in evaluating a journal/publisher.

If so, readers are able to view the full set of research output.

Those criteria are also summed up and gathered from the 4 below and the references listed in “Further information”:

- Beall, Jeffrey: Predatory journals: Ban predators from the scientific record. The false academy: predatory publishing: A new page
- Cabells International: http://www.cabells.com/blacklist-criteria (Cabells’ blacklist only for subscribers)
- Washington University’s check list: http://libguides.wustl.edu/php?q=47124&p=302704
- Crawford, Walt: Journals, “Journals” and Wannabes: Investigating the List https://citesandinsights.info/civ1417.pdf (This checklist’s design is based on Crawford’s aspects in Crawfurd’s article)

Further information:

a) Beall's List: Potential, possible, or probable predatory scholarly open-access publishers

e) DOAJ: Information for publishers http://www.doaj.org/publishers
f) Dunleavy, Patrick: Submitting to a journal commits you to it for six weeks to six months (or longer) – so choose your journal carefully. (2016) - http://blogs.ise.ac.uk/impartsofsocialsciences/2016/11/10/choose-your-journal-carefully/


h) HZI Library: Check the relevance of information sources – HZI Library – URL: https://helmholtz-hzi-bibliotheca-open.de/LinkClick.aspx?TabId=2,eFe8fEOB04/3d&tabid=81&portalID=1&md=e625&LanguageDe


- Beall, Jeffrey: Predatory journals: Ban predators from the scientific record. – In: Nature 534 (2016) 326 https://www.nature.com/articles/nature18212

- OAFAQ: Membership Criteria: https://oaspa.org/membership/membership