

Identification and treatment of spurious journals in Latindex

Guide for Editors

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Editors' Guide

Introduction

In order to prevent bad editorial practices that can affect the credibility of all academic publications and harm the scientific community, Latindex is implementing a detection system that deploys a more careful scrutiny of the journals.

To this end, a Working Group was set up to identify journals of dubious quality and define the policy to be followed with journals that engage in fraudulent practices, to unequivocally ensure the integrity of the publications included in Catalog 2.0. Thus, Latindex warns "that it reserves the right to exclude dubious quality journals (spurious journals)".

Currently, the reviewers working in the Latindex network use common guidelines to carry out the necessary verifications and apply the same standards so that consistent decisions are made throughout the network. In addition, a Review Board has been created that examines certain journals taking as a reference a list of characteristic features that make it possible to identify these types of publications. In these cases, the journal would enter a period of observation and verification of data, and the rating request would be temporarily suspended. In the event that the journal or its editor is finally found to be in violation of ethics and good editorial practices, the journal will not be able to apply again to the Catalog for a five-year period of time.

Latindex considers it necessary to alert and educate researchers and potential authors on how to identify predatory and fraudulent journals, to avoid sending manuscripts to this type of unscrupulous business. In this way, it will be possible to avoid authors being deceived and later defrauded in their efforts to publish in academic and scientific journals that could be fraudulent, with their foreseeable consequences. Likewise, editors will be able to effectively identify these bad practices in order to prevent their journal from falling into them and affect the authors later.

This document includes the common guidelines of Latindex to ensure unequivocally the integrity of the publications. The guide contains a list of characteristic features that make it possible to identify spurious journals or journals of dubious quality and recommendations so that editors can carry out the necessary verifications and thus avoid practices that could be fraudulent, even without this being a conscious action.

Characteristic features that allow to identify this type of publications

The characteristic features appear in five main sections and each of them are ordered from highest to lowest importance, considering the lack of transparency, the falsity of the data or the intention of deception. Some sections include a final section on bad practices that may be frequent in these journals, even if they are not a clear indication of fraud. The traits are as follows:

- Spurious business practices
- Editorial board and peer review
- Website
- Publication practices
- Indexing and metrics

1. SPURIOUS COMMERCIAL PRACTICES

The journal's information on publishing fees and copyrights, and in general, its information on its business practices, must be transparent. These are the "Access and reuse policies" (feature 20 of the Latindex Catalog). If there is a cost to the author, it should be presented in the form of a publication fee that is paid only when an article is accepted for publication, and the amount of the fee should be clearly indicated on the website. In this sense, some common practices in fraudulent or predatory journals are:

1.1. They hide information about the charges for processing articles (so-called Article Processing Charges - APC) and do not indicate the charge of a fee until after the author has completed the submission and the manuscript has been accepted.

1.2. They require a submission fee (or handling fee), which must be paid whether or not the manuscript is accepted, rather than a publication fee (APC). In any case, this fee must have a price visibly stated in the journal and cannot be modified.

1.3. They create a fraudulent website similar to a legitimate academic journal (known as a clone), in order to offer academics the opportunity to quickly publish their research for a fee.

1.4. They claim to be a non-profit organization when in fact they are for-profit businesses.

1.5. They are open access but do not allow authors to retain the copyright.

1.6. They use a language that suggests that they are leaders or referents, when in fact they are new journals.

1.7. On their business websites, they sell indexing services, editorial training, proofreading, article arrangement, and translation services for the future publication.

1.8. They hide the publisher's relationship with partner companies that are for-profit.

1.9. They are associated with a conference that has been identified as predator, facilitating the publication of articles by paying the conference registration fee.

1.10. They actively and insistently request manuscript submissions by e-mail, even when there is no record or submission request to the journal for such messages to appear.

2. EDITORIAL BOARD AND PEER REVIEW

Latindex establishes as a mandatory requirement, the definition of the editorial board and those responsible for the journal (characteristic 1) who have the responsibility and academic solvency for the journal to be a serious and high-level entity. Similarly, it requires that the procedure for selecting the articles or arbitration (characteristic 6) be clearly detailed, in such a way that it demonstrates the quality of the content of each issue. Therefore, the following practices should be avoided:

2.1. The responsible editor or members of the journal editorial board falsely claim to have academic degrees or other qualifications.

2.2 The name of the publisher suggests that it is a society or an academy, when in reality it is a single person who acts as editor and does not have the infrastructure or organization that recognizes it as a society or academic organization. The same can apply to commercial editors.

2.3. The journal mentions that it is edited by an organization that does not recognize it.

2.4. The journal creates an editorial entity for the sole purpose of meeting the Latindex criteria.

2.5. No editor or member of the editorial board appears on the journal's website as responsible for the review procedure.

2.6. The editorial board is very small or "will be constituted soon."

2.7. The journal includes scholars on an editorial board without their knowledge or permission.

2.8. The publisher's founder (or a single person) is the editor of all the journals published by that company.

2.9. A single editorial publishes an overwhelmingly large set of journals at the same time.

2.10. The editors do not really exist or have passed away.

2.11. The title of the journal indicates a national or international affiliation that does not match its editorial board or location.

2.12. The journal's website does not detail a clearly stated peer review policy.

2.13. Peer review is inadequate. That is, a single person reviews the applications or the reviewers read manuscripts that do not correspond to the discipline of their specialty.

2.14. There is evidence that the editor and the members of the editorial board do not have the academic credentials to serve as peer reviewers, since they are not identified as authorities or active members in their discipline or in the discipline of the journal.

2.15. They have members on the editorial boards who are prominent researchers, but the journal exempts them from any contribution to the journal, except the use of their names or photographs.

3. WEBSITE

It is possible that some bad practices may be observed on the journal's website which may be due to the lack of experience of the publishing entity or the editorial board. If the journal does not present false data, no intention of deception is suspected and if a willingness to collaborate and to be transparent is ascertained, Latindex will perform the rating normally.

But the lack of integrity and especially the lack of professionalism of the website can be bad practice. For example, the texts are very defective, the formats are not the usual ones in scientific publications or there is an excess of announcements that are not related to academic matters. These and the following are aspects where journals must be careful so as not to make these errors:

- 3.1. The journal or publisher uses a virtual office and the website does not identify a physical address for the publisher or provides an address that turns out to be false.
- 3.2. The contact addresses are not professional and do not relate to an institutional affiliation or an email domain of the journal itself (for example, @hotmail.com or @yahoo.com).
- 3.3. There is no way to contact the journal directly and it can only be done through a web contact form.
- 3.4. The quality of the website is not professional: there is a carelessness in grammar and spelling in the texts that are read on the website, many links turn out to be dead or broken, or the images are too distorted indicating that they may not be authorized.
- 3.5. The journal provides an ISSN that turns out to be false.
- 3.6. The journal title refers to a country or demographic group that is not related to the content or origin of the journal.
- 3.7. On the main page, texts mainly addressed to the authors and not to the general public of the journal are used or highlighted.
- 3.8. The names and logos of other publishing groups are used on the website to feign legitimacy.

4. PUBLICATION PRACTICES

There have been bad publication practices that are usually associated with spurious journals, such as those that offer short response times, because they do not have peer review processes. The journal should avoid the following practices:

- 4.1. The journal publishes papers that are not academic at all, for example layman's essays or pseudoscience (false or misleading science).
- 4.2. Universities or other organizations are mentioned as partners or sponsors, when in fact they are not.
- 4.3. The articles evidence that they have not been subjected to minimal revisions or corrections.
- 4.4. The journal declares the adoption of ethics codes and anti-plagiarism detection systems with the sole purpose of complying with the Latindex methodology.

- 4.5. Publisher promises speedy publication or unusually quick peer review (less than 4 weeks).
- 4.6. There is little geographic diversity of authors, although the journal claims to be international. This means that most of the authors and the content of the articles belong to a single country, often oblivious to the publishing entity.
- 4.7. The periodicity is monthly or less, which also indicates that they could publish without rigor.
- 4.8. The published articles turn out to be already published in other journals with the same authorship.
- 4.9. The journal purposely publishes many controversial articles or review articles in the interest of increasing the number of citations.
- 4.10. The journal publishes papers presented at conferences, without additional peer review.
- 4.11. The information that the journal describes does not match what is included on the journal's website: the contents differ from the specified title and scope.
- 4.12. The journal massively publishes articles in a single issue and is bimonthly or monthly.
- 4.13. The title of the journal is copied or is so similar to a legitimate journal that it could cause confusion between the two.

5. INDEXATION AND METRICS

Journals seek visibility and recognition through their inclusion in indexes and databases, which in turn use the citations received for their articles to measure their impact. These practices can be fraudulent to the extent that they are misused or simulated in the following ways:

- 5.1. They show false indexes in recognized databases that they are not able to credit.
- 5.2. They use misleading metrics (that is, metrics with the words "impact factor" that are not Clarivate's Impact Factor, for example) or display false data.
- 5.3. They refer to databases or metrics that do exist but are equally fraudulent or out-of-date. It is recommended to consult the following sources: Stop Predatory Journals <https://predatoryjournals.com/metrics/> and Misleading Metrics <https://beallslist.net/misleading-metrics/>
- 5.4. They refer to other systems that are not databases or indexes, in which any journal could be included or that are not indexes but have other purposes; for example, CrossRef, Research Gate, DOI, ORCID, etc.
- 5.5. Their publisher or their periodic publications do not appear in directories or are not widely cataloged in specialized libraries.
- 5.6. The editor manipulates documents available in other information systems to include false citations to the journal, or bibliographic references to journal articles that were not included in the original version of the documents, in order for these invented citations to be accounted for by systems that automatically generate citation metrics.