(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

Hijacked Journals: An unexplored publication challenge to the young researchers

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Abstract

This article was prepared to meet and crave extravagance of scholars in my research community especially the young researchers who have just stepped into the deep sea of Research. During recent months, we had discussions on research publication ethics and challenges, but many of us were not aware about the big scam of Hijacked Journals in the academic world. This necessity intended to explore the few unspotted and less discussed areas of Journal Hijacking such as the origin of the term Journal Hijacking, various definitions, what is general concept and understating of the Hijacked Journals, how the Journals Hijackers target the journals, pioneers of Journal hijacking, professional means to identify the journals Hijackers, general tips safeguard from journal hijackers, and finally concluded with few sample authentic and hijacked websites form medical journals.

Keywords: Pioneers Of Journal Hijackers; Publication Challenge; Academic Alert; Duplicate Websites; Research Stealing

1. Introduction

When I was discussing with my fellow researchers in the University, I have noticed that many of them are not aware about the most hazardous threat in their research field that is the term "Hijacked Journals" and it was not much discussed among researchers in academic interaction sections anytime. Hence it was through provoking to elaborate on the unexplored challenges to young researchers by Hijacked Journals. Very often Hijacked Journal is not a hot topic among the researchers either due to ignorance or over confidence with legislative system which is prevailing in the Asian countries and also the target journals for hijackers are usually published other than in English and most of the Asian journals publish in English language (Memon, 2019). Here, this article is an attempt to discuss about the history of Hijacked Journals, how researchers can identify the hijacked journals, how to be alert of them etc. will be discussed briefly. This paper is organized into the following sections: general understating of Hijacked Journal, Origin of journal hijacking, means to identify the journals and finally general tips with sample. The paper ended with concluding remarks. As a descriptive article, secondary data was used to identify the present list of related articles in the same field. In recent years, however, new empirical and conceptual studies have started to document the scale, mechanisms and consequences of journal hijacking in much more detail (Abalkina, 2024,), (Dadkhah et al., 2024,) (Hegedűs et al., 2024,)

2. Definitions of Hijacked Journals

Hijacked journals are duplicate or fake websites of legitimate ones utilizing the title, ISSN and other information of the reputable journal. They are often created by a malicious third party for the purpose of fraudulently offering academicians the opportunity to rapidly publish their research online for a fee(https://publons.com/blog/hijacked-journals). Hijacked journals are fake websites of authentic ones, utilizing the title and ISSNs of reputable journals (Dadkhah, M., & Borchardt, G.2016). More recent analyses show that the phenomenon has expanded considerably, with at least 67 hijacked journals identified in Scopus alone and many more suspected worldwide (Abalkina, 2024,) (Hegedűs

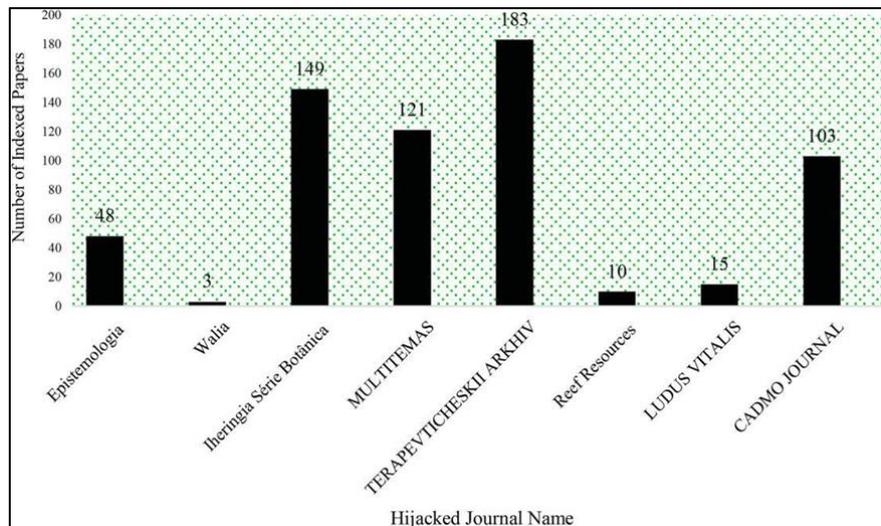* Corresponding author: Swastik Sahoo

et al., 2024,) (Rorke et al., 2024,) A hijacked journal is a legitimate scientific journal that offers print-only version, for which a bogus website has been created by a malicious third party fake publisher for the purpose of fraudulently offering research scientists the chance to rapidly publish their paper online with publication fee (Kolahi & Khazaei,2015) (Bhasker & Solomon, n.d.).

3. Universal perceptive on Hijacked Journals among academicians

Hijacking of scientific journals is the activity of fake websites created by hackers in place of true academic journals for copying their names, addresses, impact factors and international publication numbers and all other credentials in order to appropriate scientific output and payment of fees charged for publication with very delicate manner (Martins, T. G. 2016). The hijacking of scientific journals began in 2012, and currently more than 20 scientific journals are on this list with multidisciplinary subjects. These journals are from different countries such as Switzerland and Austria but very less identified from Asian countries as the many are published in English language because hijackers are more attracted to local European language. They are multidisciplinary journals, usually not originally published in English, accept manuscripts from different areas and have impact factors measured by indexing agencies (Martins, T. G. 2016). Most of these journals are available in-print only, and they are not high impact factor journals, which end up convincing more easily the invited author to publish within weeks with acceptance confirmation. In addition, in this fraud the names of the respective actual journal editors are used without their permission and any legal confirmation. Loesser and victims are usually selected from scientific journal websites that are not peer reviewed and listed in the Scopus or any other standard agency (Sorooshian, S. 2016). Young and inexperienced Researchers are usually contacted by the false journals by e-mail offering quick publications with considerable impact factor in exchange for publication fees. Once researchers send the article, they receive a message with bank information to pay the fee immediately. To further deceive the author, a list of superficial considerations about the article is sent, suggesting outward corrections to be done before the publication, which will not occur. However, hundreds of researchers have been deceived globally. The fake journal uses the Open Journal Systems software for the management of the "manuscripts" they receive, and the whole appearance looks pretty professional (Memisevic, H. 2018).

4. Brief History of Hijacked Journals

The term "hijacked journals" was first coined by Dr. Mehrdad Jalalian in 2012. The initial reports of journal hijacking came about the Wulfenia, published by the Regional Museum of Carinthia in Klagenfurt, Austria; and Archives des Sciences, published by the Society of Physics and Natural History of Geneva (SPHN), in Switzerland.

Source: (Dadkhah, Maliszewski, & Lyashenko 2016)

Figure 1 Number of indexed papers that belong to hijacked journals in Google Scholar

Currently, there are more than 100 scientific journals on different lists for hijacked journals. Hijacked journals are a phenomenon of creating fake websites that mimic authentic and reputable journals and their websites and abuse the identity of those journals (i.e. Name and ISSN) — where authors are made to believe that their work will be published in a reputable journal (Memon, 2019). A similar phenomenon called journal phishing was described by Dadkhah et al in 2015, where a fake website similar to an authentic website is created by the cybercriminals, and sensitive information

of the authors (such as credit card passwords) is gathered to make money. The graph below will present the summary of a study on the list of indexed well known journal are hijacked journal in Google scholar (Dadkhah, Maliszewski, & Lyashenko 2016) (Dadkhah et al., 2024).

5. Target journal selection by Hijackers

- Finding some reputable, but not very famous, journals as their potential targets, especially individual publishers with single journals (JALALIAN, M., & MAHBOOBI, H. 2014).
- Journals based in non-English-speaking countries are preferred.
- The target journal should not have a website because when searching for name, it should appear in search engine but should have a link.
- The target journal should not have a high impact-factor value because it would be difficult for the hijackers to convince the authors or researchers that a high impact-factor journal invited them to publish their work in very short period of time (JALALIAN, M., & MAHBOOBI, H. 2014).
- Since only the popular indexed journals matter to most universities when someone is applying for an academic upgrade or a Ph.D. opportunity, the criminals know that the victim journal should be covered by Scopus or any other academically accepted indexing agencies and have an impact factor compiled by the JCR (JALALIAN, M., & MAHBOOBI, H. 2014) (Hegedűs et al., 2024) (Shen & Bjork, 2023).

6. Imitation and fake Web development by Hijackers

- Anonymous registering of a .COM or .ORG domain name for the affected journal to imitate the website of an authentic journal or maliciously setting up a duplicate website for the hijacked journal.
- Avoiding the country-name domains (such as .US and .IR or IN) because their registration procedures usually require a check of the identity of the domain owner or verification of a valid address.
- Misusing of famous editors and real people's names in the list of the journal's editorial board without their permission. It seems to be an easy job to set up a fake journal listing "editors" who know nothing about the job they purportedly are doing or listing fake names of people with titles such as "Dr." or "Ph.D."
- Creating fake impact factors or falsely stating that they have earned an impact factor is a good technique to pretend to be a prestigious journal. This technique applies for the completely fake publishers, not for the websites of real journals that have been hijacked, because they have a verified impact factor compiled by the JCR (JALALIAN, M., & MAHBOOBI, H. 2014).
- Providing a link from a fake website to the authentic journal's profile in the master journal list of Scopus. Sometimes, authors know that there should be a link between the Scopus's website and the Journal's website, but they forget that this link should be from Scopus to the Journal, not from the Journal to Scopus (JALALIAN, M., & MAHBOOBI, H. 2014).
- Having no contact detail provided in the "Contact us" page of the website of a hijacked or fake publisher.
- Including a fake log-in gateway for accessing the archive of the past issues that will never work.
- Misusing of the names of invalid organizations, indicating that they are scientific supporters or publishers of the fake journals (JALALIAN, M., & MAHBOOBI, H. 2014).

7. Pioneers of Journals Hijackers

Here we will introduce the pioneers or forefathers of journals Hijackers. Three of the persons of interest in the world of journal hijackers are 1) "the man behind the pseudonym "James Robinson" who uses a fake address in Dubai, United Arab Emirates 2) an East European IT scientist whom we call "king of hijacked journals" and he uses the pseudonym "Ruslan Boranbaev", and 3) an Assistant Professor of the Saudi Arabia university and his team of Word Press experts from Pakistan (Jalalian, M., & Dadkhah, M. 2015). The so-called "James Robinson", however, is a man who used a methodical approach to accomplish his criminal goals, but the design of his hijacked journals show that he clearly has average or less knowledge of what happens in the academic world, and his "limited" knowledge and expertise related to web design and online journal management systems resulted in his creating low quality web pages for the affected journals. The only notable thing about "James Robinson" is that he is the man who mass hijacked too many journals. He was very careful to hide his identity, but he forgot to remove his footprints from his work especially when he used other pseudonyms for registering fake websites, using some random emails in filling and using the same server for hosting many of his fake websites. The third person of interest in the world of journal hijackers, "Ruslan Boranbaev", deserves to wear the crown as the "king of the cybercriminals who have hijacked journals". As we discussed beginning, he is the man who registered the domain "sciencesarchive.com" on October 23, 2011, to hijack the Swiss journal "Archives des

Science" the first time such a foul act had been committed in the history of academic world (Jalalian, M., & Dadkhah, M. 2015).

8. Hijacked Journals: Methods of Identification

Operators of hijacked journals are known through sending of excessive mails to authors through the internet requesting for submission of articles for publication (Dvorin, 2014). They have a way of copying authors' e-mail addresses via their publications in internet for this purpose. This practice is contrary to the operations of universally Indexed journals. These indexing agencies don't normally send e-mails to authors requesting for manuscripts for peer review process (Omonijo, 2015). Many indexed journals will accept manuscripts only from registered members via their email and they promote the transparent peer review proves which is not the custom of the hijacked journals.

According to these authors, accepting articles quickly without peer review or quality control, including hoax and nonsensical papers characterized the mode of operation of hijack journals. Basically, when an article is submitted to a high impact journal, it usually takes months to complete the process of review and get the article published. But when an article is submitted to any hijacked journal, such an article is never reviewed. The fake operators will send an e-mail to the author that his or her paper has been accepted for publication and that the paper could be published in the next issue of the outlet if the publication fee is paid within seven days, which is contrary to the ethics of publishing and operations of the original outlets. We have discovered that hijacked journals normally capitalize on the weakness or unnecessary delay in the peer review process, which characterized the operations of many genuine High Impact Journals to dupe innocent researchers who are mostly from developing nations.

In addition to the above, no High Impact Journal, indexed in Popular database, accepts articles for publication without sound editorial works. In such outlets, reviewers' suggestions, comments and suggestions for correction are usually sent to the author in order to improve the quality of the paper. If the identified corrections were not properly affected, the chief editor of the journal would send the manuscript back to the author until every suggested correction is rectified. It should be noted that any article not measured up to the standard of such High Impact Journal is often rejected. However, authors should note that no hijacked journals reject articles, no matter how bad the paper is, it will be accepted for publication.

As noted by Rahman, et al., (2014) where members of staff of some of these journals are available, they do not even seem to read the biographies of their editorial board members before publishing them. It is unfortunate to realize that most of them don't even know how to discover and correct mistakes in manuscripts submitted for peer review. Thus, papers are being published with errors or mistakes. Also, hijacked journals are easily recognized through their fake official addresses. They seem to operate through a 'contact us' page that only includes a web form. Authors are asked to submit their request to the editor through a form well designed on their fake web link. The publisher of such hijacked outlets focuses on how to dupe authors at the expense of quality production. More often than not, hijacked journals publishers do not render any significant service to enrich articles submitted for publication. Thus, such publications lack substantial contributions to knowledge. Consequently, no value is added to readers of such papers and researchers who engage them for academic presentation.

Hijackers usually claim that their outlets are indexed in legitimate abstracting and indexing organisations, which include Thomson Reuters and Scopus Impact Factor Ranked Journals by SCImago. This is not true. They use to forge Thomson Reuter's logo and also inscribe 5 years Impact factor on their web sites to avoid any suspicion. Jalalian, (2014) believed that they have the knowledge required to design a website, manage an open access e-journal. Kalahi and khazaei, (2015) also argue that they are skilled to hide their characteristics on the World Wide Web. Thus, it will be a good idea for authors to check the master list of outlets indexed in Scopus Impact Factor Journal by SCImago before sending their papers out for peer review. These fake publishers do not have any means of discovering author's misconduct such as plagiarism (Jalalian, M. 2015). They seem not to be concerned with the quality of papers published since their target is fund oriented. Scholars should know that the legitimate journals normally subject any article received to plagiarism detection software (Turnitin, 2014; gallethy, 2013) to find out any relationship which the submitted articles have with previous studies.

Table 1 Hijacked Journals identification table

Features	Page Rank	Journal Seek	Archive Availability	Domain Registration Time	Call for Papers	Visitor's Countries
Page Rank		P	P	P	X	X
Journal Seek	P		P	P	P	P
Archive Availability	P	P		P	X	X
Domain Registration Time	P	P	P		X	X
Call for Papers	X	P	X	X		X
Visitor's Countries	X	P	X	X	X	

Source: Dadkhah, M., & Obeidat, M. M. (2015

To use Table 1, that is enough to extract quantities for each feature according to what has been described. Then, if two features with the value 1 are coincided (in horizontal and vertical line) in one or more of the boxes that are marked with the letter P, investigated journal has been hijacked. If the features with the value 1 are coincided in no box P, they must be coincided at least three boxes X, to be identified as a hijacked journal. Otherwise, the investigated journal website will be an original one (Dadkhah, M., & Obeidat, M. M. 2015).

9. General Tips to spot and avoid hijacked Journals

- First of all, always perform intensive checks/investigation on call for papers received through email. Start by searching for the journal in various search engines, and through online forums or blogs to find out more.
- Try downloading or viewing already published papers. Hijacked journals often contain papers of low quality with numerous typos that are often copied from other journals. Generally, they will not display information in already published papers.
- Hijacked journals often offer very small peer review time. Most of the time they do not provide any review and accept paper without modifications.
- Most of the hijacked journals have fake editorial boards without designation, university address or contact information.

- Hijacked journals often do not provide scope information or subjects accepted for publication in the journal. They would publish papers in all subjects.
- Be careful with journals that provide ambiguous statements on author fees.
- Hijacked journals have weak websites with simple submission format. Direct email to the editor along with research paper is always preferred by these journals (Menon V.G.2019)

10. Sample of Authentic and Hijacked websites of selected Medical Journal

Table 2 Authentic and hijacked websites of selected Medical Journals

Legitimate Journal Title (ISSN)	Authentic Journal website	Hijacked Journal website
Emergencias (1137-6821)	http://emergencias.portalsemes.org	http://www.sanidadediciones.com
The Journal of the American Medical Association (print: 0098-7484; online: 1538-3598)	http://jama.jamanetwork.com	http://www.ama-journal.org
Vitae (0121-4004)	http://aprendeenlinea.udea.edu.co/revistas/index.php/vitae/index	http://www.vitae-udea.org
Terapevticheskii Arkhiv (0040-3660)	N/A2	http://www.terapevticheskiiarkhiv.org
Kardiologiya (0022-9040)	http://ores.su/en/journals/kardiologiya/	http://www.kardiologiyajournal.org
Revue Scientifique et Technique (0253-1933)	N/A2	http://www.rstoide.org

Source: Dadkhah, M., & Borchardt, G. (2016).

11. Conclusion

Hijacked Journals are very badly exploiting the quench of researchers to publish new articles, especially of young researchers and research scholars. We have been looking into many articles in the field of Hijacked journals, but unfortunately, we could not find many valuable and informative articles which are published after 2016 and particularly the period between 2015-2019 was very stagnant. However, recent empirical and conceptual works have again brought this topic to the forefront by documenting index jacking of hijacked journals into major databases, high levels of plagiarism, and even the dominance of hijacked medical journals in search-engine results (Shen & Bjork, 2023). But with available secondary data, we have explored the various aspects of the Hijacked Journals, means to identify the journals, general tips to safeguard from these journal hijackers etc. with available data. The major point was noticed that it was less studies or explored in the Asian countries on the effect of Hijacked Journals among the research scholars or academicians. Hence this will remain as research gap for future studies and can be explored very elaborately. This term Journal Hijacking or Hijacked Journals should be an alarm and alert to the young Researchers.

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