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IMPACT IN THE COMMUNICATION AREA OF ALLEGEDLY FRAUDULENT JOURNALS' CALL FOR PAPERS

IMPACTO EN EL ÁREA DE COMUNICACIÓN DE *CALL FOR PAPERS* DE PRESUNTAS REVISTAS FRAUDULENTAS

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ABSTRACT

The demanding promotion of university teachers is being taken advantage of by international publishers to develop a fast business, which is framed by supposedly fraudulent activities of apparently scientific magazines, but without impact indexes that some experts already qualify as "epidemic" (García-Puente, 2019) and "plague" (Silva, 2016). This research uses the client or mystery researcher technique (Morena, 2013) to respond to an intentional sample of the call for papers (CFP) sent to researchers between January and April 2020, with a previously published article, which was intentionally altered to appear to be a scientific article, but which violates the guidelines of originality and rigour: the order of the paragraphs is altered and translated into English with DeepL, without subsequent monitoring. During the study period, 98 PICs were received and 38 submissions were made. The results are eloquent: none has been rejected, and within an average of 6 days 16 publication acceptances are confirmed. In all cases, payment is requested in advance. The article identifies the profile of the journals, their recruitment strategies, the use of claims of: indexing, ethical standards and peer review and the naming strategies to simulate international prestige.

KEYWORDS

Papers; science communication; publishing houses; ethics; popularization of science; predatory journals; pseudoscience; scientific review; scientific journals; predatory journals

RESUMEN

La exigente promoción del profesorado universitario está siendo aprovechada por editoriales internacionales para desarrollar un negocio rápido, que se enmarca en actividades supuestamente fraudulentas de revistas aparentemente científicas, pero sin indexaciones de impacto que algunos/as expertos/as ya califican como «epidemia» (García-Puente, 2019) y «plaga» (Silva, 2016). Esta investigación recurre a la técnica del cliente o investigador/a misterioso/a (Morena, 2013) para responder a una muestra intencional de los *call for papers (CFP)* remitidos a investigadores e investigadoras entre enero y abril de 2020, con un artículo previamente publicado, que fue intencionadamente alterado para aparentar que se trata de un artículo científico, pero que vulnera las pautas de originalidad y rigor: se altera el orden de los párrafos y se traduce al inglés con DeepL, sin supervisión posterior. En el periodo de estudio se reciben 98 CFP y se realizan 38 envíos. Los resultados son elocuentes: ninguno ha sido rechazado, en plazo promedio de 6 días se confirman 16 aceptaciones de publicación. En todas se solicita el pago previo aranceles. El artículo permite identificar el perfil de las revistas, sus estrategias de captación, uso de reclamos de: indexación, normas éticas y evaluación por pares y las estrategias de *naming* para simular prestigio internacional.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Artículos; comunicación científica; editoriales; ética; divulgación de la ciencia; pseudociencia; revisión científica; revistas científicas; revistas depredadoras

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing and changing demands involved in the process of accreditation and academic and professional promotion of university teaching staff in Spain are being taken advantage of, and sometimes made profitable, by certain publishing companies that have detected the need to disseminate research results as a possible easy, quick and succulent business opportunity. This is what has led to the emergence of what are commonly known as predatory journals:

those that actively solicit manuscript authors for which they charge a fee without providing the editorial services, endorsements and quality procedures (such as peer review) that are the main hallmarks of legitimate publications (Elsevier Connect, 2019, s.p.).

This is not an isolated phenomenon, but the reality is that events are also held, which are supposedly for academic purposes and the dissemination of science and knowledge, but which really aim to facilitate the publication of works in journals that are supposedly indexed and have strict quality standards, and which on many occasions involve the intermediation of short-lived publishers, against payment of a variable amount and with little scientific impact.

Sharing research results on scientific supports and platforms of impact is not only an unavoidable activity of the research community, but also a concern and an obligation in order to meet the requirements of project evaluation bodies and individual activity. This growing need to publish has favoured the multiplication of call for papers (CFP) linked to supposedly scientific supports that offer rapid publication and dissemination at low cost, with claims based on blind peer review and references to indexing in reference databases that, on many occasions, are minor dissemination platforms or simple references to application processes for inclusion, which are in the pipeline, and therefore cannot be accredited as quality and indexing indexes. They have been described as (alleged) predatory publishers and journals which experts like Jiménez Contreras and Jiménez-Segura (2016, p. 7) consider to be a "scientific epidemic" that benefits from the "generalised lack of knowledge of this phenomenon among researchers" and their need to publish in international journals due to the pressure of the evaluation processes.

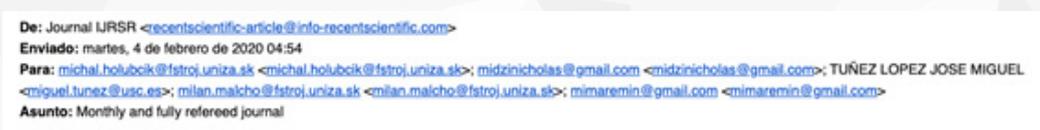
In this context, and taking into account the serious consequences that this may have for present and future generations of teachers, as well as for students, it is essential to investigate this possible source of knowledge, accessible to anyone, and to warn of the possible lack of rigour, innovation and ethics in these materials.

For this reason, this study presents the results of an updated review of the scientific literature on allegedly fraudulent or predatory actions and applies and implements them on a research approach that seeks to advance and deepen the knowledge about the process carried out by these pseudo-editorials, which favour scientific infoxication and go beyond the limits of ethics and responsibility through scientific fraud and online communication, offering society pseudo-knowledge, that in many cases not only do they not come from rigorous and objective research processes, but they have not even passed the essential and enriching processes of editorial revision, nor supervision by experts in the field under study, thus neglecting such essential foundations for quality knowledge as the evaluation and supervision of manuscripts through anti-plagiarism tools and the verification of compliance with authors' rights, among others.

In view of the increase in the number of invitations received by researchers to publish, some institutions such as the Library of the Autonomous University of Madrid have created the Quick Guide to identify predatory journals with which they try to help the academic community to facilitate the decision of where to publish their research work and avoid the temptation of succumbing to the proposals they receive in their email boxes by inviting them to publish in journals of impact whose quality is sometimes at least questionable.

The guide states that one of the practices typical of this type of journal is the aforementioned mass mailing of emails inviting the academic and scientific community to send articles to their journals in emails which, on occasion, also violate the Organic Law on the Protection of Personal Data and the guarantee of digital rights (3/2018), among others, since recipients may know the identities of other recipients.

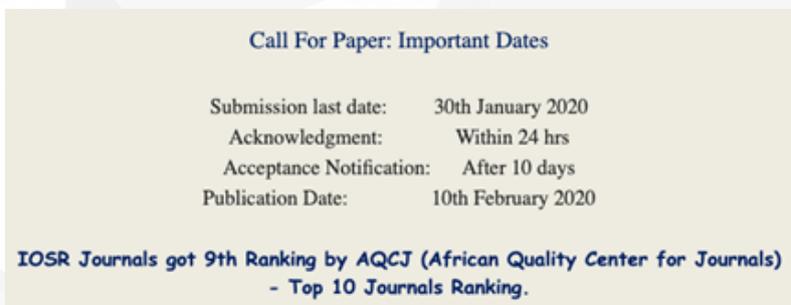
Image 1. Screenshot of an emailing with public recipient identities



Source: personal communication of 4 February 2020

The guide also states that the PICs include dates of receipt of manuscripts and publication of articles that imply practically immediate publication from the moment the editorial team receives the text from the authors.

Image 2. Screenshot of an emailing with important PIC dates



Source: personal communication of 15 January 2020

Furthermore, they try to attract attention and interest among their recipients by stating that these journals have high impact rates and are indexed in relevant databases, although on closer examination it can sometimes be seen that this is not a real indexing but that the publication is in the process of being admitted because, they claim, they have sent the application to be indexed or that they are simply unsupervised repositories to which any user can upload their personal documents such as the digital publishing platforms ISSUU or SlideShare.

Image 3. Screenshot of emailing with indexing

Source: personal communication of 4 February 2020

1.1. ALLEGEDLY FRAUDULENT JOURNALS AS OBJECTS OF STUDY

The first references to supposedly predatory scientific journals are related to the list that Jeffrey Beall (2010), from the Auraria Library of the University of ColoradoDenve, made public with a list of "predators" that identified themselves as Open Access and passed on the publishing costs to the authors. Since then, concern about the impact of predatory practices on the dissemination of research results has increased, although in the specific area of Communication studies are almost non-existent, although the increase in the number of Faculties and the number of researchers, together with changes in the systems of evaluation of scientific production, have placed the area of Communication in Spain in a scenario in which the offer has multiplied at the same time as new scientific journals were being consolidated. Fernández-Quijada and Masip-Masip(2013) documented what they called the ANECA effect in the area, with their analysis of Spanish production in Communication from 1980 to 2010, in which they note how production doubled between 2004 and 2008 (Moragas i Spa 2005; Martínez and Saperas2011).

The change in supports, the increase in the number of researchers and the modification of the dynamics of dissemination of research results occur in practically all areas of knowledge. The stimulus to international dissemination and the tightening of the requirements for publications with an impact on the accreditation processes have led to the need to publish and have turned into a business opportunity proposals from publishers based on the economic profitability of the process rather than on the interest in the dissemination of valuable and quality scientific contributions. A profitability that Bohannon (2013) qualified as a global industry is supported by the fees that authors have to pay instead of the subscription and/or download services that support these publishers.

Predatory journals and their study are a recent phenomenon in science communication. Jiménez Contreras and Jiménez-Segura (2016) place the first work, by an Indian author, Raju, in 2013, which refers to the activities of allegedly predatory publishers. The contributions of Shen & Björk (2015) are significant, as they show how the volume of articles in predatory magazines has multiplied fourfold in four years, reaching 420,000 texts in 2014. The study by Shamseer et al. (2017) also allowed a cross-sectional comparison of the incidence of predatory journals in the area of medicine, in order to differentiate them from others that are published in open access or by subscription.

The predatory journals have also been studied, for example, from a general perspective by Silva (2012 and 2014), Olivé (2013) and Rojas (2018). And also from more specific objectives, such as Guerra (2019), who focused his study on the origin and reasons for their appearance, while Silva (2012 and 2014); Olivé (2013); Greyet et al. (2016); Mercado (2017); Rojas (2018) and Guerra (2019) focused their attention on the pernicious invitations received by the scientific community through PIC (call for papers) and the use they make of them. Abad (2019) approached the phenomenon from the perspective of plagiarism.

Del Ponte et al (2014) and Túnnez-López and Martínez-Solana (2018) have highlighted the impact of these journals from the point of view of citation. Something similar was analysed by Somoza-Fernández et al (2016), such as the presence of journals considered as predators in various bibliographic databases and in the DOAJ directory, and they verified in the Information Matrix for Journal Analysis (MIAR), produced at the University of Barcelona, the ISSNs of 944 journals on the list of possible open access predators drawn up by Beall to show that they did not have a significant presence.

Somoza-Fernández et al. (2016) also identified the bad practices highlighted by the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in a lawsuit against a predatory publisher:

many articles are not peer-reviewed, many of the scientists listed on the editorial boards never agreed to appear there and the editor retains the manuscripts by hiding the fees until they are accepted, making it difficult for researchers to retrieve them and send them to another journal. Companies are also accused of misleading scientists and the public by organising conferences and meetings where the company flaunts the attendance of senior researchers as untrue (Oransky; Marcus, 2016, quoted by Somoza-Fernández et al. 2016, p.32).

These contributions have laid the foundations for the necessary strategies to be carried out to limit its progress (Prieto, 2019) and to put an end to this phenomenon which is already being described as an "epidemic" (García-Puente, 2019) and a "plague" (Silva, 2016). On the other hand, Pai & Franco (2016) analysed the predatory conferences and Silva (2018) the congresses that move away from the relevant evaluation processes.

Although there is no single definition, the predatory reference is associated with journals that

They appear to be a scientific support, encourage indexing, show that their publication processes are rigorous and subject to peer or double blind peer review, guarantee unusual speed in the process, proclaim open access and end up charging for publication

and, in some cases, request the assignment of copyright on the manuscript (Túñez-López y Martínez-Solana, 2018, p. 440).

These are publications that are characterised by stimulating rapid publication in a medium of supposed scientific impact that appears to at least offer international diffusion. The depredation is not only in the payment for the text to be published (and in the best of cases it is reviewed beforehand) and in the publication fees, but in the fact that the dissemination itself (and sometimes the prior assignment of copyright) leaves researchers without the capacity to publish these research results in scientific supports with real impact because they have already been disseminated previously and otherwise could be considered duplicated publication.

Another characteristic is the use of persuasive messages that tend to confuse, because they feed the idea that the review process is by pairs or double blind pairs, the ethical standards are very strict and the indexing is wide. They also emphasise that it is a fast and agile process, as opposed to the usual time lag between submission and publication of an article in scientific journals.

In the bibliographical review of the impact of allegedly predatory products, no previous studies have been found that specify the impact on the Communication area of journals and/or publishers that could respond to the profile of predatory entities, hence one of the main novelties and specificities of the present text. The analyses carried out contain generic references to the areas of Social Sciences and Humanities, in which the irruption of predatory activities has less impact because many of their journals are free. After the in-depth review of Beall's list and the journals linked to the publishers included in it, Túñez-López and Martínez-Solana (2018) already concluded that the mentions of journals and publishers with references to Communication could be considered very low, with no specialised or specific titles, but rather global references to communication studies which, at most, detail a very extensive catalogue of topics of interest to be admitted. Most of the titles are defined as international journals and published in English, but none of the 55 titles reviewed could be located in the MIAR or CIRC databases.

The aforementioned studies on allegedly predatory practices (Martínez, 2009; Silva, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018; Fernández-Quijada and Masip-Masip, 2013; Olivé, 2013; Del Ponte et al, 2014; Shen & Björk, 2015; Grey et al, 2016; Jiménez Contreras and Jiménez-Segura, 2016; -Pai and Franco, 2016; Somoza-Fernández et al. , 2016; Mercado, 2017; Shamseer et al, 2017; Rojas, 2018; Silva, 2018; Túñez-López and Martínez-Solana, 2018; García-Puente, 2019; Guerra, 2019 and Prieto, 2019) do not make use of the research technique called mystery shopper (Morena, 2013). This is another novelty through which we intend to innovate and provide knowledge and direct information about the phenomenon analysed in this study but in the area of communication, since Bohannon (2013) carried out a broader study in the area of Pharmacy. Nevertheless, the previous research allows us to outline a list of characteristics shared by the journals/editors, which can serve as a guide to help identify them. Strategies for dissemination and visibility of journals can also be identified, as detailed in table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of predatory publications

<p>In their offer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Name similar to that of reference magazines. Can be confusing. - International and open dissemination. - Very short review and publication deadlines. - Insistence on peer or double blind peer review. - Shipments not always standardised. They are referred to email or through own records on the magazine's website. - Fees for the review process are announced. - Headquarters and dispute resolution in remote countries. - Publication rates slide with discount offers for second or third article. - Consent is requested for the transfer of copyright on the texts sent. - Extensive index lists are published in bases, but most are little known or even promoted by the publisher itself. - It associates prestigious publishers with issues that are not indexing references, for example, <i>linking to know more about open access</i>). - Lack of specialization. A very extensive thematic catalogue of contents is collected and accepted by the magazine. - In some cases, no ISSN. - Some offer additional translation or text preparation services.
<p>In their visibility strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proactive attitude. They address the researcher directly by proposing to publish. - Impact on feeding the idea of internationalisation of dissemination. - Frequent inclusion in the title of generic references to the territorial area or to science to highlight from the title that it is an international and scientific journal. - Association of the platform with universities and reliable databases, through links or specific collaborations. - An image of rigour encouraged by ethical conduct policies with strict sanctions for their violation. - Very short deadlines to communicate the acceptance of the article for review. - Publishers with a wide range of journals in a variety of fields. - Frequency of publication is continuous or with several issues per year to encourage immediate publication after review.

Source: own elaboration

2. DESIGN AND METHOD

This research is proposed in an experimental way with a descriptive intention. The lack of previous reference studies on the area makes it advisable to start from blind hypotheses and set as an objective the identification of publication techniques for scientific journals linked to the call for papers that are constantly being received in researchers' e-mail accounts as spam. In order to articulate the research, and due to its experimental nature, the secondary objectives are to know from the inside the process of receiving PIC, sending manuscripts, implementing requests for reviewers and revision of galley proofs, these being the usual steps prior to publication in scientific journals. For this reason, the following aspects are analysed, which are articulated in the form of research questions:

- Q1. Are the reviews conducted by blind or non-blind and actual peers?
- Q2. Is there a prior editorial review process that allows for the analysis of texts sent before they are sent to reviewers?
- Q3. Is the originality of the articles verified before accepting their revision?
- Q4. What are the actual publication deadlines?
- Q5. What are the required fees and payment concepts?
- Q6. What is the average waiting time from the sending of the text to its acceptance and if the author/journalist communication is done through platforms such as the Open Journal System (OJS) or through the magazine's own channels or its editor (email)?
- Q7. How do magazines call themselves and what features characterise their naming?

The field work focuses on the mystery client investigation technique (Morena, 2013) to respond with a fictitious identity of a fraudulent article to an intentional sample of the PICs received by researchers from the Communication area of four Spanish universities over a period of three months. An adulterated article has been intentionally treated because it was not original, it was structured in randomly ordered paragraphs in Spanish and automatically translated into English with the digital tool DeepL without review or post-editing. In order to maintain an ethical conduct as researchers, the experiment was limited to the process of relationships established with the linked journals and in no case was the publication of the text provided allowed. The aim is to discover the permeability of these PICs and the real application of peer reviews, as well as the dynamics, requirements and rates per publication, and to identify the naming strategies of the journals in order to simulate being a publication of international prestige in Social Sciences, in general, and as far as possible in Communication, in particular, given that the text that this experiment is carrying out is thematically specialized in the field of online commercial communication.

These are the variables analysed:

- Naming of the magazine: presence of concepts such as "journal", "publication", "magazine" or derivatives, as well as the adjective "international" or multilingual derivatives.
- Language/s of the naming.
- Email/s of the magazine.
- Date of sending the text.
- Date of acceptance.

- Time difference in days.
- Email response in your own mail thread or independently.
- Databases promoted in your communication.
- Communication channel/s of magazine-author.
- Process and results of the information exchange with the magazine
- Amount of fees requested.
- Currency.
- Form/s of payment.
- Concept used.

3. FIELD WORK AND DATA ANALYSIS

The field work is focused on responding to an intentional sample of the 98 call for papers in the area of Social Sciences received by researchers in the area of Communication from four Spanish universities over a period of three months, from January to May 2020. The technique of the mystery client (Morena, 2013) is used, which is not very common in scientific research but is common in market research. This is a research technique that allows the research team to pose as a user, in this case, an author who has been named José-Manuel (surnames are omitted for this article), which makes it easier to understand the editorial process without conditioning the responses or reactions of those responsible for the journals that have been studied.

For this purpose, a fictitious research profile was created, attached to the University of Santiago de Compostela. The "mystery author" has been characterised as a man, who holds the degree of Doctor, supposedly belongs to this University located in Spain, whose real identity is close to the research team, who has been informed of the use of his identity (name and surname) as well as the purposes of this research, but who is not directly linked to research or scientific dissemination.

Associated with the profile is an email account, without an institutional or corporate domain, from which 38 CFPs are answered with an article published by one of the members of the research team in a scientific journal in Spanish, which has a relative impact on Google Scholar, and which has been altered by changing only the order of the paragraphs and then automatically translated into English with the digital tool DeepL, whose translation has not been supervised either by the research team or by sworn translators. The work is intentionally done with a text that only apparently could respond to a scientific article, but that violates all the guidelines of originality and lacks rigour, as well as being incoherent in the narrative because the paragraphs are ordered randomly.

The period for sending the manuscript to the journals began on 29 January 2020 and ended on 4 May of the same year (97 days). A total of 20 responses have been received and of these 16 offer publication rates.

The process is interrupted when the research team (represented by the "mystery author") receives the information from the journal to execute the final publication of the text. This is done so as not to make the serious mistake of obtaining a duplicate publication, which would involve not only

a fraudulent practice, but also the possible request to withdraw the original text by the journal where the original text is published.

4. RESULTS

Of the 98 PICs received in 97 days, 38 of them were selected as an intentional sample to be submitted to the present experiment as they were susceptible, from the research team's consensus point of view, to accept a manuscript of the subject matter and characteristics of the one used for this study. Of these 38 supposedly predatory journals to which the text was sent, 20 replies were obtained, of which 16 accepted the publication of the text specifying fees, this charging of fees being one of the fundamental conditions established by Elsevier (2019) in his definition of predatory journals. However, the research team states that the fact that a journal charges for the publication and/or edition of an article does not necessarily mean that it is a predatory journal.

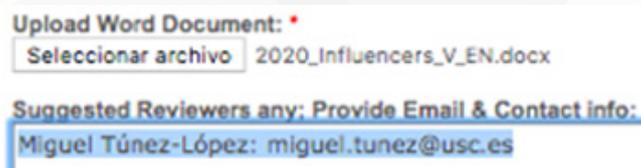
Table 2. Sample of journals analysed, amounts requested, dates and period of acceptance

Naming (editorial or web)	IS SN	Co st	Currency	Sending date	Date of acceptance	Difference in days
JSS Journal of Social Sciences. COES&RJ-JSS (American Association for Public Opinion Research)	23 05- 92 49	17 5	€	29/1/20	7/2/20	9
JBM Journal of Business and Management (IOSR Journals)	22 78- 48 7X	12 0	USD	29/1/20	8/2/20	10
IJASSH International Journal Advances in Social Science and Humanities (www.ijassh.com)	23 47- 74 74	20 0	USD	29/1/20	5/2/20	7
IJCAR International Journal of Current Advanced Research (http://journalicar.org)	23 19- 64 75	15 0	USD + bank fees	29/1/20	10/2/20	12
IJSSHI International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention (Valley Internacional Journals)	23 49- 20 31	12 0	USD	30/1/20	7/2/20	8
IJRSR International Journal of Recent Scientific Research	09 76- 30 31	15 0	USD + bank fees	4/2/20	5/2/20	1
RCG:CT Communication Technologies (Journal of Critical Reviews)	26 58- 51 97	55 0	USD	4/2/20	5/2/20	1
RCA Научный журнал Архивариус (Archivarius Scientific Journal)	25 24- 09 35	55 0	USD	12/2/20	13/2/20	1
GP International Journal For Research In Educational Studies (Green Publication)	22 08- 21 15	59 9	USD (negotiable)	12/2/20	17/2/20	5
IJBMI International Journal of Business and Management Invention (http://ijbmi.org/editorial-board-members.html)	23 19 - 80 28	75	USD	13/2/20	26/2/20	13
ASSJ Academy of Social Science Journal (Innovative Journal)	24 56- 23 94	16 0	USD	23/2/20	3/3/20	9
IJRG International Journal of Research -GRANTHAALAYAH	23 50- 05 30	10 5	USD	23/2/20	3/3/20	9
IJHSS International Journal of Humanities and Social Science (Engineer's Publication House)	22 08- 21 74	74 9	USD. It also offers alternatives for 349 or 80	24/2/20	27/2/20	3
IJRED Journal of Recent Engineering Research and Development (http://www.ijred.com/index.html)	24 55- 87 61	40	USD/paper. 15USD/all certificates. 35USD/printed copy.	7/4/20	12/4/20	5
IJLRHSS International Journal of Latest Research in Humanities and Social Science (http://www.ijlrhss.com/)	22 08- 21 74	50	USD	7/4/20	12/4/20	5
AJSER American Journal of Sciences and Engineering Research (IAJournals)	23 48- 70 3X	65	USD	8/4/20	16/4/20	8
						6

Source: own elaboration

Once the study sample has been contextualised, the process of sending the manuscript identifies the case of RSR, a multidisciplinary journal that allows the possibility of suggesting reviewers, a common practice in some journals.

Image 4. Screenshot of the text sent through the platform with the possibility of suggesting reviewers



Source: personal communication of 4 February 2020

Of the 16 acceptances reached, none of them received suggestions from reviewers or requests for minor or major changes. The only case detected is that of the *International Journal of Latest Research in Humanities and Social Science*, which, after confirming receipt of the text, accepts it a posteriori by evaluating it and scoring it with marks ranging from 8 to 9 (out of 10) on the basis of the following variables (image 4), without enriching and improving the quality of the text through qualitative suggestions, either in terms of content or format.

Image 5. Screenshot of review report

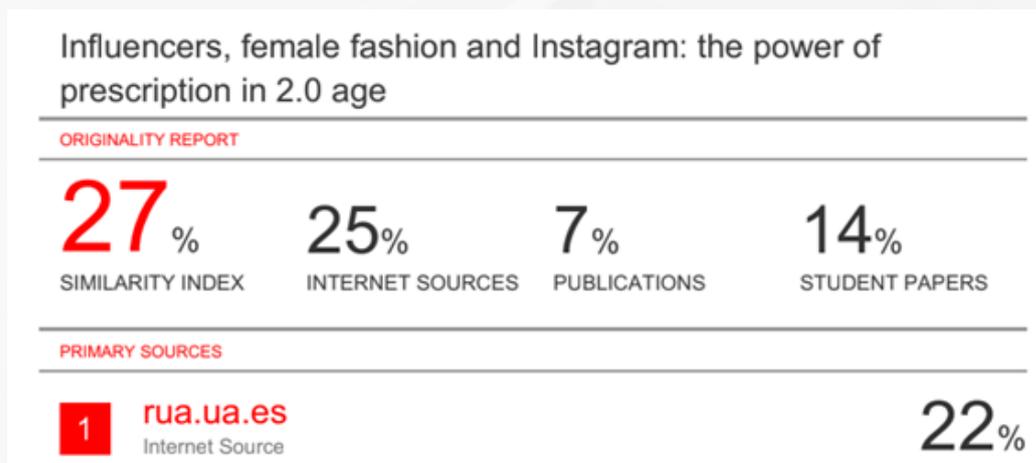
Detailed Review Report:

Sr. No.	Critical review on	Marks out of 10
1	Relevance of Title	9
2	Depth of Research	8
3	Extent of originality	8
4	Practical Applicability	9
5	Justification of conclusion	9
6	Structure and Organization	8
7	Quality of references	8

Source: personal communication of 14 February 2020

Therefore, there is generally no evidence of the existence of either a peer review process (P1) or a prior editorial review process (P2), especially when the text is substantially and noticeably questionable and improvable.

Note that in the item "originality" (P3) the text receives an 8. In this sense, we also detect the case of Green Publication (which, according to the journal itself, is indexed in Scopus but, as we have seen in the SJR-Scimago Journal & Country Rank, this is not the case) which sends the mystery author the Turnitin report, the anti-plagiarism software that identifies the coincidences of the evaluated text with manuscripts previously published on the Internet, after having examined the text sent in English (with the exception of the tables and notes which continue to be in Spanish) with regard to the possible coincidences, and confirms its acceptance with the following results:

Image 6. Screenshot of the Turnitin report

Source: personal communication of 10 April 2020

Please note that these 22% of matches refer directly to the original and legal text which is the starting point for this investigation. Therefore, despite attempts to filter out harmful plagiarism or duplicate publications, the journals analysed have not been able to detect it, nor have they been concerned about accessing that source to establish possible relationships between the text received and that identified by the anti-plagiarism tool.

With respect to P4, it has been possible to detect that the periods of time for the supposed revision are reduced, since an average of 6 calendar days is counted from the time the text is sent until it is accepted by the journals for publication.

A study of the fees requested by the journals (P5) shows that, with the exception of the *Journal of Social Sciences*, which charges its costs in euros (175), the other journals use US dollars (USD) as their standard currency. In order to calculate the average in homogeneous and equitable terms, this journal has been excluded from the calculation, which has made it possible to verify that the average amount is 245 USD. The concepts vary from online publication (the most expensive rate) to obtaining additional physical copies, also including shipping charges.

With regard to the communication channels used (Q6), the use of e-mail is predominant. The case of the *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention* is noteworthy, which also makes use of the standardised scientific journal platform OJS (Open Journal System), where it registers the author who sends the text.

Finally, a study of the naming of the 16 magazines shows that all of them include concepts such as "Journal", "Publication", "Magazine" or derivatives in their names. Nine make reference to the international sphere by also including it in their visual identities as publishing brands.

Therefore, we are faced with a reality managed by companies and people who are aware of the needs of the target group and the demands to which their professional careers are subjected and, consequently and with the main purpose of making a profit, they try to imitate not only their identities, processes and tools, but also to capture their attention with services that are not very operational, given the non-specialised but totally general nature in which their work would be disseminated, seriously undermining the scope of their work, but also their passage through evaluation processes in their own workplaces, regional, national, Community or even interna-

tional evaluation services to which files with these publications, which have been the subject of considerable depredation, could be sent. Logically, this curriculum vitae, which is published in a predatory magazine, could also be subject to processes of application for financial aid to research, publish and disseminate knowledge. And what is even more dangerous, to reach a teacher and also his or her students.

None of the 16 journals that have accepted the publication of the article appears on MIAR as a referenced publication. In some cases a long list of references to indexing in document bases is offered, but none of relevance and in others the association of the journal with Scopus or WOS (JCR) is encouraged in the PIC, but it is clarified later that they are in the process of indexing.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The use of the research tool "mystery client" - which, adapted to the object and context of study, could be called "author or mystery researcher" - is traditional and especially used in the business world within programmes for evaluating and improving the quality of service and as a working tool in consulting on the experience of clients, has made it possible to evaluate incognito and first-hand the key procedures and the attention and services provided during the cycle of relationships established by authors with this type of publisher, being previously aware that the product (text) should not even pass the editorial review process of the journals to which it has been sent, let alone be put into public circulation and accessible to society. In this way, it has been possible to verify the results of the supposed revision processes to which the manuscript should have been submitted, while at the same time knowing how they are implemented by the people behind them, as well as the conditions established for publishing and disseminating the results of a work in journals that unfortunately put into circulation and make unverified information accessible to society in general.

If the results of this experiment are contrasted, firstly, with the research team's track record as researchers and also as publishers of scientific journals, and secondly with the literature consulted, it can be deduced that these publishers undermine research ethics and integrity, as well as scientific standards based on rigorous processes, not only researchers, but also publishers and reviewers.

In this sense, these practices, without a doubt, can imply the undermining, deterioration and discrediting of the arduous task that is carried out daily by editors, reviewers, authors in the different disciplines of knowledge. It is therefore essential that these initiatives are supervised, regulated and removed from the usual circuits that are a source of knowledge for present and future generations. Furthermore, if we take into account that their publications are made on the Internet, it is essential that they be tracked and removed from the circuit outside the usual channels and enabled for the sharing of quality knowledge, because as Jeffrey Beall has already said, "their objective is not to promote, preserve and disseminate knowledge, but to exploit the payment by the author, using the open access model for their own benefit". In this sense, it should be noted that there is a predominance of journals from India, which implement these pernicious actions, or at least whose bank accounts for the transfer of costs are geolocated in this country. Despite the fact that the sample used in this article is substantially lower than that used

by Bohannon (2013), it is striking that the average acceptance time has even been reduced from 40 to 6 days, as has been detected.

Despite some journals such as the *Journal of Social Sciences* are very specific when they state "only original academic manuscripts related to the journal topics and unpublished elsewhere are considered for publication in the journals"¹, it has been proven that not all accepted manuscripts have passed the required revision.

In this sense, there is no record of the receipt of reports and/or feedback by the supposed editorial teams or committees of evaluators, i.e. blind peers. There is hardly any evidence of this, and in the minimal cases where they are provided, the reports are minimal, brief, irrelevant, not at all enriching and totally generic. They do not even mention the number of reviewers who have assessed the quality of the text.

Furthermore, the text sent and accepted has not been adapted to the standards of the journal since they have not been provided, obtained or requested. It has not even been adapted to a specific citation standard of the journals with which it has been experimented, thus avoiding a tedious task for the scientific community despite the help offered by bibliographic managers such as RefWorks or Mendeley. With the exception of the *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, the rest do not have, provide or require a template for sending the manuscript adapted to their editorial standards, although the journal indicated has not required the adaptation of the text initially sent for acceptance.

The analysis of the practice developed by these journals cannot be limited to an exhibition of practices, but to a joint interpretation of their performance: the association of the journal with prestigious bases is encouraged, but it does not appear in any; a naming is used that promotes the belief of international projection and that emulates the names of prestigious journals in the area. A sense of rigorous control of the review process is also encouraged, and constant reference is made to strict quality control systems and sanctions for violations of ethical behaviour in the publication process. The interrelationship of the three variables draws a rigorous and prestigious journal simulation that the practice carried out with mystery clients reveals to be non-existent: none rejected the article and in almost 50% of the cases it was accepted for publication without changes in an average time of less than one calendar week.

However, as a result of the self-criticism of the research team, in its conviction to keep this line of work active, it is aware of several limitations. The existence of a large number of emailings received, the dispersion of email addresses even within the same journal, which prevents the communications established with the journals from being clearly followed and traced, is particularly noteworthy.

Even so, several opportunities have been identified to improve, deepen and generate greater knowledge about the object of study, which is so necessary as this paper has sought to show. In the first place, extending the period of analysis, as well as the subjects of the intentionally fraudulent texts, would allow an increase in the number of journals with which to experiment "silently". Secondly, the possibility of specialising or diversifying the journals would help to know and compare results according to their areas of knowledge and also according to the saturation

¹ Cf. <http://centrefexcellence.net/index.php/JSS/about/submissions>

and, therefore, difficulty for authors and contributors who wish to publish their scientific work in rigorous scientific journals. Finally, the possibility is raised of sending previously published text without translation to supposedly fraudulent journals, in order to check whether they analyse the texts received with anti-plagiarism software.

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