



# Case Study: What Happens to a Journal after it Accepts a Spoof Paper?

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## Abstract

One way of exposing predatory journals is to submit a spoof article to see if it gets accepted. We investigate one journal, looking at how it has performed since a spoof paper it accepted came to light. We find that it has published almost 20% more papers following the acceptance of the spoof paper. The journal has a new web site, which appears to show that it did not publish its first paper until 2018. However, there is an old web site that lists 321 papers dating back to 2012. The editors said that this is due to a new workflow system, which meant that previously published papers could not be listed on the new web site. Moreover, the number of papers could be not accommodated, as a high configuration server would be required to provide a responsive web site. We found some plagiarism, which looks quite serious. We conclude that the spoof paper had little effect on the journal, which continues to operate, seven years after the spoof paper was accepted.

**Keywords** Predatory Publishing · Open Access · Spoof paper · Sting Operation

## Introduction

In an attempt to expose predatory journals and conference, scholars have submitted spoof papers which, if subject to peer review by experts in the domain, would be immediately rejected.

The hope is that once a journal/conference has been exposed in this way, then the resultant publicity would warn others from submitting to that journal/conference and it will be forced out of business.

In this paper, we reflect on one of the most well known sting operations in order to gauge the effect it had about seven years after the spoof paper was submitted. Our

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analysis provides evidence whether these stings are effective in tackling predatory publishing. This paper also provides a point of reference for other researchers as we do not believe that the long term effect of a sting operation on a journal has been reported in a peer reviewed journal before.

One of the negative effects of predatory publishing is that the scientific archive contains papers that have not been subject to robust peer review. One decision we made was not to formally cite papers in the references that are (arguably) predatory as we do not want to infect the scientific archive. This also guards against predatory journals attempting to validate their journal by demonstrating that papers they have published have been cited in a reputable journal. We realise that we are making a subjective decision but, if anything, we err on the side of caution.

Another key decision we had to make is how to refer to the spoof paper, as it does contain a profanity. We decided to use ‘*f!\*@ing*’, rather than the correct spelling as we do not want a peer reviewed scientific paper to contain such a profanity, just for the sake of it.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In the “[Related Work](#)” section we provide a brief overview of predatory publishing, along with related work. “[The Spoof Paper](#)” section provides details about the spoof paper that was accepted. The next section considers the journal that accepted the paper in more detail followed, in the “[How has the Journal Performed?](#)” section, an analysis as to how the journal has performed since accepting the spoof paper. In the “[Conclusion](#)” section we conclude the paper. A “[Future Work](#)” section provides some suggestions for future work and an “[Archive](#)” section provides access to the data referred to in this paper.

## Related Work

Predatory publishing refers to publishers and journals that apply an Article Processing Charge (APC) in order to publish an article, but they do not follow recognised procedures that maintain the integrity of the scientific archive. The most common omission is the lack of robust peer review, if any, but other warning signs include sending out many spam emails, poor websites, editorial boards where the full details of the editors are not provided, editors being listed without their knowledge and very fast publication times [5, 16, 17]. Erfanmanesh and Pourhossein [5] provide good advice to researchers when looking where to submit their research, “*To avoid being victimized by questionable journals, early career authors should carefully consider the peer-review policy, editorial board members information, scope of the journal, prominence of publishers, statements of publishing ethics, indexing databases and quality of the published papers in order to spot questionable journals*”.

The term *Predatory Publishing* was first used by Beall [2], and has been in common use ever since. The idea of predatory publishing had previously been suggested by Eysenbach [6] and Sanderson [14], but they never used the term. The legacy left by Beall, including the list he published (known as Beall’s List), has been discussed in [8] and the status of the publishers he first investigated has recently been revisited in [9].

Beall is not the only person who has written about the dangers of predatory publishing. For example, Linacre et al. [11] said “*The purpose of this research note . . . is to ascertain what, if any, substantive damage can result from these practices. And to derive “warnings signs” for those embarking on the road to creating/distributing what they have learned.*”.

The number of predatory articles that have been published is rising, from 53,000 in 2010 to 420,000 in 2014. These articles were published in about 8,000 predatory journals [15].

In this paper, we investigate the effect a sting operation had on a journal. This topic has been addressed before by Al-Khatib and Teixeira da Silva [1], who considered six sting operations. The authors said that the authors who submitted the spoof papers violated authorship criteria of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors and that what they were doing was unethical. They conclude that such studies undermine trust and integrity and that bogus publications are best left to blogs and non-academic forms of publishing. We appreciate this, but by “outing” the journals in a blog is not going to get the same attention as submitting a paper and then revealing the outcome. The spoof paper we focus on in this paper starkly shows that the journal did not carry out any peer review. We are unsure how this could be done, with the same effect, in a blog post?

As well as predatory publishers, there are other challenges that face the scientific community. Alongside predatory publishers and journals, there are now bogus impact factors [4]. Legitimate impact factors enable researchers to get some idea of the quality of a journal, or at least how often papers in the journal are cited. Bogus impact factors aim to give journals and publishers an air of legitimacy, which is probably not deserved.

This paper follows in the same spirit of authors such as Teixeira da Silva and Al-Khatib [16]. They focussed on a particular publisher (KENKYU Publishing Group), providing a case study of the publisher, covering the investigation that followed after receiving an email to submit a paper to a new journal. In this paper, we provide a case study of a particular journal which accepted what was obviously a spoof paper, and what effect it had on the journal and the status of that journal now. By carrying out such case studies we can gauge the effect that a sting operation has on a journal.

## The Spoof Paper

### Paper Details

<b>Title:</b>	Get me off Your F!*@ing Mailing List
<b>Accepted by:</b>	International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology
<b>Citation:</b>	Mazières, D., E. Kohle. 2014. Get me off your f!*@ing mailing list. International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology
<b>Status:</b>	Accepted but not published as the article processing fee was not paid

We checked the domain name of the journal, using <https://who.is/>. This shows that the journal's domain is registered in India to Tej Pal Singh. This is the same person that sent the acceptance email and requested USD 150 for the Article Processing Charges. This data has been captured and can be seen in the archives (see “[Archive](#)” section).

## Paper Acceptance

The paper, authored by Mazières and Kohle, just repeated the phrase “*Get me off your f!\*@ing mailing list*” over and over again, for 10 pages. It also contained two figures that contained the same words.

The paper was originally submitted to a 2005 conference (9th World Multiconference on Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics, 10–13 July 2005, Orlando, Florida). We do not have any further information about the outcome of that submission.

In 2014, Peter Vamplew submitted the same paper (with the original author names) to the International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology. This was done after receiving many unsolicited emails asking him to submit his research papers [7, 13].

The paper was accepted. The acceptance email is not dated but it asks for the camera ready version to be submitted by 25 October 2014 so we can assume that the email was sent somewhere around the beginning of October 2014.

The review form showed seven categories, these being (the ranking given is shown in brackets): Appropriateness to publish in IJACT (Excellent), Accuracy (Excellent), Innovation (Very Good), Relevance (Very Good), Presentation (Good), Quality of Writing (Very Good) and Application of paper as introductory study material for revolutionary new concepts (Very Good). The over all recommendation was “*Accepted*” from the five available options (Rejected, Marginally Accepted, Accepted with minor changes, Accepted and Strongly Accepted).

Vamplew was asked to pay USD 150 but he declined and the paper was never published.

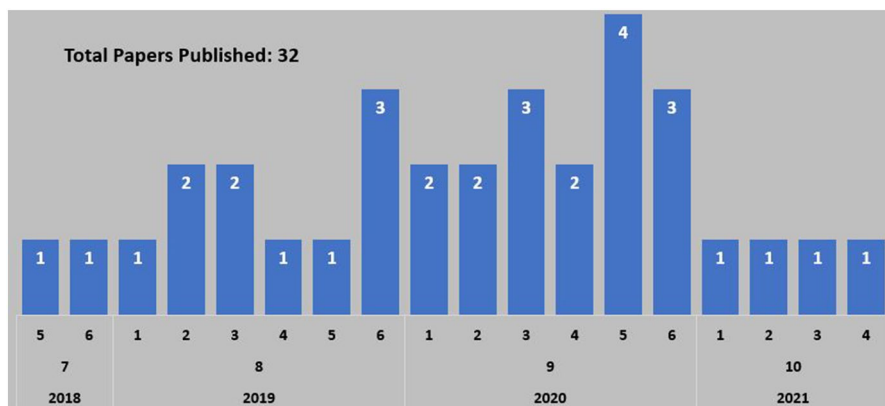
You can see the paper, the reviews and the acceptance email by following the links provided in the “[Archive](#)” section.

The paper attracted a lot of media attention (for example Flaherty [7], Safi [13]).

## International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology

### Journal Status

The journal is still being published. Its URL is <https://www.ijact.org/>. The journal lists its ISSN as 2319-7900. If you search for this ISSN on the ISSN portal <https://portal.issn.org/>, it says that the ISSN is “suppressed”. The definition for this term, from the ISSN web site is “*Suppressed records correspond to ISSN that were*



**Fig. 1** The number of papers published (new web site) by the International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology. The x-axis shows the year, volume and issue

*deleted, generally because the resource described is not a continuing resource or has never been published”.*

The journal is not a member of either COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) or DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals). On the journal’s home page it states that it follows the ethical guidelines developed by COPE. This could give the impression that they are a COPE member, which is not the case.

## Papers Published

### Current Archive

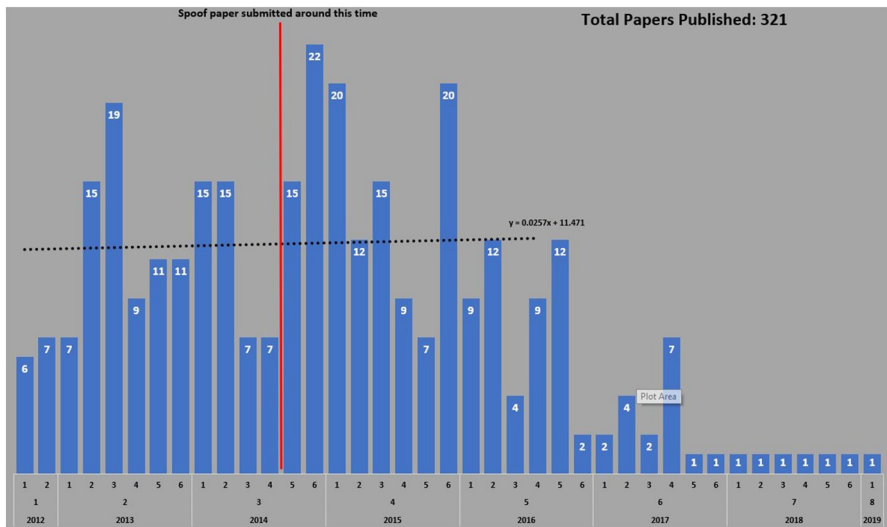
Looking at the “[Archive](#)” section of the journal’s web site, the journal published Volume 1, Issue 1 in October 2012. In fact, no papers are listed against that issue. Indeed, the first paper does not appear until Volume 7, Issue 5, which was published in October 2018. That is, there are 36 issues listed (two issues in 2012; six issues in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017; four issues in 2018), where zero papers appear to have been published.

Figure 1 shows the number of papers published when papers started being listed, since Volume 7, Issue 5 (2018).

It is worth noting that had Vamplew paid the requested USD 150 article processing charge this would, you would assume, have been the first paper published in the journal as it would have appeared in 2014 or 2015.

### Old Website

The website for the journal has a link to the “*Old Website*”. This URL (<https://www.ijact.org/ijactold/index.php>) is part of the same domain as the current web site, but shows (presumably) the web site that was used before moving to the



**Fig. 2** The number of papers published (old web site) by the International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology. The x-axis shows the year, volume and issue

new version. One of the entries on the old web site is “*Past Issues*”. Following this link shows that the journal has been publishing papers since the first issue in 2012. It shows the papers that were published from 2012 to the start of 2019; some 321 papers. Figure 2 shows these articles, broken down by year, volume and issue. The solid, vertical line indicates the approximate time when the spoof paper was submitted.

### Why does the New Web Site not List All the Papers?

The new web site’s archives link does not provide access to the content that was published from Volume 1, Issue 1 through to Volume 7, Issue 4. We reached out to the two Editors-in-Chief’s (Prof. Harish Bairathiya and Himanshu Ojha), who are both listed on the new web site. Prof. Harish Bairathiya is also listed as the sole Editor-in-Chief on the old web site. To contact the editors we used the email address given on the web site (editor@ijact.org). The same email address is given for both editors. We also connected with Himanshu Ojha through LinkedIn. He accepted our request to connect but has yet to respond to our message for information. Prof. Harish Bairathiya does not appear to have a LinkedIn account.

We also tried to connect Professor Bairathiya through his institution, which is given as “*Department of Computer Science & Engineering, Maulana Azad National Institute of Technology, Madhya Pradesh, 462003*”. We could not locate him on the institution’s web site and he was not listed on the department’s web site. We email’ed the Head of Department to ask if they could give us his contact details. As yet, we have not received a response.

The email we sent (1 September 2021) to the editors read:

*Dear Professor Bairathiya and/or Mr Ojha, Editor in Chief, International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology*

*Apologies for writing out of the blue, but I was keen to seek your advice/guidance.*

*We are carrying out some research on Open Access publishing and was drawn to your journal.*

*Looking at the web site, we see that the journal was started in 2012, yet the first paper was not actually published until 2018 (Volume 7, Issue 5; 25 October 2018). We were struggling to work out why a journal would be started in 2012, release six issues each year, but have no papers listed until October 2018.*

*We then looked at the old IJACT web site (which you link to) and saw that there were numerous papers listed, about 320 up to Volume 7, Issue 5.*

*Do you know why these papers are not listed on the new web site? Is it just an oversight, a data error, or is there some other reason?*

*I hope you can help?*

We received a response on 11 September 2021, which said:

*Basically when created new website there OJS 3 inter so there put every paper in the new website needed whole process to perform. Means you need to submit a paper perform review and make galley this take too much time and resources. Another thing is that if number of PDF increases in OJS We needed a high configuration for server to fast process of website.*

*Regard*

There was no name on the email, so we are unsure whether it was written by one of the editors, or somebody else working for the journal. The mention of *OJS* is *Open Journal Systems* (<https://openjournalsystems.com/>). The email appears to be saying that when creating the new web site, the OJS system requires certain processes to be followed, which they did not have the resources to do. Moreover, the server would not be capable of handling this many PDF's.

## Plagiarism

Although not the focus of this paper, we did take a look at the first five articles that were listed on the new web site, as well as the last five papers that have been published. This was motivated after finding plagiarism in paper #1 in Table 1 when we carried out a manual search and found some similarity with [18] and [12].

Table 1 shows the 10 papers we looked at. Papers #1-#5 are the first five papers published. Papers #6-#10 are the latest five papers.

We have looked more closely at the papers that have a Turnitin similarity measure greater than 25%.

**Table 1** The first and last five papers published by IJACT: Checking plagiarism with Turnitin

#	Citation	Similarity
1	Xiao K. (2018) Regularized multiquadratic method for solving inverse boundary value problems. <i>International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology</i> 7(5) 1–5	57%
2	Samuel K.M. and Skukla R.S. (2018) Challenges to Design a Distrubuted Database using UML and Merise. <i>International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology</i> 7(6) 1–14	4%
3	Dubey A.K. and Gupta R. (2019) Enhanced Reversible Image Data Hiding Based on Block Histogram Shifting and PADHM. <i>International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology</i> 8(1) 1–5	63%
4	Xu Y. and Zhang H. (2019) Slope One Collaborative Filtering Based on User Similarity. <i>International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology</i> 8(2) 1–4	21%
5	Zhang S. and Li W. (2019) KCF Tracking Algorithm Based on VGG16 Depth Framework. <i>International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology</i> 8(2) 5–9	6%
6	Kumari M. and Raghuvanshi M. (2021) Accurate Intrusion Detection Based On Feature Optimization Using Plant Grow Algorithm. <i>International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology</i> 10(4) 1–4	31%
7	Harinam and Suaib M. (2021) A Survey on Deep Learning Techniques for Sentiment Analysis. <i>International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology</i> 10(3) 1–4	15%
8	Saxena M. and Sharma S. (2021) True and Reliable Information Sharing in VANET Environment. <i>International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology</i> 10(2) 1–3	23%
9	Kushwaha V., Patel K.K. and Richariya P. (2021) Collaborative Profile Assessment to Secure MANET by DDOS Attack. <i>International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology</i> 10(1) 1–5	5%
10	Ando R., Kadobayashi Y. and Takakura H. (2021) Parallelizing Time-Series Session Data Analysis with a Type Erasure Based DSEL. <i>International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology</i> 10(6) 17–25	84%

## Paper #1

In addition to the plagiarism we found through manual search [12, 18], Turnitin reported a similarity of 57%. One of the main sources of this similarity (11%) was [10]. None of these three papers are cited.

## Paper #3

Of the 63% similarity reported by Turnitin report, 61% of the text is similar to:

*Dubey A.K. and V. Namdeo (2018) Review on Reversible Data Hiding in Encrypted Image Based on Block Histogram Shifting. International Journal of Innovative Research in Technology & Science 6(6) 12–14.*

It is noticeable that the papers have a common author (Dubey), yet neither paper cites the other. We also note that one of the papers was published in the last issue of 2018 and the other paper was published in the first issue of 2019. It is therefore not totally clear which paper was written first, and which one was plagiarised. It is likely that both papers were submitted around the same time.



We also note that the Editor-in-Chief of both journals (*International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology* and *International Journal of Innovative Research in Technology & Science*) is Prof. Harish Bairathiya. We are not sure if/ how this is relevant but it is worth recording.

### Paper #6

Turinitin reported a similarity of 31%. 11% is attributed to Cai et al. [3], which is not cited.

One of the algorithms in the paper is taken from:

*Shrivastava, P., C.K. Verma. 2019. A hybrid forecasting model for option price prediction using machine learning technique. International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering 9(1) 3444-3450.*

This paper is not cited.

### Paper #10

According to Turnitin, 84% of this paper is similar to other texts. In fact, all of that 84% comes from:

*Ando R., Kadobayashi Y. and Takakura H. (2020) Parallelizing Time-Series Session Data Analysis with a Type-Erasure Based DSEL. International Refer-eed Journal of Engineering and Science 9(5) 41-51*

. . . which has all the same authors, yet neither paper cites the other. If you compare both papers, it is obvious that the majority of the text in #10, comes from the above paper.

Checking for plagiarism is not the main focus of this article, but we felt we had to comment once it came to light. It would be an interesting exercise to check all of the papers that have been published in this journal for plagiarism.

### How has the Journal Performed?

The question we are addressing in this article is what happened to the journal that accepted a paper comprising entirely of the phrase “*Get me off your f!\*@ing mailing list*”.

The paper was submitted around September/October 2014, it was accepted (we can only assume without anybody reading it) and the camera ready version was requested by 25 October 2014. The article processing charges were never paid, so the paper was never published, but the paper still received the attention of the media, which helped publicise the issues around predatory publishing.

The journal’s current web site does not list any articles until October 2018, even though the journal started in 2012. However, the “*old website*” lists 321 articles between 2012 (Volume 1, Issue 1) and 2019 (Volume 8, Issue 1). Looking at both

web sites (old and new, see Figures 1 and 2) the journal has published  $(321 + 32 - 3) = 350$  articles, noting that there is an overlap of three articles in the two figures.

Our interest is drawn to the solid vertical line of Figure 2, which marks the point when the spoof paper was submitted/accepted. If the resultant publicity had a negative effect on the journal, you would expect to see the number of articles being published decrease over the next few issues, taking into account that some papers would already be queued for publication.

The variable number of papers published in each issue makes it difficult to gauge whether the number of papers being published is generally increasing, or decreasing. To make the comparison easier, we plotted a trend line using the twelve issues before the spoof paper was submitted and the twelve issues that followed. The trend line looks flat (in fact it rises slightly, as shown by the trend line equation which we show on the graph), indicating that the number of papers that were published after the spoof paper was accepted remained constant when compared with the twelve issues published up to that date. In fact, in the first twelve issues (up to the point where the spoof paper was accepted), 129 papers were published. In the following twelve issues, 154 papers were published. That is, the number of articles increased by  $((154 - 129)/129) * 100 = 19.38\%$  after the spoof paper was published.

Based on the above observations, we can say that the journal was not affected by spoof paper being submitted/accepted. Indeed, it published more articles after the spoof paper was accepted.

In more recent times (from Volume 6, Issue 5) the journal has published a lot less papers (just one paper for each issue). We are unsure of the reason for this. Perhaps with the new web site, they are trying to be more selective in the papers that they publish?

## Conclusion

Despite the International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology accepting a paper that could not have been subject to peer review, the journal is still operating. The number of papers it published in the twelve issues following acceptance of the spoof paper actually increased when compared to the previous twelve issues.

It is not our role to re-review papers that have already been accepted but we do express concerns about plagiarism that we detected, some of which looks quite serious.

The journal's web site appears to ignore 321 previous papers. The editors responded to our query why this is the case, saying that it was due to the system they use for their web site. However, we find it hard to understand why the journal would not populate its archive with its most important asset, rather than only making them available on their old web site.

In conclusion, we do have concerns about the legitimacy of the International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology journal but the acceptance of an obviously spoof paper does not appear to have affected the journal as it is still operating and publishing regularly.

## Future Work

Many other spoof papers have been submitted. It would be interesting to carry out similar studies to this to see the effect, if any, these papers had on the journals that accepted the spoof paper.

We briefly discussed the plagiarism that we found in some of the papers published in this journal. A more wide ranging study of the International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology might be worthwhile.

## Archive

We have created the following archives on Wayback Machine as a record to support the statements made in this paper.

- The who.is record of the [www.ijact.org](http://www.ijact.org) domain (archived 11 Sep 2021): <https://bit.ly/3z3QrEA>
- An article by Joseph Stromberg in vox.com that describes the sting and also provides access to a copy of the spoof paper (archived 8 Sep 2021): <https://bit.ly/2WXaTdF>
- An article by Stef Brezgoz at ScholarlyOA which reports the sting. This page also contains links to the acceptance email and the review reports (archived 8 Sep 2021): <https://bit.ly/3zPMbdf>
- The journal web site (archived 31 Aug 2021): <https://bit.ly/3BA2lbn>. We are unsure why but Wayback did not archive the pages showing the papers published in 2021, so we captured a screenshot and uploaded that to Wayback (<https://bit.ly/38u7wgf>)
- This page shows the editors of the International Journal of Innovative Research in Technology & Science, showing the Prof. Harish Bairathiya is the Editor-in-Chief (archived 9 Sep 2021): <https://bit.ly/38Nxqf6>
- The ISSN search showing that that ISSN 2319-7900 is suppressed (archived 29 Aug 2021): <https://bit.ly/2WzXHKK>
- The COPE search showing that that ISSN 2319-7900 is not a member of COPE (archived 29 Aug 2021): <https://bit.ly/3BnQZXX>
- The DOAJ search showing that that ISSN 2319-7900 is not a member of DOAJ (archived 29 Aug 2021): <https://bit.ly/3jqmRon>
- This is the web site for Maulana Azad National Institute of Technology. The “People” section shows that Prof. Harish Bairathiya is not listed as a member of the department (archived 5 Sep 2021): <https://bit.ly/3BM8Vey>

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