What does ChatGPT advise about predatory publishing?

ABSTRACT

The debate surrounding "predatory publishing" continues to be unable to find entirely effective solutions to dealing with this problem, despite fervent efforts by many academics and policy makers around the world. Given this situation, we were interested in appreciating whether ChatGPT would be able to offer insight and solutions, to complement current human-based efforts.

Dear Journal of Professional Nursing Editors,

We were interested to read the article by Hulsey et al. (Hulsey et al., 2023), which, along with many other previous papers, provide advice on how to identify or avoid predatory journals. This is not being critical of the paper. Far from it. Discourse on this topic is welcomed, invited and needed, especially when it targets a specific discipline that may not otherwise be exposed to more general literature on predatory publishing.

Predatory publishing impacts all academics, not only because of what is known about predatory characteristics that degrade academia's institution of trust, but also the integrity of information held in the literature that is claimed to be peer-reviewed (Teixeira da Silva et al., 2019). Despite ample research having been conducted on the topic of "predatory publishing", surprisingly, there is still no consensus as to precisely which entities, especially journals and publishers, are "predatory", except for extreme and thus highly publicly visible cases, such as OMICS (Manley, 2019).

Attempts have been made to provide a standard definition for "predatory publishing" (Grudniewicz et al., 2019), but this is challenging because it is difficult to capture the complex characteristics of predatory publishing. One reason why academia is unable to find a widely accepted definition is because of the ambiguity, in that a journal may have some low quality characteristics (e.g., spelling, poor website management, etc.), which are not enough to characterize it as "predatory" (Yamada & Teixeira da Silva, 2022). This inconclusive state enables predatory journals to survive (flourish even), while escaping close scrutiny, but it also allows some "good" journals to be unfairly or incorrectly characterized, as may occur when imperfect watchlists and their inclusion and/or exclusion criteria are employed, in particular those by Beall and Cabells (Teixeira da Silva et al., 2022; Teixeira da Silva et al., 2023).

After over a decade of research and debate, still no robust or widely accepted definitions exist for predatory publishing. Is an appreciation of the topic perhaps hampered by subjectivity and bias? There is thus a need to have a neutral, impassionate, and objective opinion on predatory publishing.

OpenAI's ChatGPT is capable of creating text that is closely reminiscent of human-written text. We wondered, nonetheless, whether ChatGPT might be able to offer a distinct appreciation of the issue of "predatory publishing". To achieve this, we asked ChatGPT three queries (Suppl. Figs. 1–3). In the first query, and its follow-up query (Suppl. Fig. 1), ChatGPT offered sound advice, but nothing new that is not already known in terms of broad advice for taking care when selecting a journal. What was interesting was ChatGPT's explicit avoidance of naming-and-shaming any specific journal, either cognizant that there are legal implications in doing so, or as an indirect acknowledgment that it recognizes the indistinguishable gray zone. In the second query (Suppl. Fig. 2), ChatGPT was critical of Beall's List (Kendall, 2021), advising against its use, confirming what we also pronounced in the literature (Teixeira da Silva & Kendall, 2023). In the third query (Suppl. Fig. 3), ChatGPT offered fairly standard and known solutions. In all three queries, ChatGPT did not voluntarily provide supporting literature, nor did it identify any information sources, but this, like other erroneous aspects (van Dis et al., 2023), is a recognized limitation of ChatGPT.

In conclusion, ChatGPT provided accurate responses to "predatory publishing" since its strength is to collate, synthesize and summarize previous human-created knowledge of a particular area of exploration, as in this case of predatory publishing. It was not supposed to provide new insights, nor draw any novel conclusions pertaining to predatory publishing, but rather to inform individuals of the current state of the literature which would take an enormous amount of time and funding were humans to conduct such an assessment.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors, who declare no conflicts of interest, contributed equally to the conceptual design, writing, editing, and take responsibility for the content of the paper (i.e., the four ICMJE clauses for authorship). The authors declare that the free version of ChatGPT was used via the first author's account.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2023.08.002.

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