

Letter to the Editor

Softening the Adjective or Descriptor will not Change the Nature or Threat of “Predatory” Publishing

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Dear Editor,

The issue raised by Tiesenga et al. [1], namely of the nomenclature used to characterize a journal or publisher as “predatory” or otherwise, has been previously debated to some extent [2]. The issue of predatory versus exploitative behavior in academic publishing is also a well-explored debate [3]. Furthermore, the grey zone between what constitutes “predatory” behavior and what this term does not encompass is expanding because several journals and publishers that were once considered safe to publish in, having conducted peer review and ranked by metrics, have failed their own stated quality standards [4], as evidenced by the growth in retraction rates in some of those journals and publishers) [5]. Therefore, several of the issues debated by Tiesenga et al. [1] have already been debated, even though relevant literature was not cited. The originality of the core proposal by Tiesenga et al. is also in question since, as indicated in entry #9 of Table 2 in their article, the European Association of Science Editors had already recommended a shift in the term “predatory” to “non-recommended” in 2025.

On page 36, section 4.2 of Tiesenga et al. [1], the Kscien predatory publishing lists are advertised. Kscien – with which the article’s corresponding author is affiliated – is an organization based in Iraq that has, since 2017, emerged as a replacement to Beall’s original blacklists. One problem with the Kscien blacklist is that it classified – when this letter was originally written – 3539 entities as being “predatory”, a label that directly contradicts the core argument of their article, which advocates that the term “predatory” should not be used. This contradictory stance by Kscien related to use of the term “non-recommended” as opposed to “predatory” is emphasized by the authors’ statement on page 39, where it states that “One clear advantage of the term “predatory” is its moral precision and clarity because it explicitly signals condemnation of exploitative publishing practices and conveys the seriousness of their questionable and unethical practices.” In other words, according to this definition, the Kscien “predatory publishing” blacklist is certain about the predatory nature of the 3539 entities, even though Kscien provides no tangible evidence to support that classification.

Tiesenga et al. define their paper’s objective on page 35, namely to adopt “more neutral language that can help to protect academic integrity while reducing legal and reputational risks”, although no evidence is provided that academic integrity will be protected, nor that legal and reputational risks will be reduced, simply by changing the label of a journal or publisher from “predatory” to “non-recommended”. Ultimately, a veritable threat can be euphemistically referred to as “risky” but if the threat to scientific integrity is real, it will impact all academics, including those that employ euphemistic language and those that employ straightforward and unambiguous terms to define the threat. If evidence of “predatory” publishing behavior is clear and unambiguous, then freedom of speech will not be threatened.

Sincerely,

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