

Fake Journals: Not Always Valid Ways to Distinguish Them

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Abstract In their recent paper, Esfe et al. (Sci Eng Ethics, doi:[10.1007/s11948-014-9595-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-014-9595-z) 2014) present some criteria for fake journals and propose some ‘features’ to recognize them. While I share most of the authors’ concerns about this issue in general, some of the reported criteria are not fit to differentiate fake journals from genuine ones. Here are some examples derived from their list, which illustrate that such criteria are not necessarily specific to fake journals only, but they could also apply to well-established journals and, therefore, should not be considered as is.

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First, the presence or absence of a financial source is not a valid criterion to distinguish between fake and genuine journals. In fact, some well-established open-access journals have started completely free, with or without organizational sponsorship, but years later they became widely known with excessive fees. It is thus not a matter of how a journal is funded, but how and what it publishes. Second, “weak websites” and “simple submission forms” are not valid criteria for fake journals, neither. Otherwise, what does “weak” (or strong) website mean? Simple, clean and light websites would be preferred by most authors rather than cumbersome, complicated, time-consuming with long submission forms; the easier and smoother submission form, the better and time-saving for authors. Websites are only recent platforms for journals, which lived a long time ago without ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ websites, without even online submission forms. Again, it is not the ‘*form*’ that matters, but the *content*. Third, having general or multidisciplinary journal scopes would be an advantageous factor rather than an inconvenience. Generalist and multidisciplinary journals are usually among the ‘highest ranked’ journals,

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regardless of the subjectivity of the ranking systems. Forth, a reduced delay between submission and publication processes is rather a benefit sought by most authors and cannot be considered as a measure for fake journals. Authors would prefer to have their articles published as soon as possible upon submission without compromising the quality, however. High quality and rapidity of publication are not incompatible; rapidity of publication depends mainly on the type of papers, the submission volumes, the number of handling staff, the reactivity of reviewers and editors, the domain (medical papers usually take longer) etc. Many journals now start to compete on fast peer-review processes to attract more authors. One month is becoming standard (less is better, longer is bitter). Fifth, a new journal cannot be immediately included or indexed in an established database unless it has some valid content and/or being a part of a larger recognized publisher. Sixth, a genuine journal can publish high quality content without having DOI or ISSN numbers. This was the case till recently, where most journals had no such identifiers (particularly DOI) for decades. Seventh, the bogus names that would mislead or confuse with established journals' names, is not a journal matter in my opinion, but a matter of Internet top-level domains (TLDs), where it is fully possible and largely admitted to have one different letter or different extension (com, org, net...etc.) to get a specific name. For example, "journalname.com" and "journalname.org" can be two different journals without any particular problem, since the domain extensions are different, which is acceptable in Internet nomenclature. Of course, it is not an elegant way to plagiarize or imitate other journals' names in any case, but similar names are sometimes unavoidable, exactly as for people's names.

Subsequently, not *all* of the criteria listed by Esfe et al. (2014) are effective or specifically applicable to fake journals. Genuine or well-established journals share many features and tend for example to make a faster decision, to adopt simpler and quicker submission forms, to move gradually to compulsory open access business venues, etc. Careful attention should thus be paid to distinguish between fake and serious journals beyond the *form* and the *impression*. Personal experiences would also help to enunciate the question properly.

Finally, it is undeniable that there is an increasing trend toward the harmful idiom "*the end justifies the means*", which seems to be the case unfortunately even in scientific systems, supposed to be the most objective, fair and unbiased fields. As we should beware of fake journals, we should also beware of journal fakes (such as the impact factor, elitism, journal ranks,...etc). Most issues are often related to greediness, profit and money; if solved, things would be better. Till that, the way will be long and rough.

Conflict of interest None.

Reference

Esfe, M. H., Wongwises, S., Asadi, A., & Akbari, M. (2014). Fake journals: Their features and some viable ways to distinguishing them. *Science and Engineering Ethics*. doi:10.1007/s11948-014-9595-z.