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Profiles, motives and experiences of authors publishing in predatory journals: OMICS as a case study[1]

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Abstract: The paper aims to understand the context and drivers of researchers' decision to submit a manuscript to a predatory journal. Using OMICS as a case study and asking authors for their views, the paper presents their profile, motivations and publishing experiences. The methodology is based on a questionnaire sent by email to all authors of articles published in OMICS (+2200). The authors were asked about 1/ the factors that influenced their decision to submit their article, 2/ their publishing experience with OMICS, 3/ their level of satisfaction, and 4/ whether or not they would repeat the experience. 86 responses were collected and 18 emails were received. The analysis made it possible to add details to the profiles of authors already identified in the literature, but also allowed new and more nuanced profiles. This research extends our knowledge on the phenomenon of predatory publishing from the authors' feedback and provides a better understanding of the socio-economic, psychosocial and geo-political conditions that drive researchers' decisions to submit their work to a

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predatory journal. At the same time, it reveals some of the strategies used by OMICS to persuade authors to submit their papers. The findings will help to inform institutional policies that seek to put in place efficient measures to combat predatory publishing.

Keywords: OMICS, predatory journals, predatory publishing, predatory publishers, publishing subculture, cybercrime.

INTRODUCTION

Predatory publishing is one of the hottest topics in the world of scholarly publishing. It emerged in the early 2000s, depicted as a 'pandemic' (Taylor, 2021), particularly in the health sector (Moher, 17) and has subsequently been the subject of numerous alarmist editorials, thereby reinforcing its importance (Inouye, 2021).

Although the topic was initially covered by the press, blog posts or opinion pieces, the scientific literature devoted to it is now growing (Petrisor, 2016; Cobey, 2019; Eykens, 2019; Mills, 2020; Boukacem-Zeghmouri, 2021). Today, theoretical analyses (Allman, 2019) can be found alongside empirical studies (Siler, 2021), whose methodologies are mostly quantitative. Given the risk that predatory publishing poses to the entire scholarly publishing sector, papers on predation appear in journals dedicated to different disciplines (Mertkan, 2021). The definition of predatory publishing has recently been established (Grudniewicz, 2019) and it is now a research topic that has been 'legitimised' by a rapidly expanding field of research (Boukacem-Zeghmouri, 2021).

However, a recent review has shown that the issue, important as it is, still lacks critical mass (Mertkan, 2021). One of the least discussed issues is that of authors publishing in predatory journals (Vogel, 2017; Stöckelová, 2017) by asking about their awareness of the risk of predation and their motivations for submitting their manuscripts (Mills, 2020; Mertkan, 2021). This is particularly important, as the growth of predatory journals has been driven by their ability to find researchers to submit manuscripts or serve on their editorial boards (Linacre, 2019; Downes, 2020). So far, the available literature allows us to understand that the figure of the author in predatory journals is multifaceted.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Author as a "victim"

Initially, the author base of predatory journals consisted mostly of young, early-career and inexperienced researchers (Ebadi, 2018) from so-called Southern countries (Xia et al., 2015), but this has been contradicted by recent studies showing that early career researchers are also very acculturated to prestige and high-quality journals (Nicholas, 2021; 2023). As evaluation policies have evolved, the pool of 'victims' has expanded to include consenting seniors (Jayanth, 2019; Perlin, 2018; Salehi et al., 2018).

Even if predatory publishing is globalised, i.e. includes Western researchers (Kolata, 2017) (Offord, 2018), its geography remains concentrated in African and Southeast Asian countries, which do not have a mature scientific publishing industry and whose researchers struggle to publish in international journals: Africa, India, Sri Lanka, China, Pakistan (Nwagnu, 2015; Hedding, 2019; Vaidyanathan, 2019b; Vaidyanathan, 2019c) and Arab countries (Shehata, 2018). Although states in these countries allocated significant financial resources to research in the early 2000s (Xia, 2015), the difficulties associated with navigating the Web (Bawden, 2009), as well as the lack of knowledge of the scientific publishing ecosystem (Boukacem-Zeghmouri, 2014), are the main reasons that can lead researchers to fall prey to predatory practices.

These findings confirm the hypothesis that, due to a lack of information (Cohen, 2019), training (Kisely, 2019) and a so-called culture of scientific publishing (Tijdink, 2016), authors are not well prepared to select reliable journals for their manuscripts (Strong, 2019). From this perspective, predatory publishing can be seen as a reflection of the geopolitical and economic asymmetries of globalised knowledge production (Stöckelová, 2017), which makes researchers from the South more vulnerable, as predatory journals - which court them - develop specific strategies to look like West/North journals: abusive inclusion of prestigious researchers in editorial boards (Ruiter-Lopez, 2019), use of invented researcher names (Sorokowski, 2017), pressured and flattering invitations (Petrisor, 2016 ; Lund, 2020), announcement of false impact factors (Wilkinson, 2019) or, more radically, hijacking, part of

cybercriminal tools (Lukić, 2014) which consists in appropriating the identity of a legitimate, well-established journal (Moussa, 2021). Predatory journals are well aware of the needs and vulnerabilities of authors, and play on these weaknesses to confuse them (Petrisor, 2016; Strong, 2019).

The resigned author

Previous research has drawn attention to the fact that researchers from the global South, aware of their lack of training and experience (Kisely, 2019), feel disadvantaged compared to those from the global North and therefore do not believe in their chances of being published in international journals (Beigel, 2014) (Krawczyk, 2021). The fact that their manuscripts are rejected without even a review reinforces this feeling (Salehi, 2020), resulting in a researcher's social identity being a factor in the composition of the author base of predatory journals (Kurt, 2018).

By explicitly opting out of so-called 'legitimate' journals, researchers could choose to submit their work to journals that are more identified with their geographical areas. This amount to a kind of 'self-publishing' model, which, as Allman (2019) points out, can be seen as a response by researchers in the global South to a Western capitalist scientific publishing system, designed by countries in the global North that excludes them and therefore fails to convey the universalism of science. This argument resonates with that of Bell (Bell, 2017), who associates predation with a parody that critiques and questions the legitimacy of the established hierarchies of international journals.

The desperate author

The research funding policies mentioned above are not without their evaluation criteria, which are aligned with international policies and indicators (Omobowale et al., 2014; Vaidyanathan, 2019a; Wilkinson, 2019). This is despite the fact that training and acculturation to scientific publishing are not always sufficiently developed to support local communities in this shift (Ebadi, 2018). The pressure of 'publish or perish' is therefore also an incentive to submit manuscripts to predatory journals: *« Promotions are based on points awarded for publishing papers in research journals with different impact factors — a measure of the frequency with which an article in a journal is cited in a year. Some people fall into the trap unknowingly, but many others do it otherwise too »* (Jayanth, 2019).

Researchers, faced with this "symbolic violence" (Ebadi, 2018), seem to lose their critical sense in the rush to publish (Chambers, 2019) or succumb to the temptation to take the easy way out (Nwagnu, 2015; Demir, 2018;) to publish quickly and reach a large audience (Petrisor, 2016; Shaghaei, 2018; Wang, 2021).

The consenting author

Studies show that a category of researchers knowingly submits their articles to predatory journals (Kurt, 2018; Demir, 2018; Vogel, 2017). They justify this by the fact that they are satisfied with the services offered by these journals, in particular the rapid dissemination of their article in open access (Burgess-Jackson, 2020; Salehi, 2020).

It has thus been established that experienced researchers (often referred to as Seniors) are indeed part of the author base of predatory journals consenting to take the risk (Pyne, 2017; Shaghaei, 2018; Eykens, 2019; Hedding, 2019). However, this consent is based on the justification that the journals are indexed in international databases (Manca, 2020) and are therefore taken into account by the institutional policies of the researcher (Demir, 2018). In addition, university tenure and promotion policies do not necessarily address the issue of publishing in predatory journals, leaving this prerogative to university libraries (McQuarrie, 2020). In this case, the relationship between the author and the predatory journal is therefore based on different but converging interests, leading to the submission of the manuscript (Memon, 2019).

Whether the literature presents them as victims (Frandsen, 2019) or cynical accomplices (Kolata, 2017; Vogel, 2017), authors who publish in predatory journals are united by their subordination to the relentless rule of 'publish or perish' (Nielsen, 2020). At the same time, research shows that there is no common understanding among researchers of what predatory journals are (Cobey, 2019). The representations developed about these journals are therefore multiple, contributing to the blurring and confusion between journals (Wang, 2021).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

While the existing literature helped to characterise the profiles of authors who publish in predatory journals, there is still little empirical work that could help to understand the mechanisms that lead authors to submit their papers (Mills, 2020). Similarly, the experiences of authors prior to and during manuscript submission, as well as during and after the publication process, remain poorly documented (Mills, 2020). Nevertheless, these stages are crucial for understanding the mechanisms of predation and the reasons why researchers decide to submit a paper. For this purpose, we have chosen a clear example, the predatory publisher OMICS, where the 'diagnosis' of predation has been legally confirmed.

OMICS, a notorious predatory publisher and a case study

The case study approach is commonly used in the social sciences to explore complex phenomena in depth. It is particularly relevant to our research, which seeks to understand the contextual conditions that led researchers to submit and publish articles to a predatory journal.

OMICS was chosen as a case study because of its recognised status as a predatory publisher. OMICS was first identified as such by Jeffrey Beall in his list (Beall, 2012). Since 2008, it has included thousands of journals and conferences on its website, presented them as indexed titles in international databases, and sent invitations to authors to submit papers or join editorial boards (Masic, 2017; Downes, 2021). The number of articles published to date is estimated at 69,000 (Siler, 2021), and it is therefore not surprising that OMICS has been described as a predatory “mega-publisher” (Manley, 2019a). OMICS' status as a predatory publisher was made official in August 2016, when the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) sued OMICS (Kolata, 2019). It was then confirmed in 2018, with an order to pay $50.1 million for 'unfair and deceptive practices' (Dyer, 2019).

OMICS was accused of defrauding thousands of researchers through fake peer review. It presented itself as an open access publisher, but did not provide details of its terms and conditions (licences, prices, etc.) and charged a publication fee once the article was published on its website (Dyer, 2019). Names of well-known researchers were added to editorial boards and scientific committees of

conferences without their consent (Downes, 2021). Allegations of indexing its journals in international databases were also part of the accusation.

This condemnation brought OMICS's status as a predatory publisher to the fore, making it a 'perfect' model of predation whose strategies have been revealed in the literature (Downes, 2021; Siler, 2021; Krauskopf, 2021). Its mechanisms are based on both journals and conferences, for which it has been developing takeover and rebranding operations for several years (Siler, 2021), with the aim of appearing legitimate to a research community it is trying to attract or retain. As Stewart Manley (Manley, 2019a; Manley, 2019b) points out, despite this conviction, OMICS continues to operate with impunity, even as the number of articles published declines.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

By looking at the author base of predatory publisher OMICS, we seek to investigate the conditions and drivers that led researchers to submit a manuscript to one of its journals, their motivations, and their feedback. To this end, our study raises the following research questions:

RQ 1: What is the profile of authors who have published in OMICS?

RQ 2: Which factors came into play in researchers' decisions to publish an article with OMICS?

RQ 3: What are the feedback, experiences and satisfaction level of the authors?

RQ 4: What is the level of knowledge of authors about the phenomenon of predatory publishing and the status of OMICS as a predatory publisher?

The theoretical approach underlying this study is borrowed from Luc Boltanski developed in his book "On justification" (Boltanski, 1991). It allows us to suspend any judgement about the authors and to focus on the social, cultural, political and economic frameworks in which they develop, with the factors that influence their choices and decisions. This approach recognises that authors have the capacity to control their choices and decisions. It also helps to reveal the 'dialogues' in which authors intervene to justify their actions, according to which principles and values.

METHOD

The method used was a preliminary and exploratory survey with data collection by questionnaire. Two reasons justify this choice: first, because of the size of the OMICS journal community, which we wanted to reach as widely as possible. Secondly, the findings will allow us to better prepare a qualitative survey with the researchers who agreed to participate in our semi-structured interviews (September 2024).

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was designed in 4 parts related to the 4 research questions and consisted of 33 questions. Open-ended questions were included in order to collect the authors' responses in their own words and terms, and to get closer to the qualitative approaches preferred for understanding authors' motivations (Kurt, 2018). The questionnaire was posted on the Survey Monkey platform, and the link and invitation in English to respond were sent to 2209 email addresses of potential authors collected by scraping from the OMICS website. The first invitation to respond to the questionnaire was sent in October 2022. This was followed by four reminders. A final reminder was sent in February 2023 and the survey was closed in March.

RESULTS

Response rate

86 complete responses to the questionnaire were collected, representing only about 4% of the target population. This low response rate is similar to other equivalent studies (Cohen, 2019). Of the 2209 emails sent, almost 200 (193) were found to have invalid or non-existent addresses, according to the non-delivery messages received. During the course of the survey we received 18 email responses: 6 researchers claimed to be victims because they never submitted an article to OMICS; 5 other researchers said they did not understand or read English; 4 authors replied by sending a text for publication and the last 3 made a proposal to collaborate to start a journal or join an editorial board.

Respondents' characteristics

Respondents were mainly male, 76%, and women representing only a quarter of the total number. Although the 22-35 age range accounts for the largest proportion of responses, with almost a third

(27,9%), there is no age dominant feature among the respondents. As figure 1 below shows, age categories are almost equally distributed.

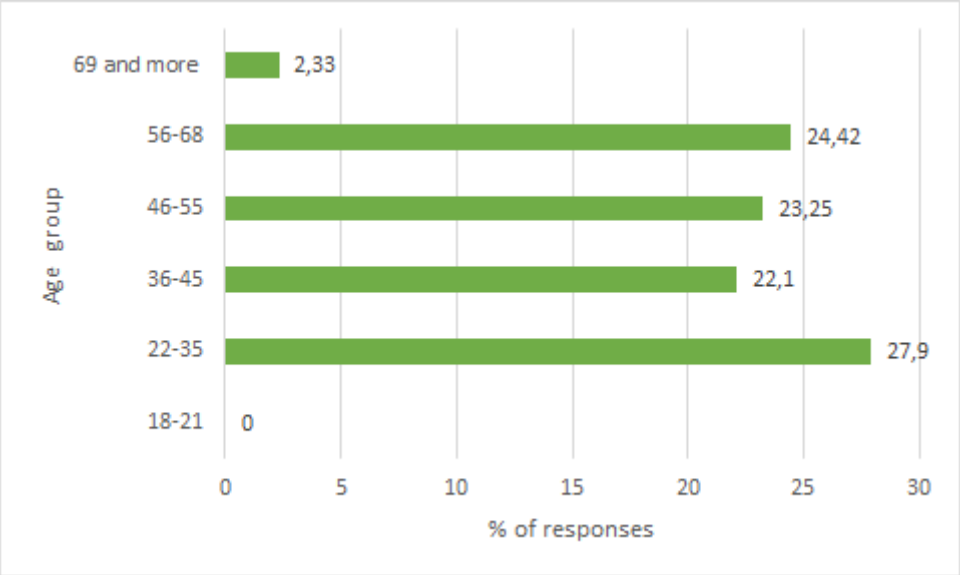

Figure 1: Breakdown of respondents by age group

The status of respondents is almost equally divided between 3 main categories as shown in figure 2 below: PhD students (21%), Professors (20%) and Associate Professors (18,6%). There were also responses from Master students (7%). Responses to the category "Other" were incoherent (ex. Amazon Cloud services) or not precise enough (ex. independent).

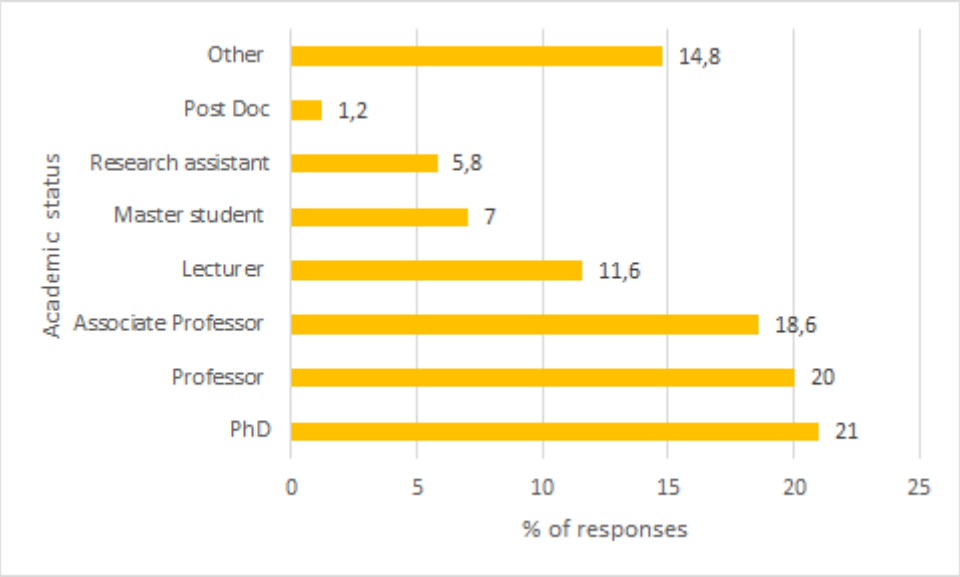

Figure 2: Breakdown of respondents by status

A very large majority of respondents (65%) indicated that they had more than 10 years of experience in academia. The majority worked in the public sector (76%), split between universities (61%) and public research organisations (15%).

The geographical distribution of the responses is spread over 31 countries, with 17.5% coming from India, 14% from Ethiopia, 9.3% from Nigeria, 7% from the USA. On the long tail, we find countries from Europe, Asia, Africa, North America and Arab countries.

As shown in Figure 3 below, half of the respondents worked in the field of health (49%), followed by biology with 19% and chemistry with 8.13%. Other disciplines are under-represented, as shown below.

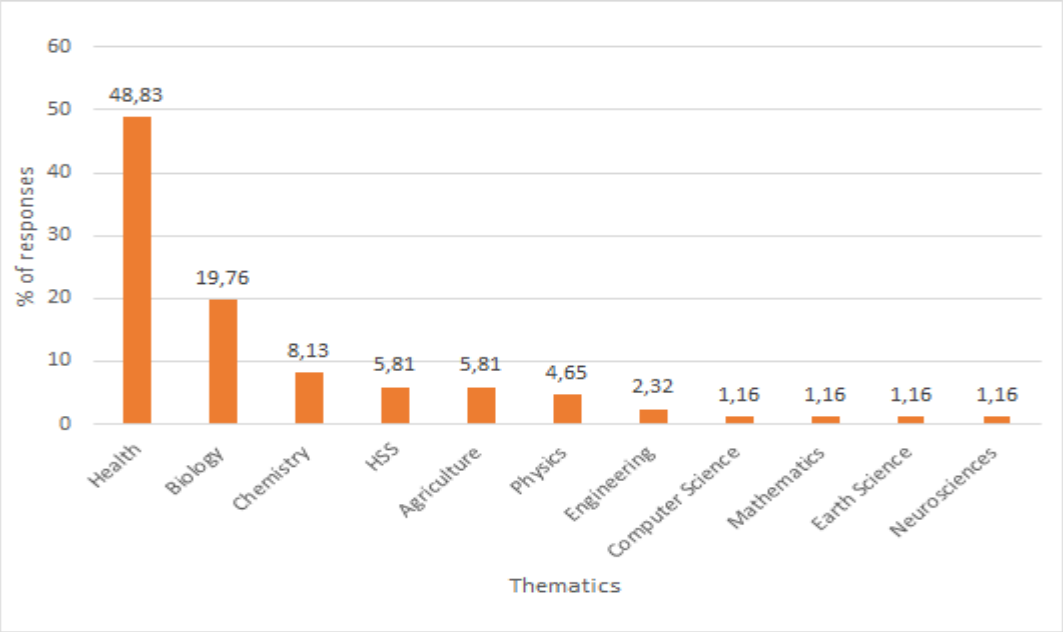

Figure 3: Breakdown of respondents by research field

Looking at the productivity of authors, we found that 47% of respondents publish between 2 and 4 articles per year. Half of the respondents (49%) publish between 2 and 4 articles per year. The remaining respondents are unevenly distributed between the other categories of production rates. It is worth noting that six respondents (9%) indicated that they publish more than 12 articles per year.

Authors' English skills

Answers to open-ended questions and emails received show that the majority of respondents have a very limited command of English: sentence structure, terms used, but also poor spelling of names and

acronyms. Poor English skills are also reflected in respondents' verbatim, which we have chosen to leave in their original form without correction.

First contact with an OMICS journal

53% of respondents first discovered the OMICS journal in which they published an article by searching for a journal title on the Web. Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) said that they met the journal through an email invitation to publish. On the other hand, 9% of respondents say that peers introduced them to the journal.

Almost 76% of the articles published with OMICS are first-time submissions. However, when asked whether OMICS is a well-known publisher in the respective communities, answers are split: 35% of the respondents say that it is the case, 32% of the respondents say they do not know and 27% say that it is not the case.

When asked to name a publisher comparable to OMICS, the answers are equally divided. Authors (44%) say they do not know or do not have an equivalent. The other part of the answers (Appendix 3) gives different examples, ranging from historic publishers (Elsevier, Wiley, Springer), to databases or platforms (Scopus, ScienceDirect) to prestigious journals (Nature) or publishers of questionable status (ex. Ommegaonline).

Factors driving decision to submit a manuscript

The first factor in authors' decision to submit their articles to an OMICS journal was the scope of the journal (52%). The second factor (34%) involved in the respondents' decision was its "Impact Factor". The journal's indexing in international databases and its Open Access model carry the same weight in an author's decision-making process (30%). Finally, the acceptance rate of the journal, with 18% of the responses. For 76% of the respondents, the published article is the result of a first submission, i.e. OMICS was the first choice. 24.4% of the respondents indicated that they had submitted their article to another journal before OMICS, with the titles mentioned (Appendix 2) mainly showing titles from questionable journals.

OMICS Journals turnaround time

When asked about journal turnaround time (TAT), more than half of the respondents (53.5%) indicated that it was between 3 and 8 weeks. Almost 21% of respondents indicated that they had published their article within 2 to 6 months. Almost the same percentage (20%) said they had published their article in a very short time (between 3 days and 3 weeks). On the other hand, almost 6% of respondents indicated that they had published their article within more than 6 months.

Peer review at OMICS

76% of respondents indicated that their article had received some form of review or feedback. The majority (74%) was satisfied. Finally, 12.8% of respondents were unsure about the quality of feedback received on their article. On the contrary, in 15% of cases, the article did not receive any form of peer review or feedback, while 9.3% indicated that they did not know if their article had received any feedback.

APCs

For 64% of respondents, the article was published with an Article Processing Charge (APC). Of these authors, 43.75 % paid an amount between USD 1-100, 28.2% respondents paid an APC between USD 100-500, 9% paid between USD 500-1000 and 18.75% respondents paid more than USD 1000. For 49% of the respondents (i.e., two-thirds of the authors who paid an APC), the APC was paid with their own money. Authors reported using respectively research funds (12.3%), and university funds (10,8%) to pay APCs. The rest of responses (77%) say using personal funds (including loans from friends) to pay the APCs.

Copyright conditions

The questions about copyright terms revealed much about researchers' ignorance of this important issue. The responses show that only 9% of the authors were able to specify which terms they had accepted, 20% said they didn't know what it meant, and 6% said they had no such agreement for their

article. The remaining authors (64%) gave an inconsistent answer, such as the title of the journal, its discipline or the DOI of their article.

Impact of publishing with OMICS on researchers' careers

For 40% of the respondents, the publication of their work with OMICS contributed to their promotion. On the other hand, only 24% of the respondents stated that publishing with OMICS helped them get tenure. Similarly, only 10.5% indicated that they had received a grant for publishing in an OMICS journal.

Feedback on OMICS publishing experience

The survey respondents were asked to rate from 0-100 their experience of publishing with OMICS. The average response was 64 points, therefore quite positive, but this hides significant disparities. As shown in figure 4 below, two categories stand out, with a split in the middle of the ratings allowing us to identify two antagonistic experiences: one clearly negative (on fifth of responses), concentrated in low ratings (0-10), the other positive (four-fifth of the responses) but more spread out in its rating, between 50 and 100. So, there is no "medium" in the ratings showing a "good enough" experience.

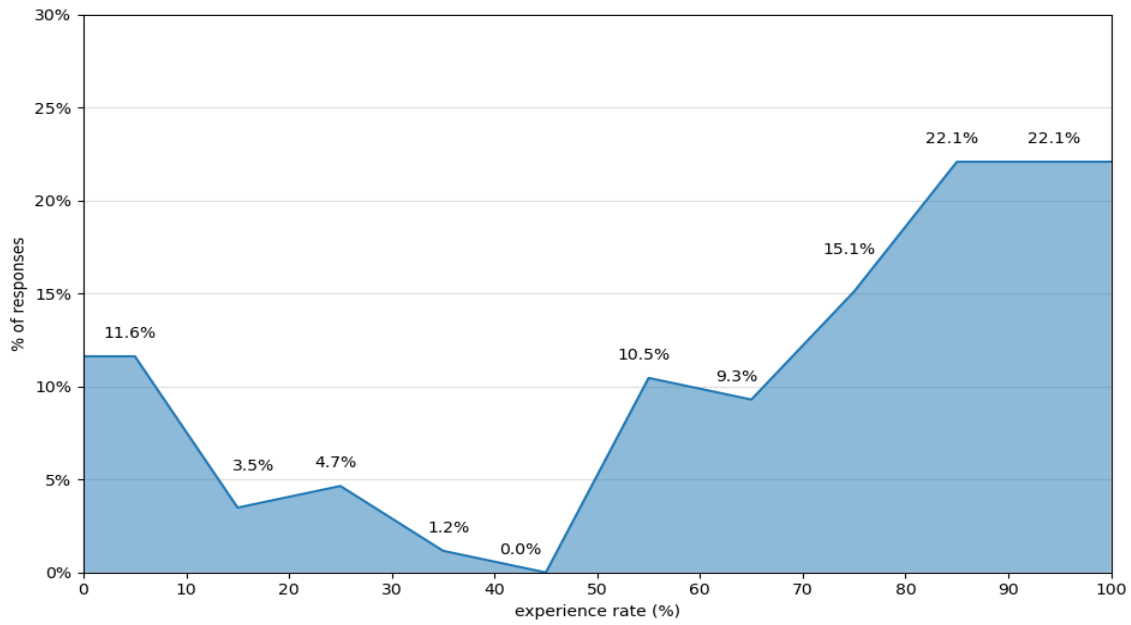

Figure 4: Rating publication experience

Besides, 71% of the authors are willing to repeat the experience of publishing in an OMICS journal. This trend in responses towards a satisfactory experience is reflected in the answer's authors gave to the open-ended questions.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Responses to the open-ended questions about authors' experiences and emails replies were analysed thematically, according to the elements mentioned by the respondents and according to whether the experience was positive or negative. In fact, the thematic analysis is more concerned with capturing the variety of arguments put forward by respondents in relation to their experiences, rather than the number of times these arguments are put forward. This approach is particularly relevant in the case of our survey, which focuses on researchers' feedback, reporting it in their own words and reflecting their point of view. It is also consistent with the theoretical framework of this study, where the issue of arbitration of arguments and the justification by researchers of their choice is central.

A positive publishing experiences

Accessibility and Dissemination

Open Access appeared almost systematically in the responses, highlighting the importance of its potential to reach a wide audience:

> *"Open Access is very important, which increases the accessibility of my research to a large group of people".*

Some authors clearly emphasised the importance of OA in allowing them to disseminate their article widely on the web and to their community:

> *"It was a simple and expedient process. The Open Access nature of the publication greatly facilitated distributing the research results".*

Visibility

Linked to the previous argument, the visibility argument was also favoured by the authors. They claim that their publication in OMICS brought them a level of visibility that they had not experienced before:

"Because my article reached quite many audience because I got many feedback emails from different individuals and journals".

A speedy and straightforward experience

Most comments highlighted the speed and ease with which the article was published. The lack of delay and complexity in the publishing process was a strong and recurring argument in the responses:

"Quick, painless publication process".

"Lack of complexity in uploading the manuscript".

This satisfaction is also based on the existence of direct and regular interaction with OMICS contacts, having received 'prompt response from the journal', via phone, chat and social networking tools, including those non-designated for this purpose:

"Processing time was quick. Whatsapp communication was excellent".

The ease and speed of the publishing experience is also linked to the peer review process, with authors expressing a high level of satisfaction with the guidance provided:

"Because the fast the manuscript was reviewed and published".

"Timely publishing Peer review process and Supportive editorial staff".

Free of/low charge

Several respondents expressed satisfaction with the low or even free cost of publication, which makes OMICS a more competitive publisher than others. The absence of charges was seen as a support to authors from the global south:

"Relatively cheaper and better than others".

"Free charge, which is help to publish more articles like my countries".

This assessment is even more satisfactory for respondents when it is combined with the criteria of speed and ease of publication:

"Fast Publication and discount or no fee for developing country".

Indexing and Impact Factor

The authors' responses largely confirm that they believe they have published their article in an indexed journal with an Impact Factor. However, without access to international databases that would allow them to verify the information published on the website of a given journal (Sile, 2021) and/or highlighted in the phishing emails. The following verbatim accounts confirm their credulity:

> *"So it is qualified and indexed and my work is easily promote to scientific world".*
>
> *"Compared to my other published articles the impact factor at an OMICS was better and above those journals".*

Respondents' satisfaction is also due to a combination of the above-mentioned arguments:

> *"Because of highly indexed and fast publishing experiences and sometimes free publication processing fee for open access Journals".*
>
> *"1. Have good impact factor, 2. average duration for publication 3. Need to provide APC charge for low and middle income countries".*

A negative publishing experience

At the other end of the spectrum, negative elements were cited to justify dissatisfaction with their publishing experience with OMICS.

High publishing costs

The argument that APCs are too high was raised several times. According to the authors, the price is even higher when applied to researchers from the South.

> *"OMICS publisher should reduce their APC especially for authors from low and middle income countries like Nigeria".*

Authors' dissatisfaction may also stem from the failure to obtain APC waivers or exemptions in relation to their status as researchers from the global South, or from the fact that the publisher's commitment to apply the waiver was not honoured, as one author's comment suggests:

"OMICS offered free publication but the agreement was not recognized. It was a disappointing experience".

No peer review, no standards

Dissatisfaction also stems from the fact that it was only during the publication process that they realised that peer review was non-existent. Typically, because the speed of publication is such that it cannot reasonably allow for serious feedback.

"The paper I published was not in my view peer-reviewed. Despite several efforts to get them to change the language (isiZulu), they published the gobbledygook or gibberish they had messed up in their formatting process".

"They do some review but not enough and somewhat acceptable".

Many authors discover after publication that their article does not meet international publishing standards, has not been assigned a DOI, or has not been indexed:

"(...) the complaint is they give less care to article processing and author proofing. They did not even write my name properly in an article that I published from its sister journal of allied academics. That is the reason I discontinued to publish my next articles from their platform".

How does publishing with OMICS affect an author's career?

Visibility and impact

Two key arguments for the positive impact on their careers were the visibility and citation impact of their articles:

"As a young researcher, my publication at an OMICS Journal gave me much of exposure".

"20 Citations till now. More than 5 thousand read in Researchgate".

"It is ok because the paper was read it and cited by other works several time".

A passport to enter the academic system

Articles published at OMICS have had a positive impact on the careers of some researchers, who have been granted tenure or have received substantial salary increases:

> *"Impact of publication from the OMICS journal on my career is my salary increases from the $335 to $425".*

> *"I have gone career structure from associate researcher position to full researcher due to one publication from OMICS journals. So I confirmed that this journal and publisher is so qualified and scientific".*

Tenured researchers emphasised the importance of OMICS in fulfilling the strong requirement of publishing articles regularly:

> *"They Published my article at least".*

> *"Fulfilling the requirement to publish one article every year in a good journal".*

Consequently, some authors testify to the role that articles published on OMICS may have played in validating a Ph.D. application:

> *"The published article was a necessary element to obtain the title of habilitated doctor".*

> *"The publication in this OMICS journal explains the various Creative Commons Licenses on a high level, quality and tweak, and build upon the image and good work and to give a good opportunity to facilitate the defense thesis of my student".*

This leads some authors to include OMICS in their publishing strategies in order to get grants:

> *"I think it is a great achievement for a student to publish his/her article. And I hope this publication will help me to get an international scholarship for higher studies".*

How well is OMICS's predatory character known?

Only 23% said they had been informed that OMICS had been ordered to pay over USD 50 million by the US federal judiciary for its "unfair and deceptive" practices:

"I suspected they were a predatory journal but they had big names on the editors board, so would be disappointed if they are".

"I am surprised- I had not heard of any kind of case against the OMICS publishing group"

The victims were able to express their satisfaction at the news:

"They deserve the fine. I have not heard of a journal that publishes without reviewing the article even though it claims that the articles will be reviewed by peers. I also could not understand why they would publish the article without me giving a go-ahead. Actually, I had complained that the language needed to be right, and they ignored that too, to go ahead and publish it".

Voices from the periphery

The responses show that not all authors see themselves as victims and even show signs of disbelief in the predatory nature of the industry. They even express a degree of solidarity with a publisher who charges them a lower APC than legitimate publishers:

"Omics is not a predatory, competitors exposed as predatory to the research communities".

"Practically, they take article processing charges that is much lower than any so-called established journals. Regarding peer reviewing, I got the best peer reviewing from OMICS. I have also stored in my mail box reviews from so called established journals. Anyone can check their qualities. So, it is totally unfair what happened to OMICS. Filthy, money-oriented, business people are all behind this".

The analysis reveals elements consistent with the arguments put forward by previous studies on the geopolitical dimension of predation. They reveal another perspective, that of the periphery, which is outraged by a publishing system that shows little concern for the difficulties faced by researchers in the global South:

"How to ensure a minimum of cognitive justice with a system perverted by money, uniformity and single thought. Most young researchers come to terms with this system out of obligation and not out of choice".

"OMICs publishing is very helpful for developing countries where we didn't afford to pay publication fees on highly reputable journals. Thus, better to have the choice to publish a scientific paper to address and share with the world!!

OMICS is open access, relatively straight forward and timely. Much less of a hassle and less arrogant than old-school society journals".

The situation is particularly sensitive for early career researchers who are trying to secure a position and enter the academic world:

"The editors of major journals imposes Eurocentric guidelines. A young researcher residing in a developing country does not have the material or institutional capacities to meet the financial criteria of major newspapers. English-speaking journals for some also have this Eurocentric conception which does not accept that we can leave the beaten track. currently I have two articles under review for 2 years already. I note that to be able to publish in English reviews, you have to be sponsored by a big name to legitimize and facilitate".

A traumatic publishing experiences

Authors who realised the predatory nature of OMICS during the publication process lead us to analyse their experiences through the category of trauma. These authors provided longer verbatim accounts than all the others did, recounting the episodes of fraud to which they were victims.

"We were contacted and asked to write a review. At no point in the email or correspondence with the author were APC mentioned. Once the article had been accepted we were telephone ask told to pay 3000 euros for the APC. When we asked for the manuscript to be withdrawn because we had no funds to pay the APC the editors stopped responding to our emails. We later found out that the manuscript had been published without our consent. We were then

bullied repeatedly by phone calls and emails asking for the money. The manuscript was submitted via the editor and not online and all revisions were dealt with in a similar fashion. We never consented to the manuscript being published or to paying the costs".

The narratives reveal a lot about OMICS's predatory strategies. In addition to emails, which are effectively phishing tools, social networks are also used to identify and contact authors and persuade them to submit articles:

"I was approached by a LinkedIn contact, I didn't do my due diligence, and ended up wasting my article there. When I discovered, I wanted to recall my manuscript. They went ahead to publish it anyway, and blocked me on all avenues I used in reaching them before".

"OMICS also hijacked our National Society website and redirected traffic to their website to make it appears as if our Society is involved in the publication. It is a highly fraudulent organization".

In some cases, an author who has already paid for the publishing service is harassed into paying a second time for the same published article:

"I paid the agreed amount, and then the journal asked me to pay again with double fee 1 year later... with repeated emails".

"Very bad experience, a lot of emails continuing to ask me to pay an article which was published and paid 1 year ago".

Some authors prefer not to mention the publication on their CV, so as not to be associated with OMICS, but also so as not to be accused of complacency, even if they recognise that it is a "waste of manuscript" for their work:

"Predatory journal, definitely. No benefit. I even do not mention this in my CV. Simply fraudulent".

"I am ashamed to even use the article myself. They ignored my request to correct the language they had messed up in it".

An emerging subculture

For some established authors, OMICS is a good tool for the easy dissemination of their papers. The ease of publication, its speed, accessibility and the absence or quick peer review allow them to use OMICS as a dissemination platform, a self-publishing tool of their work:

> *"I don't have a career goal, the most important thing for me is to disseminate my research. It is a question of alerting the stakeholders of my country on certain points".*

> *"My career is already established and OMICS publication was sought to promulgate concepts in a journal rapidly".*

These authors say they have learned a lot from OMICS about the rules and principles of the "new options" for Open Access and are ready to submit a new paper. For this category of authors, publishing an article is straightforward and obviously fast. In this vision, publishing is equivalent to dissemination:

> *"The exposure to wider scientific world".*

> *"It is beneficial to disseminate information and knowledge".*

The same applies to peer review, which is seen as a quick and easy step in the publishing process:

> *"I had learned a lot from them such as how present quality product to user".*

> *"If I produce quality paper, I can easily publish it. Also, I have learned many things from the peer review comments".*

> *"I learned how to give a response for peer reviewers comment and questions".*

This ease of publishing does not seem to ring alarm bells, and is rather related to the effort they put into the production of their article. The publishing experience at OMICS thus becomes, in a way, the yardstick against which they confront any other publishing experience.

> *"I got an experience of hardworking and how the paper is evaluated fairly and professionally".*

We therefore see that OMICS indirectly intervenes in the constitution of a form of subculture - based on easy and quick publication as new principles and values - which acts on the representations of researchers:

> *"I have been learned a lot from this publisher 1 how we present our work in understandable form to readers 2 scientific contents 3 Grammatical and language issue 4 how help those who need assistance 5 how produce quality product".*

Even the money attached to publishing is not really a problem, because, on the one hand, the prices are still lower than that of other publishers, and, on the other hand, researchers have developed their own tips and tricks:

> *"If you keep saying I don't want to publish if there is a fee, they will inevitably waive the fee".*

DISCUSSION

The survey results confirm many of the characteristics identified in the existing literature. Firstly, that the majority of authors are from the global South (Xia, 2015; Nwagnu, 2015), but not exclusively (Hedding, 2019). Secondly, that the majority of respondents work in the health sector (Moher, 2017; Manca, 2020). Finally, low English language skills and a lack of information are also among the dominant characteristics of the respondents (Strong, 2019). However, the results also allow us to lift the veil on two closely related phenomena: on the one hand, the complex environment and conditions in which the decision to submit an article is made by its author, and on the other hand, the predatory mechanisms implemented by OMICS. The study therefore allows us to answer our research questions by proposing a more nuanced categorisation of author profiles and their motives:

Fictitious and unwilling authors: our findings reveal the fake nature of authorship at OMICS. Fictitious and fake authors, fake addresses and unwilling authors are all 'hacking' strategies used by OMICS to inflate its content and have long been used by predatory journals, including where reviewers and editors are concerned (Sorokowski, 2017; Moussa, 2021; Siler, 2021). The low response rate in our study can therefore also be seen as a symptom of a dummy author base. Similarly, the authors whose identities were hacked are senior international researchers, recognised for their careers, mostly

retired or close to retirement. Their prestige and scientific credentials legitimise the predatory journals of OMICS. Their names and affiliations are usurped by OMICS to reassure and convince the potential authors they contact to submit a paper.

"Unheard" victims: our results revealed a new category, one with such poor English skills and so little knowledge of the scientific publishing system that they are unable to understand what happens to their manuscript. These authors already identified in previous studies (Omobowale, 2014; Kurt, 2018; Cohen, 2019), do not realise that they are victims, do not feel that they are and do not manifest themselves as such. The lack of knowledge of this category of authors ensures that they remain captive victims. Only a sufficient level of English and a minimal knowledge will enable them to reflect on their condition.

Exploited victims: this category represents authors who, as other studies have pointed out (Nielsen, 2020; Cobey, 2019), are subject to the pressure of the "publish or perish" rule and seek to publish their articles within an anxiety-inducing approach. This is exacerbated by their precariousness (Shehata, 2018) or their desire to advance their careers (Frandsen, 2021), but also by their difficulties in navigating the ever-changing digital information environment (Bawden, 2009). The confusion of these authors, combined with their isolation, makes them easy prey for predatory journals that generate credibility thanks to the long-awaited markers of legitimacy (indexing in international databases, impact factor, prestigious names of editors and editorial board members, etc.) (Petrisor, 2016). The testimonies provided by these authors are very close to those expressed in the literature (Chambers, 2019; Masic, 2017) and confirm the parallels with cyber criminality (Lukić, 2014). These authors represent the most vulnerable victims in our study, as they are the most receptive to the OMICS strategies.

Cynical and critical: this category represents authors who have published in OMICS with full knowledge of the facts. They are also willing to publish again in an OMICS journal. Similar to previous studies (Omobowale, 2014; Kurt, 2018; Demir, 2018; Salehi, 2020), these authors express satisfaction with the TAT, satisfactory evaluation and reasonable APC rates. This category of authors does not

belong to a specific age group and therefore includes both junior and senior researchers, as the literature has already shown (Pyne, 2017; Shaghaei, 2018 ; Eykens, 2019 ; Hedding, 2019 ; Jayanth, 2019 ; Perlin, 2018 ; Salehi, 2018).

What our findings do show, however, is the kind of Stockholm syndrome that this category of authors exhibits, which is linked to the strong imperative to publish in international journals for which they do not consider themselves eligible (Beigel, 2014) or which they consider inaccessible (Burgess-Jackson, 2020; Krawczyk, 2021). This category of authors nurtures a sense of downgrading already identified in the literature (Mertkan, 2021) and confirms the pressure that the "publish or perish" rule represents for them (Nielsen, 2020). They confront it with a form of solidarity towards the predatory journals that they consider ''good enough'' and that give them the possibility to publish quickly and easily in fake forms of international journals (Bell, 2017). In this case, publishing in OMICS is seen as a survival strategy in a very competitive and unequal world, rather than an unethical practice (Mertkan, 2021; Manca, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study sought to get closer to the author base of a predatory publisher, OMICS, in order to better understand the motivations of authors, the drivers and the conditions under which they publish their manuscripts. The findings have allowed us to add nuances to the profiles already identified in the literature but also to identify new profiles thanks to a better understanding of their environment.

Authors' responses and feedback have also provided insights into the environment in which researchers develop, and the complex trade-offs involved in identifying a predatory journal and deciding to submit a manuscript. They highlight the negative effects of the pressure to publish at the expense of quality.

While the predatory nature of OMICS is confirmed, the arguments on which its strategies are based (ease of submission, openness and speed of dissemination, low APC rates, responsiveness and close relationship with authors through social networks, etc.) are to some extent legitimised by authors who feel located in 'underworlds' (Stöckelová, 2017), despised and excluded from the North/Western and

international publishing system. Researchers' motivations thus reveal a representation of scholarly publishing that is anchored in what we see as a subculture, where ease and speed of dissemination are more important than legitimacy, certification and thus quality control (Petrisor, 2016).

Therefore, the established definition of predatory journals could not find consensus among all OMICS authors, because it does not consider previously invisible inequalities, hierarchies, power and domination relations between regions of the world located on a so-called "periphery", as opposed to a "centre" that devalues or even excludes them (Bell, 2017; Krawczyk, 2021; Stöckelová, 2017). On the contrary, a whole section of the author base is developing a traumatic and negative relational experience with publication, related to cybercrime (Lukić, 2014), from fascination to disappointment to harassment, confirming OMICS' fraudulent status. This finding is alarming and can no longer be ignored by institutional policies.

These findings highlight the importance of exploring predatory publishing from the perspective of an emerging subculture of academic publishing that has its own values and representations. It also helps to better frame the issues of asymmetries and geopolitical inequalities in the current system of scientific knowledge production, as well as the question of the status and legitimacy of the scientific content produced.

LIMITATIONS: the study is based on a single case study. Our findings, although relevant to the experience of publishing with OMICS, cannot necessarily be extended and applied to other publishing experiences with other predatory publishers. They do, however, provide a better understanding of the mechanisms by which the predatory process can be deployed with a particular author base, thanks to the shape-shifting nature of its vulnerabilities.

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Appendix 1: questionnaire

1-Identity

1. How old are you?

⇒ 18-21 years old

⇒ 22-35 years old

⇒ 36-45 years old

⇒ 46-55 years old

⇒ 56-68 years old

⇒ 69 years old and more

2. What is your gender?

⇒ Male

⇒ Female

⇒ Other

3. In which country are you established?

(Drop-down list of countries)

4. What is your research field?

⇒ Biology

⇒ Chemistry

⇒ Computer Science

⇒ Earth Sciences

⇒ Engineering

⇒ Health

⇒ Mathematics

⇒ Physics

⇒ Humanities

⇒ Social Sciences

Other *Write an answer*

5. What is your academic status?

⇒ Master's student

⇒ PhD

⇒ Postdoc

⇒ Lecturer

⇒ Research Assistant

⇒ Associate Professor

⇒ Full Professor

Other *Write an answer*

6. To which institution or type of institution are you attached?

⇒ University

⇒ College

⇒ Public Research Organism

⇒ Private Research Organism

Other *Write an answer*

7. How many years of experience do you have in academia?

⇒ 0-2 years

⇒ 3-6 years

⇒ 7-10 years

⇒ 10 years and more

8. How many article(s) do you publish per year?

⇒ Less than 1 article per year

⇒ 1 article per year, on average

⇒ Between 2 and 4 articles per year

⇒ Between 5 and 8 articles per year

⇒ Between 9 and 12 articles Per year

⇒ More than 12 articles per year

2-Article submission:

9. **You have published a paper in an OMICS Journal, can you tell us how did you came across this journal?**

⇒ By a promotional mail

⇒ By an advertisement on the web

⇒ By an email invitation to submit an article

⇒ By peer recommendation

⇒ By acquaintance recommendation

⇒ Searching for a journal on the internet

Other *Write an answer*

10. **What is/are the criterion(s) that led you to choose this journal?**

⇒ Topic of the journal

⇒ Indexation in international databases

⇒ Impact factor of the journal

⇒ Publication rate

⇒ Open access dissemination

Other *Write an answer*

11. **Has the article you published in OMICS Journal been submitted to any other journal publishers before?**

⇒ Yes

⇒ No

12. **Could you please mention the title(s) of the journal(s) to which you submitted your paper before submitting it to OMICS?**

Write an answer

3-Publication process at OMICS:

13. **Regarding the paper you have published in OMICS journal, how long did the process take from submission to publication?**

⇒ Less than 3 days

⇒ Between 3 days and 1 week

⇒ Between 1 and 3 weeks

⇒ Between 3 weeks and 2 months

⇒ Between 2 and 6 months

⇒ More than 6 months

14. **Did your article receive any feedback from the journal (comments, feedback for corrections, amendments, reviews)?**

⇒ Yes

⇒ No

⇒ Don't know

15. **If so, were you satisfied with the feedback?**

⇒ Yes

⇒ No

⇒ Mixed

If you have anything to add *Write an answer*

16. **Did you pay an APC (Article Processing Charges) for publishing the article?**

⇒ Yes

⇒ No

17. If you answered yes to question 16, how much was the money amount?

⇒ 0 - 100$

⇒ 100 – 500$

⇒ 500 – 1000$

⇒ 1000$ and more

18. If you answered yes to question 16, then which source funded the APC?

⇒ Research project funds

⇒ University or employer funds

⇒ Your personal funds

Other *Write an answer*

19. What is the license (Creative Commons) under which your article was published?

Write an answer

4-Publication impact:

20. Can you please rate your publishing experience with OMICS' journal?

Scale from 0 to 100

21. Is OMICS a well-known publisher in your community?

⇒ Yes

⇒ No

⇒ Don't know

Any comment? *Write an answer*

22. Did your publication at OMICS help you to obtain a promotion?

⇒ Yes

⇒ No

23. Did your publication at OMICS help to get a financial award?

⇒ Yes

⇒ No

24. Did your publication at OMICS help to get a tenure track?

⇒ Yes

⇒ No

25. How would you describe the impact of your publication at an OMICS journal on your career?

Write an answer

26. Would you repeat the publishing experience at an OMICS journal in the future?

⇒ Yes

⇒ No

27. If your answered Yes, then why?

Write an answer

28. If you answered No, then why?

Write an answer

29. What other publishers could you compare OMICS to?

Write an answer

30. What did you learn from your publishing experience at OMICS?

Write an answer

31. Did you know that OMICS was ordered to pay $50.1 million by the US federal justice system in compensation for its practices, which were considered "unfair and deceptive", particularly with regard to authors?

⇒ Yes

⇒ No

32. Do you have any comments to add, any information or personal feelings on the subject?

Write an answer

33. Do you agree to participate in the second step of this study with an interview? If so, could you please provide us with your email address?

Write an answer

Appendix 2: Journals to which the authors submitted their article before submission to an OMICS journal

Title provided by the respondents	URL found
Journal of Depression and Anxiety	https://www.longdom.org/depression-and-anxiety.html
Journal of Pulmonary and Respiratory Medicine	https://www.hilarispublisher.com/pulmonary-respiratory-medicine.html
Biomedical Engineering and Medical devices	https://www.longdom.org/biomedical-engineering-medical-devices.html
Works on biotechnology	No Result
Agriculture and natural resources	https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/agriculture-and-natural-resources
Neurology India	https://www.neurologyindia.com
Indian journal of neurosciences	https://www.ijnonline.org
Epidemeology (Sunnyvale) open access	https://www.omicsonline.org/epidemiology-open-access.php
Journal of pregnancy	https://www.hindawi.com/journals/jp/
Journal of drug Metabolism and Toxicology	https://www.longdom.org/drug-metabolism-toxicology.html

Journal of Geology and Geophysics	https://www.longdom.org/geology-geosciences.html
Journal of virology & mycology	https://www.longdom.org/virology-mycology.html
International j general medicine and pharmacy	http://www.iaset.us/journals/international-journals/international-journal-of-general-medicine-and-pharmacy
Journal of environnemental analytical chemistry	https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/geac20/current

Appendix 3: Publishers to which respondents compared OMICS

Publisher name provided by the respondents with their own spelling	Name corrected	URL
Wiley	Wiley	https://www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com
Springer	Springer	https://www.springer.com/fr
Open journal of radiology	Scientific Research	https://www.scirp.org
Science alert	Science Alert	https://scialert.net
Thieme Wolter kleuwers	Aucun résultat	Aucun résultat
MDPI	MDPI	https://www.mdpi.com
Elsevier	Elsevier	https://www.elsevier.com/fr-fr
Juniper	Juniper Publishers	https://juniperpublishers.com
Science Group	Science Publishing Group	http://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/home/index
Ommegaonline	Ommega Online Publishers	https://www.ommegaonline.org
Dove	Dovepress	https://www.dovepress.com
Sage	Sage publishing	https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/home
PLOS one	PLOS	https://plos.org

BMC	BMC	https://www.biomedcentral.com
Hindawi	Hindawi	https://www.hindawi.com
ImedPUP	Insinght Medical Publishing	https://www.imedpub.com
IntechOpen	IntechOpen	https://www.intechopen.com
Benthams	Bentham Science	https://benthamscience.com
Cambridge Scholars Publishing	Cambridge Scholars Publishing	https://www.cambridgescholars.com
Herbert Open Access	Herbert Open Access Journals	https://www.hoajonline.com
Science direct	Elsevier	https://www.sciencedirect.com
Ocimum	Ocimum Scientific Publishers	https://ospopac.com
Open Agriculture	Bentham Open	https://benthamopen.com/TOASJ/home/