

*Pay to Play--Publish for a Price: The Myths
and Manipulation of the New Corporate
Open-Access Journals*

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Abstract: If scholarly publishing were not sufficiently challenging, a new danger arises in the realm of academic misconduct by fraudulent Open-Access pseudo-publishing by Middle East-based (especially Bangladesh) “corporations” with pay-for-play predominantly online so-called “journals.” Incessant email spamming with disregard of repeated requests to unsubscribe led me to investigate them. That inclination intersected with the increasing failures of other journals’ reviewers and editors. This combined with higher education periodical and business page reports on debates on the movement toward Open Access publishing and its conflicts with traditional subscription and academic organizations’ periodicals led me to conduct a controlled experiment.

Résumé : Si l'édition scientifique n'était pas suffisamment exigeante, un nouveau danger apparaîtrait dans le domaine de la mauvaise conduite académique par des pseudo-publications frauduleuses en libre accès par des « sociétés » basées au Moyen-Orient (en particulier au Bangladesh) et dont les services payants sont principalement en ligne, appelés « journaux ». Le spam incessant par courrier électronique, sans tenir compte des demandes répétées de désabonnement, m'a amené à enquêter. Cette tendance s'est croisée avec les échecs croissants des critiques et éditeurs d'autres revues. Ceci, combiné aux rapports de périodiques d'enseignement supérieur et de pages commerciales sur les débats sur le mouvement vers la publication en libre accès et ses conflits avec les abonnements traditionnels et les périodiques des organisations universitaires, m'a amené à mener une expérience contrôlée.

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As publish *or* perish turns into *publish and also perish*, academic journals have transformed. As I explain in “Peer reviewing is becoming more cavalier, self-serving and ignorant,” “Academics’ publishing options are an ever wilder west. Beware!” and “Editors have become so wayward that academic authors need a bill of rights,” this is *not* for the better.

The newest site of scholarly misconduct is fraudulent Open-Access pseudo-publishing by Middle East-based (especially Bangladesh) “corporations” with pay-for-play predominantly online so-called “journals.” Incessant email spamming with disregard of repeated requests to unsubscribe led me to investigate them.

That inclination intersected with the increasing failures of other journals’ reviewers and editors. This combined with higher education periodical and business page reports on debates on the movement toward Open Access publishing and its conflicts with traditional subscription and academic organizations’ periodicals led me to conduct a controlled experiment.

I chose three similarly named new “journals,” all with the same pronouncements and publishing arrangements. Their only difference is that two charge a publishing fee of \$200 and the other \$100. Unlike other, more established Open Access journals who waived their fees for a retired professor with no institutional support, none allowed any exception to pay for play.

They are:

Journal of Arts and Humanities, LAR Publishing

Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies (JHSSS), Al-Kindi Center for Research and Development (KCRD)

Journal of Liberal Arts and Humanities (JLAH), American Research and Publication Center (APRC)

Despite having US addresses, the communications of all three are marked by poor English; no sign of actual reading, review, or familiarity with my essay; poor communications in general, rapid acceptance with no suggestions for revision, almost immediate posting online after fee paid, and incessant obsession with payment.

All promise unprecedented, question-provoking turnaround. Two commit to a publishing decision within two weeks of submission; the third a decision within 7 days *for an additional \$50*. All claim to be Open-Access, double-blind, peer-reviewed monthly or bi-monthly online first publications.

The periodicals' excessive self-promotion aims at luring younger scholars and/or those desperate for publications for many possible reasons. One's "Wider Exposure and Increased Citations," for example, distortingly claims, "Publishing in open access instead of in toll-access an [sic] help open up research to a wider audience by allowing readers free access and the right to distribute published articles. Increased number of readers results [in] an increased number of citations for the authors. Studies have shown a significant increase in citations when article are made openly available." No studies are cited.

Publisher of 5 generic, undefined online journals, LAR falsely attempts to counter certain "myths" that they themselves fabricate. Among the false assertions is that these publishers are not driven for profit-making.

Dishonestly, they contradict and confuse themselves with their own "Myth 3: Open Access articles and journals are not peer-reviewed. False. A journals access policy, whether open access or toll-accessed, does not determine its peer review policy." I do not know what they mean. (*Note: all grammatical and punctuations errors appear in the communications that I quote directly.*)

Since none states the now anachronistic practice of only sending the same manuscript exclusively to one publication at a time, I submitted one essay to all three. All quickly accepted my article with no evidence of anyone reading, reviewing, or being familiar with my text. They danced together in their unclear communications; muddled practices; and constant emphasis on speed and especially payment. They easily could be one profiteering operation, not three.

First to respond was *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, published by LAR with a Beaverton, Oregon address. They offer a 7-day review for an additional \$50. Printing and shipping are "outsourced (offshored) from China, Bangladesh and Thailand."

Six weeks after submission, I received two identical acceptance emails from two different email addresses. Each announced, "The reviewers have recommended your paper for publication, subject to minor revisions." They urged speed in my response.

The "reviews" and suggested "minor revisions" made no sense. They demonstrated no familiarity with my essay. "I suggest the author to revised the introduction section a bit to develop the motivation and the flow of the discussion." Irrelevantly, the boilerplate review goes on, the introduction "should present... background and the idea of the study [including 7-8 citations]... then present the brief of methodology, then present the main findings briefly...." And so on.

I responded by asking the editor for clarification. Repeating the comments without elaboration, they admitted that the comments are “a checklist,” therefore not a peer-review.

I declined acceptance and payment of \$200 (via a link that did not appear in the emails).

Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies (JHSSS) was second. It self-promotes: Founded in 2019, “It covers the latest developments in the broad areas of the humanities and social sciences. With its uniquely broad coverage, the journal offers readers free access to all new research issues relevant to humanities and social sciences. While the journal strives to maintain high academic standards and an international reputation through the suggestions of the international advisory board, it welcomes original, theoretical and practical submissions from all over the world.”

With the others, it promises “Continuous Publishing and Rigorous Review Process.... Articles are published in the current issue as soon as they are peer-reviewed, accepted, copyedited, and proofread, allowing a steady stream of informative quality articles....” Like others, it is published in English, Arabic and French.

With no detail, they claim: Al-Kindi or KCRD “is a fast-growing academic organization that publishes high quality scholarly journals, proceedings, theses, and books, in both printed and online versions, across a wide range of academic disciplines, including economics, business, education, social sciences, humanities, sciences, etc.” Its website lists only *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Translation* and *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, in addition to *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies*.

I submitted on August 8, 2022; acceptance was sent on September 7. The Louisville, Kentucky-based editor wrote, “Thanks a lot for your interest in International Journal of Humanities and Social Science. Your research problem is of interest to us. Your manuscript has been reviewed by two reviewers. Please find the reviewers’ comments and suggestions as attached with this letter. The editorial board has decided to publish your paper with no modification.”

There were no reviews. Two tiny tables with “evaluation criteria” substituted: original contribution, well organized, author guidelines followed, based on sound methodology, analysis and findings support objectives of paper. I scored all “yeses.” Comments and Suggestions: “This paper will undoubtedly contribute to the existing field of research. This is a timely research. The paper is

organized, especially in presenting the consistent thoughts. This paper can be published in its present form.”

As with the other journals, this bears no relationship to my paper. There is no evidence that a human being, let alone a qualified scholar, read a single word. The acceptance letter devotes at least as much space to instructions on how to send the \$200 payment to a person in Bangladesh, especially the correct spelling of the name. The “financial unit of the Institute is located in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The journal is published from New York.... Please inform the editor after making payment of the publication fee.”

The third is the *Journal of Liberal Arts and Humanities (JLAH)*, published by the American Research and Publication Center (APRC) with a Washington, DC address. I submitted my article on August 28; acceptance arrived one week later on September 5. Repeatedly requested, the fee is \$100, and an additional \$30 for an xeroxed and stapled copy of 42 pages, delivered in battered envelope from Bangladesh four months after it was promised.

ARPC claims 9 generic, repetitive topic journals with no apparent focus or definition, no recognizable names of editors or editorial boards. *JLAH* is in its third volume year, and claims 12 “issues” per year.

The context- and content-less readers’ reviews almost perfectly mirrored the *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies*, albeit with one reviewer and 8 categories rather than 6. No specifics, no examples from my submission, only poorly expressed generalities and platitudes: “The paper provides a very thorough review of literatures. I appreciate the author to choose the type of topic for study. The paper is properly organized and demands appreciation.... Representing the dedication and knowledge of the researcher about the topic and skill in research.”

As with the others, most attention is devoted to payment. Again, in Bangladesh, to a person with the same last name (but a different first name) as the preceding journal. Can this be accidental? All the editors urged speed, instructed me to tell them when I made payment. In this case, I responded to the lower price and completed my experiment. Using Western Union as required for payment cost an additional \$11.47.

Less than a week later, I received a Word file, not page proofs, for final review. In contrast to what I submitted, it was now a mess especially with respect to spacing between and within words, paragraphs, and references. No editor or proofreader reviewed it, despite the erroneous statement: “prepar[ed] for publication.”

Despite my request to be informed when it was posted to the journal's website and to be sent a link, I discovered it online in the "open" or "continuing" September issue by incidental checking 3 days later. (See Graff, 2022d)

My experiment is complete. If the sample size is small, all data points agree. Despite repeated statements about double blind peer reviews and no profit aims, there is no semblance of scholarly practices or standards, actual review by qualified academics, or any individual ever reading the submission.

Denial of profit-making and radically exaggerated promotion of open access versus traditional subscription journals are both contradicted by practice. The obsession with paying fees—in the Middle East—and immediately informing editors that the author has done so, speak loudly and clearly. So does the unbelievably short turnaround time, and the one journal's fee of \$50 for a 7 day "review." Publication and delivery are unprofessional.

This is no less, and no more, than pseudo-scholarly publishing for sale. It is tragically and unprofessionally inseparable from a time of increased pressures to publish for any kind of academic post, tenure track or not, and for promotion and tenure.

It is graft and grift for a new age. Let the buyer beware, as well as the professions and the professors.

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