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Predatory conferences in economics and finance

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Abstract

There is a growing number of pseudo-scientific conferences that are based on an exploitative business model without regard for research quality. The predatory nature of such conferences means that an unsuspecting researcher is tricked into participating in these events. This study conducts an experiment to investigate how organisers of predatory conferences operate. The study concludes that the schemes set up by predatory conference organisers are sophisticated enough to convince a junior researcher to pay for participation in these events. This is the first study that looks at predatory conferences in the area of economics and finance. The review of responses to a flawed abstract shows that the acceptance offer was received within the first four days upon submission. Summing up, 3% (18 out of 613) of the targeted conferences firmly accepted the abstract. However, it does not mean that in other cases conference organisers acted honourably by ignoring the flawed abstract, even though 97% (594 out of 613) of the targeted conferences provided no response to the submissions.

Keywords: economics, finance, predatory publishing, experiment

JEL: C9, A10, G00, G21

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1 Introduction

There is a growing number of pseudo-scientific conferences that are organised with the sole purpose of charging fees from unsuspecting researchers. These conferences are regarded as deceptive or predatory, because they are based on an exploitative business model that has no regard for research quality. The predatory nature of those conferences means that an unsuspecting researcher is tricked into participating in such events, which are usually advertised as highly-ranked international conferences.

This study conducts an experiment to investigate how organisers of predatory conferences operate. The author used an inadequate and flawed abstract and sent to conferences on finance, economics and business organised in Asia. The feedback (acceptance/rejection) and the time it took to receive the response is analysed.

It should be noted that the aim of this experimental study is not to mislead conference organisers into accepting a flawed and inadequate research abstract. The core purpose of this study is to educate junior researchers in social science on how predatory conferences operate; and to highlight the elaborate, professional schemes run by predatory conference organisers to extract fees. Ultimately, the study recognises the need to shed some light on the dangers posed to the scholarly domain off and economics from predatory conferences.

The study differs from the sparse academic output on predatory publishing in targeting predatory conferences rather than predatory journals. Furthermore, complementing the current academic literature that is predominantly focused on predatory publishing in the field of medical research, the study looks at predatory activities in a social science (finance and economics). The study focuses on conferences in Asia, as this region has been flagged as the most favourable to predatory conferences and publishing.

Junior researchers and practitioners connected with academia as external staff members are particularly exposed to predatory conferences, as they are more easily convinced by aggressive advertising campaigns run on behalf of predatory conference organisers. As it transpires, potentially predatory conferences prevail in the standard 'google' search engines for scientific conferences in Asia. By now, finding a genuine conference by performing a simple internet search has become challenging. Moreover, predatory conferences appear to be professional events with names resembling genuine scholarly conferences. Predatory conference websites are no longer plagued with syntax errors, poor grammar or colourful pop-ups. The high standards of conference websites and a number of accolades promised by the organisers (e.g. SCOPUS indexing) attract unsuspecting researchers. Therefore, there is a growing need to expose these deceitful practices in order to shield the scholarly community from financial exploitation as well as to shield the body of knowledge from contamination and poor quality of predatory conference proceedings. The current paper attempts to address this need by flagging predatory conferences in finance and economics.

2 Study background

The phenomenon of predatory conferences is relatively nascent and follows the emergence of predatory publishing and journals (Memon 2017). According to Eriksson and Helgesson (2018), predatory conferences constitute a new layer added to the activities of predatory journals. Both the

predatory conferences and predatory journals have not been given sufficient focus due to the sudden emergence of this phenomenon and its fast-paced expansion (Sorooshian 2016). Using the Beall's list of predatory publishers, Brezgov (2019) points to the fact that the prevalence of predatory publishers increased by more than 5,000% since 2011. Ultimately, the current paper recognises the fact that the overwhelming number of predatory entities and the elaborated schemes run by predatory conference organisers make it difficult to investigate this 'dark side to the open access movement' (Butler 2013; Bowman 2014). As a result, there are only several academic papers pointing to the dangers of predatory publishing with Phaedra and Cress (2017) stating that anyone in academia already knows a fellow researcher who has fallen prey to predatory conference participation or predatory publishing.

Asia is often regarded as the epicentre of predatory conferences with predatory entities being set up in Asian countries (Beall 2016a). The study by Petrisor (2016) highlights the success of Asian predatory conference organisers in attracting unsuspecting researchers, which is linked to their advanced predation strategies. According to Petrisor, these strategies involve personalised calls for papers, fake metrics and falsified editorial structures, as well as the speed of processing conference abstracts. The study by McCrostie (2016) attempts to link the role of Asian countries in promoting predatory conferences to the fact that the graduate education of many Asian countries (e.g. Taiwan) is organised as a point-based system with points being awarded for participation and presentation at scholarly conferences. McCrostie (2016) also links the fact that Asia has become a hub for predatory conferences to generous government subsidies for participation in scientific meetings. These assumptions are supported by Bhad and Hazari (2015) who point to grant funding as a major reason behind targeting scholars in South-West Asia.

The research on predatory publishing and predatory conferences is primarily focused on investigating threats of predatory publishing to medical research with little attention given to the negative impact of predatory conferences in social sciences (like economics and finance). For example, the study by Mercier et al. (2018) discusses the dangers faced by early-career researchers that are exposed to a large number of invitations to participate in predatory conferences in medical sciences. The study by Mercier shows that a junior medical researcher is invited to present at 210 predatory conferences in a period of 12 months. Complementing these findings, the study by Wilkinson et al. (2019) shows that a medical researcher receives, on average, 1–10 spam emails per month soliciting participation in predatory conferences or publishing in predatory journals. Wilkinson concluded that predatory conferences constitute a distraction for career development and negatively affect academic faculty productivity. The study by Beall (2016b) points to the damage caused by predatory publishing to pharmacy research. According to Beall, predatory journals and conferences debase science by disregarding the conventions and practices of rigorous peer review. Although the studies of Mercier et al. (2018), Wilkinson et al. (2019) and Beall (2016b) point to the threats to the medical research, their conclusions can be extended to other scientific areas. However, to date, there has been limited research focusing on the impact of predatory conferences on the research domain of finance and economics (Dadkhah, Jazi, Pacukaj 2015).

3 Research methodology

Following the experimental study by Sorokowski et al. (2017), the paper adopts a similar methodological approach to flagging predatory conferences. However, instead of designing a profile of a fictitious

scientist, the paper uses an inadequate abstract of a scholarly paper sending it to a number of conferences. The abstract had been purposely modified to be a nonsensical, flawed and erroneous piece of a manuscript in order to be easily rejected by conference organisers.

3.1 Abstract creation

In the first step, five different conference abstracts were created encompassing various topics in finance and economics. All five abstracts contained the following flaws: keywords not matching the abstract, use of abbreviations without explanations, intentional typos (e.g. 'Basil regulations' instead of 'Basel regulations'), abundant use of nonsensical statements, citing non-existing regulations and theories, use of statements taken directly from other sciences (e.g. hydrology), missing connections between paragraphs, no chain of thought, referencing non-existing academic sources and the use of flamboyant, counterintuitive, counterfactual and fraudulent claims.

The five abstracts were presented to an evaluation panel that consisted of academic scholars and journal editors. The panel was tasked with the assessment of each abstract based on the following criteria:

– ease of understanding – this allowed the author to eliminate abstracts containing overly technical jargon that would obscure the message and make it harder to reject it;

– feasibility to spot that the abstract is nonsensical – this allowed the author to eliminate abstracts that were not obviously nonsensical; and

– expert-based decision on acceptance/rejection – this allowed the author to check if the abstract would be rejected upon submission to a predatory conference or forwarded to reviewers for a second opinion.

The goal of applying the above criteria was to select an abstract that could easily be identified as nonsensical and easily rejected during a review process or simply desk-rejected upon submission. An assumption was made that the flawed abstract accepted to a conference indicated that the review process was inadequate. Therefore, the input of panel experts in selecting the most adequate abstract for the purpose of the study remained crucial in ensuring the robustness of the findings. Table 1 shows the list of panel experts.

Members of the panel were aware of the study's purpose. The study used experts for whom English is the mother tongue in order to obtain their judgment on the writing style of the abstract. All expert panel members had prior experience in reviewing and validating scholarly manuscripts and abstracts due to their scientific positions as editors in international journals. Additionally, Expert 2 and Expert 5 were appointed to organise scientific conferences in 2019.

Using a questionnaire designed to collect expert opinions about the abstracts, the panel selected ABSTRACT 2. This abstract was deemed to be the most adequate for the purpose of the study, as it was relatively easy to spot that it was nonsensical, fraudulent and poorly written. All members of the expert panel unanimously agreed that ABSTRACT 2 should be met with desk rejection without the need to forward it to appointed reviewers for a second opinion.

ABSTARCT 2 is placed in the appendix in the form approved by the expert panel and submitted to the conferences.

3.2 Conference selection

Two junior researchers were asked to provide a list of potential conferences in pre-selected Asian countries for a research paper on "CSR in financial collateral haircut application to risk data". The junior researchers were not informed about the purpose of the study. The only direction that they were given was the title of the paper and the list of Asian countries. The two junior researchers had already published in academic journals indexed in SCOPUS, but had not participated in any scientific conference. The researchers were permitted to use any means available to target potential conferences for the paper. However, in reality, they relied on internet search engines and the word of mouth to compile the list of relevant conferences in Asia. The details of the two junior researchers are provided in Table 2.

The two researchers were asked to select conferences taking place in September, October and November 2019. This made it possible to submit the abstract prior to the submission deadline. The following countries were given to the researchers: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Vietnam.

Ultimately 663 conferences were selected. ABSTRACT 2 was submitted to 613 conferences, as 50 conferences had an unclear submission process or non-functioning 'error 404' websites. The full list of conferences is not presented in the paper, as it includes conference titles that were purposely similar to genuine reputable conferences. However, the detailed list is available upon request.

Table 3 summarises the targeted conferences by country and Figure 1 shows the timing of the targeted conferences.

3.3 Abstract feedback coding methodology

Since the main objective of this study is to educate junior researchers on how predatory conferences operate in Asia, the study did not exert pressure on the selected conference organisers to accept the flawed abstract. Every opportunity was given for rejecting the abstract. It was assumed that, once rejected, the abstract would not be resubmitted. Furthermore, any reviewers' feedback advising on resubmission and revisions was regarded as an initial rejection of the abstract in its current form.

In the case of no response from the organisers upon the submission of the flawed abstract, it was assumed that the abstract had not been accepted and no attempts were made to contact the organisers in order to trick them into accepting the flawed piece. Similar assumption was made for the case where organisers would respond initially acknowledging the receipt of the abstract, but later providing no feedback or decision on accepting or rejecting the abstract. These instances were coded as 'no response'. Additionally, any query about the validity of the abstract from conference organisers was met with the withdrawal of the flawed manuscript, and hence coded as rejection.

The submission was coded as accepted only if the reply from the organisers accepted the flawed abstract unconditionally. This refers to the clear acceptance reply either from the reviewers or from the organisers. Figure 2 shows the decision tree for coding the feedback on the abstract from conference organisers.

3.4 Future refinements

The methodology presented in this paper has room for improvement in two areas. Firstly, the efficiency of the experiment can be improved by creating multiple fictitious profiles of junior researchers with unique email addresses. Currently, only one profile with one email address/contact details was used to submit the flawed conference abstract. However, this approach may fail in a case where one organiser hosts several conferences across various countries to which the same abstract is submitted. There is some risk that a conference organiser will realize that the researcher has applied to multiple conferences at the same time. This may lead to a decision where the abstract is accepted only to one of the conferences hosted by the organiser and desk-rejected for the remaining events that are conflicting with the time of the selected conference.

Secondly, the abstract was plagued with different flaws ranging from citing non-existent theories and regulations to adding nonsense statements or inserting intentional typos. Future refinements of the methodology should reconsider testing each of the flaw separately. Thus, the experiment would give an indication of the types of flaws that are usually overlooked and do not preclude the acceptance of the flawed abstract. At this point, it is assumed that typos or non-matching keywords would not result in the firm rejection of the abstract. However, the use of fraudulent claims or non-existent and counterfactual theories would be met with abstract rejection or requests for revision. Since each of the flaw is expected to trigger different responses from conference organisers and abstract reviewers, the improved methodology may help tracking the methods that predatory conferences employ to verify abstract submissions.

Finally, the methodology can be improved by introducing an element of validation of the responses concerning abstract reviews. At this point, a challenger abstract that is free of the aforementioned flaws should be submitted in parallel to the flawed abstract to the same conferences using a different junior researcher's profile. Validation rules should be established such that if both submissions receive no responses or rejections, the outcome would be classified as not validated, as proposed in Table 4. This validation rule would help to address the problem of a large number of no responses to the initial submissions of the flawed abstract. It would help to decide whether receiving no responses in some cases can be viewed as desk rejections of the flawed abstract knowing that the challenger abstract has met with a firm acceptance/rejection.

4 Preliminary review of the conference list

Prior to discussing the responses from conference organisers, this paper reviews specific traits of the selected conferences suggesting that the majority of these events can be classified as predatory. Firstly, reviewing the list composed by the two junior researchers, it becomes evident that the same conference was organised on a monthly basis by rotating organisers in a given country. It seems unusual to organise the same event dubbed as 'international' so frequently. In the case of Bangladesh, it turned out that the same conference had been run on a weekly basis from September to November 2019 by the same organiser. Secondly, it was discovered that the same association organises the same 'international' conference in a number of neighbouring countries. Again, it is unusual for the same conference of an international status to be hosted across all Asian countries encompassed by the study.

Thirdly, the majority of the listed conferences shared the same e-mail or submission link for abstracts despite being organised by different associations. Summing up, it appears that different associations behind the listed conferences belong to the same group that runs one global scheme of extracting fees for conference submissions.

The listed conferences are presented by organisers as international events in economics, finance and business that aim to bring together innovative academics and industry practitioners to a common scientific forum. We present the common traits of marketing luring unsuspecting researchers into attending those listed conferences in Table 5.

Some of the organisers of the listed conferences promise to send selected conference delegates to carry out their research activities at overseas institutions. However, no specifics are given at this point. Furthermore, some conference organisers promise research grants and funding opportunities sponsored by conference organising associations. These initiatives are particularly attractive to junior researchers.

The process of attracting unsuspecting researchers is increasingly sophisticated. Conference websites nowadays conform to professional standards with no obvious warning signs like syntax errors or colourful pop-ups. Organisers do not promise fictitious rewards or presence of prominent keynote speakers. There are pseudo-scientific libraries posing as legitimate academic repositories linked to the conferences. The websites of the majority of the selected conferences offer an option to download conference proceedings from previous events, even though these proceedings contain poorly written and unrelated articles that would never be accepted for publication in a scholarly outlet. There are also pictures of past conferences and testimonials highlighting the prestige of these events. The majority of the conferences from the list display logos of leading academic publishers as conference associates and state that proceedings will be indexed. The apparent transparency of these conferences has improved as well. Conference organisers are now easily identifiable as international scientific associations with their own websites and awards for research excellence in order to validate their conferences. The above features give an appearance of genuine scholarly events and can easily mislead junior researchers.

5 Findings

In almost all cases of the flawed abstract being accepted, the positive response was received within 1–4 days of the submission. The timing of approval for the flawed abstract is presented in Figure 3.

In summary, 3% (18 out of 613) of the targeted conferences firmly accepted the abstract. There was one instance of desk-rejection. In the first instance, the paper was rejected because the deadline for submission had passed. As far as acceptance offers are concerned, the researchers obtained only firm, unconditional acceptance offers without requests for revision (which would have amounted to provisional acceptance).

There was a high rate of no responses to the submissions. The high rate of no responses cannot be linked to the fact that the abstract had not reached conference organisers. In all cases, there was a clear confirmation message (either in the form of a pop-up window thanking for the successful submission or in the form of a confirmation email stating that the paper had been forwarded for review). All acceptance letters stated that the abstract was selected for the targeted conference after a peer review process. All acceptance letters were accompanied by payment instructions to register for

the targeted conference. In many cases, the acceptance letters reiterated the manifold benefits of presenting at the targeted conference stating that selected proceedings would be published in a list of journals with impact factors.

Highlighting the scholarly benefits of registering for the conference was not the only common feature of the acceptance letters. Regardless of the country hosting the conference and diverse conference organisers, the payment instructions on the acceptance letters quoted accounts of a bank domiciled in Khandagiri, India (Table 7).

In conclusion, the overall acceptance rate for the targeted conferences was low. However, it does not mean that conference organisers acted honourably by ignoring the flawed abstract. For example, the list of potential conferences composed by the two junior researchers included 17 unique conferences hosted by Organiser C across seven countries in Asia. The same submission link was provided for these conferences, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 sheds some light on the probable reason behind the large number of no responses to the submissions. At this point, the author assumed that a conference would not be held in Japan and Vietnam, because not enough papers/abstracts were submitted in order for the organisers to make profits. It should be noted that organising a conference bears costs (e.g. hiring a venue, inviting a promised keynote speaker, publishing conference proceedings). Therefore, in cases where the number of submissions to a given conference had not reached an acceptable breakeven threshold, the submissions would typically meet with no response from the organisers. Furthermore, it should be noted that Organiser C runs the same conferences of international status across the world on a monthly basis. Therefore, it was assumed that the 'no response' outcome results from time/resource constraints of Organiser C, who prioritised the most profitable conference events. Indeed, liaising with each individual researcher to resubmit at a different date would be time consuming and would entail additional operational costs for the organiser.

All in all, the fact that there was only one common submission link and the same bank account shared across a group of conference organisers made the assumptions of cost-cutting with regard to no responses valid. However, one should note that these findings are based on circumstantial evidence and further investigation is required to balance out the low acceptance rate on the one hand and the high rate of no responses on the other.

6 Conclusions

The advertising strategies of predatory conferences have evolved to a point when previous studies pointing out the characteristics of predatory publishing have become obsolete. It has become more difficult to identify a predatory conference. The schemes set up by predatory conference organisers are sophisticated enough to convince a junior researcher to pay for the participation in these events. To this end, predatory conferences vaunt professionally maintained websites, online libraries and 'academic' repositories, keep a track record of past events, showcase testimonials and provide a degree of transparency about organisers. They no longer make it possible to deliver a paper at a conference *in absentia*. Predatory conferences no longer boast about publishing opportunities in high impact factor journals either, but provide a list of predatory journals published by the organisers instead. All these features give the appearance of genuine scholarly conferences.

Junior researchers and researchers employed outside of the academic domain are particularly exposed to the sophisticated schemes of predatory conference organisers. Therefore, this paper calls for decisive steps taken by academic and research institutions to educate their staff about the emergence of predatory publishing. Junior researchers should be taught on how to use reputable citation databases such as the Web of Science in order to validate a scholarly outlet. Furthermore, international publishing organisations and committees such as the DOAJ or the Committee on Publishing Ethics should maintain a centralised blacklist of predatory conference organisers and predatory journals. The access to the current lists (e.g. Beall list) is constrained due to the subscription fees.

There are specific threats posed by predatory conferences to scholarly communities. The paper points to the dangers of using proceedings from predatory conferences and to the overall impact on the quality of research. The rise of predatory conferences coupled with aggressive marketing campaigns threatens the scholarly community by promoting poor quality research output. Furthermore, recognising predatory conferences is difficult for junior researchers and the victims of these fake scholarly events are often discouraged from making academic progress.

The article does not quote specific names of the organisers or the targeted conferences, because these names are confusingly similar to reputable scholarly institutions. The detailed list of the targeted conferences, however, is available upon request. The findings contained in this study should not be interpreted as an attack on specific conference organisers or advocating deception. Every effort was made to maintain a high standard of ethical conduct. No conference registration was made upon the acceptance of the flawed abstract. Surprisingly, in one instance, the abstract was assigned a DOI and published prior to the conference date. In another instance, the reviewers/editors demanded a resubmission of the corrected abstract, but 8 days later this decision was overridden and the abstract unconditionally accepted. Finally, the abstract was published in the conference proceedings with an ISSN, but it was not presented at the predatory conference. This shows the magnitude of the problem researched.

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Appendix

Table 1
Panel experts

Notation	Country	Expertise
Expert 1	USA	Editor of an investment compliance journal indexed in SCOPUS
Expert 2	UK	Editor of a financial markets journal indexed in SCOPUS
Expert 3	UK	Editor of a banking regulation journal indexed in SCOPUS
Expert 4	UK	Editor of a financial risk management journal with impact factor
Expert 5	UK	Content editor for a risk management magazine
Expert 6	USA	Reviewer for an emerging financial markets journal indexed in SCOPUS
Expert 7	USA	Consulting editor for an investment compliance journal indexed in SCOPUS

Table 2
Junior researchers

Notation	Post	Number of academic publications*	Number of scientific conferences
Researcher 1	PhD student at a UK university	5	0
Researcher 2	Risk management researcher at a US-consultancy firm	1	0

* Papers published in academic journals indexed in SCOPUS, JCR or DOAJ.

Table 3
Conferences by countries

Country	Number of conferences selected	Number of abstract submissions	% of the sample (selected)	% of the sample (submitted)
Japan	66	60	10	10
Pakistan	54	50	8	8
Thailand	38	37	6	6
Bangladesh	32	28	5	5
South Korea	30	29	5	5
Sri Lanka	29	29	4	5
Turkey	29	29	4	5
Jordan	28	28	4	5
Philippines	28	28	4	5
Taiwan	28	25	4	4
China	27	27	4	4
Saudi Arabia	27	26	4	4
Iran	26	15	4	2
Nepal	26	25	4	4
Mongolia	25	18	4	3
Kuwait	22	19	3	3
Oman	20	18	3	3
Bhutan	17	17	3	3
India	16	15	2	2
Indonesia	16	13	2	2
Malaysia	12	12	2	2
Armenia	11	11	2	2
Iraq	11	11	2	2
Qatar	11	11	2	2
Hong Kong	10	9	2	1
Singapore	7	6	1	1
Vietnam	4	4	1	1
Azerbaijan	3	3	0	0
Brunei	3	3	0	0
Cambodia	3	2	0	0
Myanmar	3	3	0	0
Lebanon	1	1	0	0

Table 4
Validation of responses

	Flawed abstract	**Challenger abstract**	**Decision coding**	**Validation**
Conference A response	accept	reject	accept	validated
Conference B response	accept	accept	accept	validated
Conference C response	reject	accept	reject	validated
Conference D response	reject	reject	reject	not validated
Conference E response	no response	accept	no response	validated
Conference F response	no response	reject	no response	validated
Conference G response	no response	no response	no response	not validated
Conference H response	accept	no response	accept	validated
Conference I response	reject	no response	reject	validated

Table 5
Misleading accolades used by predatory conferences

Misleading research accolades, promises and statements by predatory conferences	**Occurrence rate in the listed conferences (in %)**	**Occurrence rate among flagged predatory conferences (in %)**
1. Assignment of Digital Object Identifier (DOI) to each paper	68	77
2. Submission of conference proceedings to Google Scholar, DOAJ etc. for indexing	85	88
3. Publishing of hard-copy proceedings with ISBN	44	83
4. Archiving in international 'academic' libraries	58	72
5. Excellent paper awards	87	88
6. Publishing of papers in journals	86	94
7. Sponsorship of the conference by many international institutes	82	77
8. Large number of invited lectures from renowned speakers	44	77
9. Review of submission by at least two independent peers	17	33
10. Submission of proceedings to SCOPUS/ISI Thomson for indexing	84	88
11. Affiliation of a large number of journals to the conference (e.g. 600)	41	55
12. Issuance of the certificate of presentation	92	100
13. Possibility to be sent overseas to continue research with international institutions affiliated with the conference	37	33
14. Research funding grants	37	33

Table 6
Breakdown of reponses

Decision code	Number of observations	%
Accept	18	3
Revision	0	0
Reject	1	0
No response	594	97
Total	613	100

Table 7
Online payment instructions

Country of the conference	Organiser	Bank details (address) for online payment
Singapore	Organiser A	Khandagiri, Odisha, India
Malaysia	Organiser B	Khandagiri, Odisha, India
Mongolia	Organiser B	no account details quoted on the acceptance letter
Malaysia	Organiser C	Khandagiri, Odisha, India
Malaysia	Organiser C	Khandagiri, Odisha, India
Japan	Organiser A	Khandagiri, Odisha, India
Vietnam	Organiser D	Khandagiri, Odisha, India
Malaysia	Organiser E	Khandagiri, Odisha, India
Japan	Organiser F	Khandagiri, Odisha, India
Singapore	Organiser D	Khandagiri, Odisha, India

Figure 1
Selected conferences by month

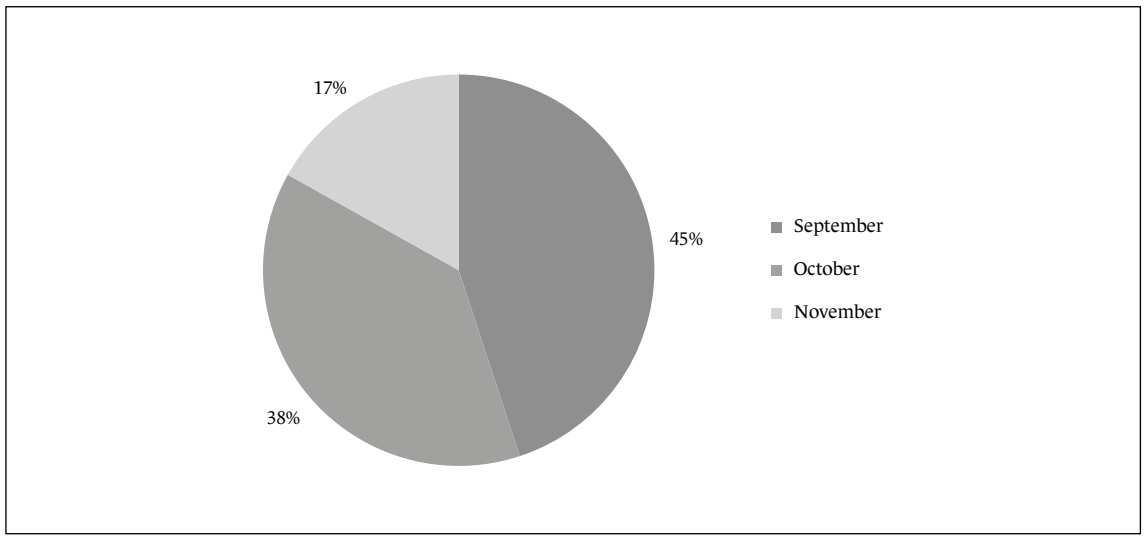


Figure 2
Abstract feedback coding

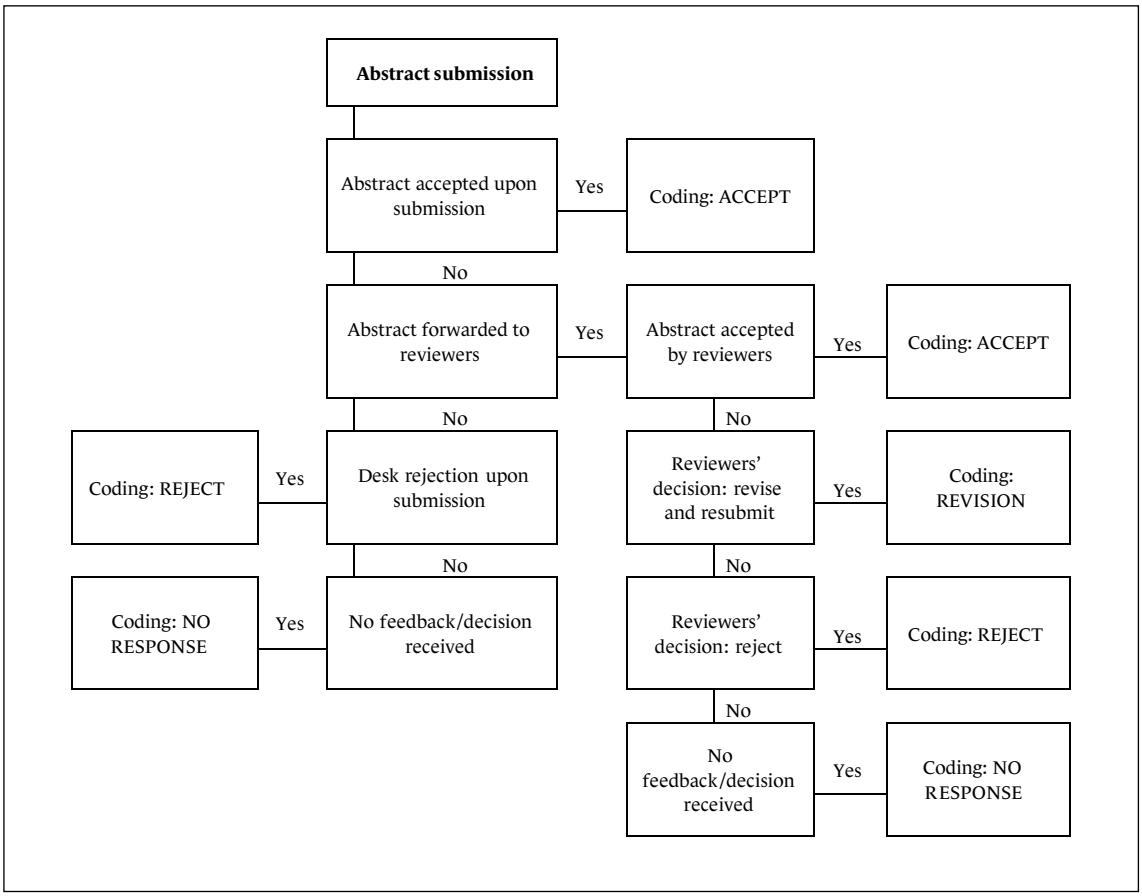


Figure 3
Timing of positive responses

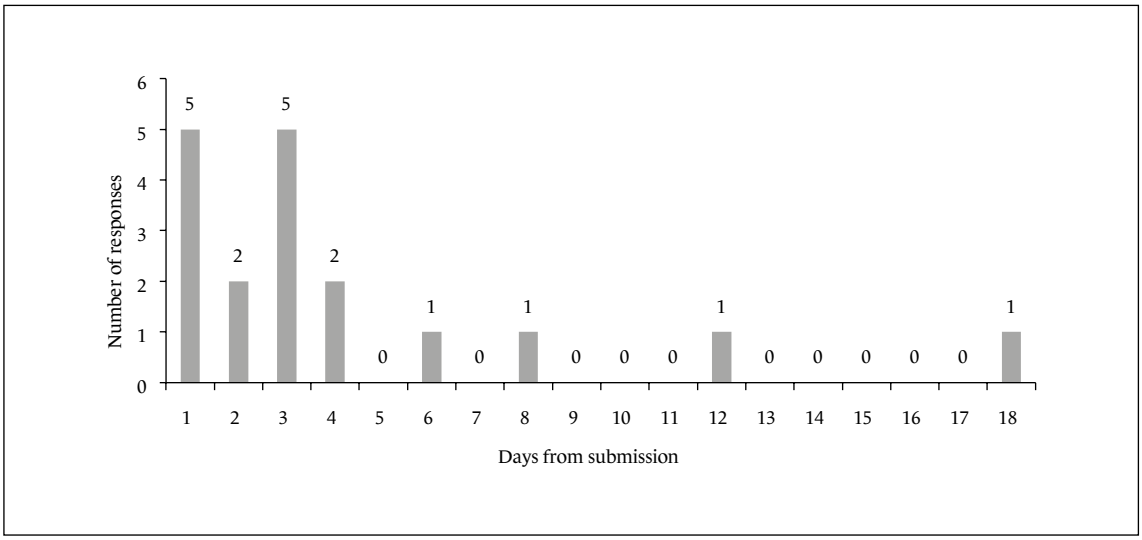
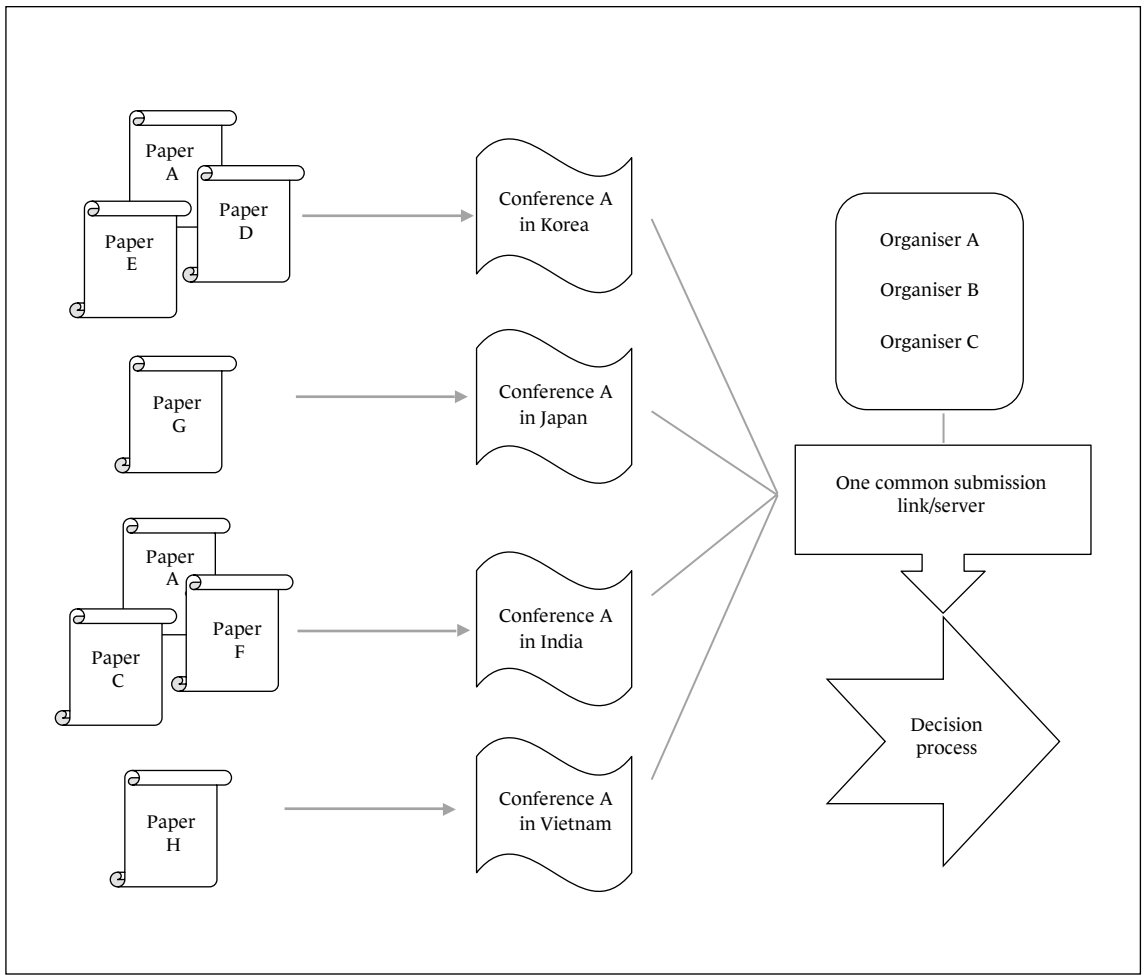


Figure 4
Conference paper submission processing



Pseudonaukowe konferencje w obszarze ekonomii i finansów

Streszczenie

Rośnie liczba konferencji pseudonaukowych, które są organizowane wyłącznie w celu pobierania opłat od niczego niepodejrzewających naukowców. Konferencje te są uważane za zwodnicze lub drapieżne, ponieważ opierają się na modelu biznesowym opartym na wyzysku, który nie uwzględnia jakości badań. Rabunkowy charakter takich konferencji sprawia, że niczego niepodejrzewający naukowiec daje się nabrać na udział w takich wydarzeniach, które są zwykle reklamowane jako konferencje międzynarodowe o wysokiej randze. Badanie opisane w tym artykule koncentruje się na konferencjach w Azji, ponieważ region ten został oznaczony jako najbardziej sprzyjający drapieżnym konferencjom i publikacjom.

Polegając na badaniach eksperymentalnych Sorokowskiego i in. (2017), w artykule przyjęto podobne podejście metodologiczne do oznaczania pseudonaukowych konferencji. Jednak zamiast zaprojektować profil fikcyjnego naukowca, w artykule wykorzystano nieodpowiednie streszczenie artykułu naukowego, które zostało wysłane na szereg konferencji. Abstrakt został celowo zmodyfikowany tak, aby był bezsensownym, wadliwym i błędnym fragmentem manuskryptu – tak aby organizatorzy konferencji mogli go łatwo odrzucić. W pierwszym kroku stworzono pięć różnych streszczeń konferencji, obejmujących różne tematy z finansów i ekonomii. Wszystkie streszczenia były wadliwe. Pięć streszczeń przedstawiono panelowi oceniającemu, w którego skład wchodzili naukowcy i redaktorzy czasopism. Celem panelu było wybranie abstraktu, który można łatwo zidentyfikować jako bezsensowny i łatwo odrzucić w procesie recenzji. Przyjęto tezę badawczą, że błędne streszczenie przyjęte na konferencję wskazuje, że proces recenzji jest nieodpowiedni. W drugim kroku wybrany abstrakt na temat „CSR w zastosowaniu redukcji wartości zabezpieczeń finansowych do danych dotyczących ryzyka" dostarczono dwóm młodszym badaczom, których poproszono o sporządzenie listy potencjalnych konferencji w wybranych krajach azjatyckich w celu przedstawienia artykułu badawczego. Młodszych naukowców nie poinformowano o celu tego badania. Jedyne wskazówki, jakie otrzymali ci badacze, to tytuł artykułu i lista krajów azjatyckich. Dwóch młodszych naukowców publikowało już w czasopismach akademickich indeksowanych w SCOPUS, ale nie uczestniczyło w żadnej konferencji naukowej. Naukowcom pozwolono użyć wszelkich dostępnych środków, aby skierować abstrakt na potencjalne konferencje. Jednak w rzeczywistości obaj badacze oparli się na wyszukiwarkach internetowych przy sporządzaniu listy odpowiednich konferencji w Azji. Ostatecznie wybrano 663 konferencje. Wadliwy abstrakt przesłano na 613 konferencji, ponieważ na 50 konferencjach przedstawiono niejasny proces składania abstraktów lub niedziałające strony internetowe.

Przed ujawnieniem odpowiedzi organizatorów konferencji w niniejszym artykule dokonano przeglądu specyficznych cech pseudonaukowych konferencji, mogących sugerować, że większość z tych wydarzeń można zaklasyfikować jako konferencje typu *predatory*. Po pierwsze, przeglądając listę sporządzoną przez dwóch młodszych badaczy, ujawniono, że ta sama konferencja była organizowana co miesiąc przez tych samych organizatorów w danym kraju. Po drugie, odkryto, że to samo stowarzyszenie organizuje tę samą „międzynarodową" konferencję w wielu sąsiednich krajach. Po trzecie, odkryto, że większość wymienionych konferencji ma ten sam adres e-mail lub link internetowy do przesyła-

nia streszczeń, mimo że są organizowane przez różne stowarzyszenia. Strony konferencyjne są obecnie na profesjonalnym poziomie, bez błędów składniowych i kolorowych wyskakujących okienek. Istnieją również pseudonaukowe biblioteki udające repozytoria akademickie powiązane z konferencjami. Na stronach internetowych większości wybranych konferencji można pobrać materiały konferencyjne z poprzednich wydarzeń. Jednak biblioteki te zawierają słabo napisane i niepowiązane artykuły, które nigdy nie zostałyby przyjęte do publikacji w placówce naukowej. Są tam również zdjęcia z poprzednich konferencji i referencje podkreślające ich prestiż. Większość konferencji z listy zawiera logo czołowych wydawców akademickich jako współpracowników konferencji i obiecuje indeksowanie materiałów. Powyższe cechy sprawiają wrażenie prawdziwych konferencji naukowych i mogą łatwo wprowadzić w błąd młodszych badaczy.

Podsumowując rezultat badania – 3% (18 z 613) wybranych konferencji zdecydowanie zaakceptowało streszczenie. W artykule odnotowano wysoki wskaźnik braku odpowiedzi na zgłoszenia. Nie można tego wiązać z faktem, że streszczenie nie dotarło do organizatorów konferencji. We wszystkich przypadkach był wyraźny komunikat potwierdzający odebranie (w postaci wyskakującego okienka z podziękowaniem za pomyślne przesłanie lub w formie wiadomości e-mail z potwierdzeniem, że artykuł został przesłany do recenzji). We wszystkich listach akceptacyjnych stwierdzano, że streszczenie zostało wybrane na konferencję docelową po procesie recenzowania. Do wszystkich listów akceptacyjnych dołączono instrukcje dotyczące płatności za rejestrację na konferencji docelowej. Niezależnie od kraju będącego gospodarzem konferencji i różnych organizatorów konferencji instrukcje dotyczące płatności na listach akceptacyjnych dotyczyły rachunków banku z siedzibą w Khandagiri w Indiach.

Ogólny wskaźnik akceptacji wybranych konferencji jest niski. Nie oznacza to jednak, że organizatorzy konferencji postąpili honorowo, ignorując błędne streszczenie. Na przykład lista potencjalnych konferencji sporządzona przez dwóch młodszych naukowców obejmowała 17 indywidualnych konferencji organizowanych przez jednego organizatora w siedmiu krajach Azji. Ten sam link do przesyłania zgłoszeń na 17 indywidualnych konferencji udostępnił jeden organizator. W przypadku gdyby liczba zgłoszeń na daną konferencję nie osiągnęła akceptowalnego progu rentowności, zgłoszenia byłyby przyjmowane bez odpowiedzi ze strony organizatorów. Ponadto należy zauważyć, że jeden organizator organizuje co miesiąc te same konferencje o statusie międzynarodowym. Dlatego zakłada się, że „brak odpowiedzi" wynika z ograniczeń czasowych lub zbyt małych zasobów organizatora, który nadaje priorytet najbardziej dochodowym wydarzeniom konferencyjnym.

Słowa kluczowe: ekonomia, finanse, pseudonaukowe konferencje