

**Abstract**

Integration into the global knowledge economy through internationalization was believed to be a major factor for transformation of higher education systems in the post-Soviet space. Transition and transformation were major paradigms through which we analyzed higher education developments. Instead, we witness the emergence of two parallel research cultures. The issue of predatory publishing helps us to see this phenomenon more clearly. Predatory publishing is transforming into a self-perpetuating culture.

## The Crisis of Predatory Publishing in the Post-Soviet Space

**Ikboljon Qoraboyev**

**W**hat we are witnessing, more than 30 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, may be the emergence and consolidation of two parallel research cultures, where the old and the new seem to coexist for a longer time than we expected. The issue of predatory publishing helps us to see this phenomenon of parallel research cultures more clearly.

While it is a global problem, predatory publishing takes an outsized dimension in post-Soviet countries, where we witness a proliferation of article mills operating through websites and, increasingly, online messaging apps like Telegram. Rather than just being a temporary problem and part of the “transition costs,” predatory publishing is transforming into a self-perpetuating culture. With the emergence of AI-based tools like ChatGPT, which have already been used [to write journal articles](#) or [to pass law school exams](#), the problem of predatory publishing in lower- and middle-income countries, including in the post-Soviet space, will only worsen. One of the features that helped to discern whether a text was predatory or not was low quality, “broken English.” With ChatGPT, predatory publishing entrepreneurs will certainly appeal more to researchers struggling to publish articles internationally.

### **The Rise of Predatory Publishing in the Former Soviet Space**

There is a preponderance of low-quality research outputs (articles mostly published in Q3 and especially Q4 journals in Scopus) in post-Soviet countries (see [A big picture: Bibliometric study of academic publications from post-Soviet countries](#)). Predatory publishing is a global phenomenon: According to *Nature*, predatory publishing practices, including paid-for coauthorship, have turned into [a multi-million dollar trade](#) and are spreading globally. Predatory publishing is taking an outsized dimension and is having a major impact in post-Soviet countries.

According to Andrei Rostovtsev, the founder of Dissernet, a famous Russian scientific project that detects and publicizes cases of academic plagiarism in Russia, turning to

predatory publishing became widespread and systematic after a goal to increase Russian scholars' outputs in journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science was introduced in 2012. Thousands of Russian scholars started publishing in predatory journals following a “pay-to-publish-anything” logic. Usually, these texts were English translations (using online translators) of articles written by others and originally published in other languages, with these predatory authors inviting other colleagues to join in as coauthors to share publication costs. Rostovtsev and his colleagues refer to this phenomenon as “a catastrophe that has become a norm.” In 2021, a study by Uzbek researchers found that the introduction of publish-or-perish logic led to a situation where Uzbekistan was leading the list of countries with the highest ratio of articles published in journals discontinued by Scopus—these journals usually turning out to be predatory. According to Bulat Kenessov, a professor at Kazakhstani National University, predatory publishing worsened further during 2022: Kazakhstan occupied the second place in terms of the ratio of scholarly articles appearing in suspicious journals that were discontinued from indexing in the Scopus database.

### **Predatory Publishing: A Temporary Phenomenon Linked to Transition?**

In this context, should we see the rise of predatory publishing as a temporary phenomenon necessarily brought upon by transition, and expect it to fade away with the successful integration of post-Soviet researchers into the global research landscape? From this perspective, the increase in predatory publications is explained by the lack of experience of post-Soviet researchers in publishing in international journals. This lack of experience is due to the isolation of Soviet research from the global scientific community. Linguistic barriers also aggravate the problem. An absolute majority of WoS and Scopus journals are published in English, while Russian remains the *lingua franca* of the post-Soviet region, including in higher education.

As a result, researchers in post-Soviet countries need time and resources to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and socialization to be able to publish in high quality international reviews. During this process, it is normal that many aspiring researchers get lured into the aggressive marketing nets of predatory publishers. Thus, predatory publishing can be seen as one of the many costs of the post-Soviet transition.

### **Predatory Publishing as a Self-Perpetuating Pervasive Culture?**

Another approach is to consider predatory publishing as a lasting phenomenon, which inevitably penetrated the post-Soviet region as a result of its exposition to globalization, and has been largely embraced and widely practiced by local actors.

Predatory publishing, in combination with other forms of academic misconduct (plagiarism, data fabrication, ghost writing, etc.), is widely used to inflate the research performance of academics, to help individuals acquire a PhD degree that they will use as a status symbol, or to enable faculty move up the ladders of academic promotion. For example, PhD degrees are attractive among Russian political elites as a status symbol, which generates a pressure for a large number of bureaucrats, politicians, and executives to chase after a PhD (Abalkina & Libman, 2020).

This versatile use of academic publications and degrees in post-Soviet society leads to the emergence of a substantial industry of entrepreneurs specialized in predatory publishing. We are facing a multiplication of serial entrepreneurs and intermediaries offering would-be authors and scientists authorships and coauthorships in articles published in journals indexed in international databases. Anna Abalkina analyzed the case of “International Publisher,” a company offering post-Soviet researchers authorships in WoS and Scopus indexed journals, estimating fake authorships obtained through this company in the hundreds, with a turnover of USD 6.5 million in the period 2019–2021. There are also many Telegram channels with names such as “Wos-Scopus,” “International articles,” “Conferences, journals,” etc., offering authors opportunities to publish their articles with fake indexes. Even if they are not Scopus indexed, they can still serve as qualifying metrics to secure positions, titles, and promotions.

From this perspective, predatory publishing should be seen as part of a self-perpetuating culture of academic misconduct supported by an industry of predatory publishing. The inclusion of scientometric targets in regulatory documents is creating specific

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demand–supply chains where (co)authorships in international journal articles are monetized, where costs can vary from several hundreds or even thousands of US dollars for Web of Science or Scopus articles to just a couple of dozens of US dollars for articles published in self-proclaimed “international” online journals with fake indicators.

### **Conclusion**

The protracted transition in research and higher education, 30 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has led to the emergence of parallel research cultures. On the one hand, a smaller number of researchers, mostly educated and trained in the West, participate in collaborating projects with international (mostly Western) counterparts. This group of researchers have a better score in terms of high-quality international publications. On the other hand, a larger group of researchers, employed by local universities and research institutes, face a similar pressure to publish, but they lack resources, training, and collaborative support to publish in decent international journals. Instead of real transformations, what we are witnessing are institutions and researchers adapting to new realities and pressures introduced by globalization, to survive the perils of “publish or perish.” ▲