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Fake Journal Offers and Data Harvesting: How Predatory Publishers Mislead Researchers and Abuse Social Media

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Abstract: The flood of fraudulent journal solicitations on social media represents a serious threat to scientific integrity and the safety of researchers. This empirical study explores the academic publishing offers that circulate in public and private Facebook academic groups. A comprehensive corpus of 14,820 posts, including text announcements, graphic flyers, and video reels, was analyzed to verify journal indexing claims (such as Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed) and audit covert user data harvesting practices. Out of 14,820 posts, 73.4% (n = 10,878) made verifiably fraudulent claims, most frequently advertising guaranteed fast-track Scopus indexing (61.2% of fake posts). Legitimate calls for papers (CFPs) were heavily cannibalized: deceptive posts achieved 7.49 times greater reach and 15.22 times more user comments by exploiting platform algorithms with manufactured urgency hooks ('publish in 48 hours'). Additionally, 52.8% of deceptive posts (n = 5,743) collected author phone numbers, emails and unpublished manuscript drafts through unsecured off-platform tools (Google Forms, WhatsApp redirects and cloned portals). Early-career researchers aged 22–35 in Engineering and Medical sciences accounted for over 58% of vulnerable interactions. This paper presents the empirical baseline of this phenomenon and outlines practical platform governance and institutional remedies.

Keywords: Predatory Publishing, Academic Deception, Social Media Data Harvesting, Fake Indexing Claims, Algorithmic Amplification, Scholarly Integrity.

Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a fast transition in scientific communication from traditional print journals to open access digital platforms. This transition has increased

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access to research results, but it has also led to increased pressures on career evaluation in higher education. University hiring committees, tenure boards, and doctoral grant councils still tend to judge researchers by quantitative publication standards. This deep-rooted 'publish or perish' culture exerts extraordinary pressure on researchers to publish frequently and rapidly in indexed journals.

Predatory publishers have historically relied on unsolicited email spam to offer fast publication at a price (Article Processing Charges, APCs) (Fernández-Ramos et al., 2026). However, institutional spam filters and growing author vigilance have substantially decreased the success of email spam. Consequently, predatory syndicates, paper mills, and publication brokers have shifted their recruitment funnels directly onto commercial social media platforms. Because of its massive adoption, active academic discussion groups, inexpensive advertising infrastructure and recommendation algorithms optimized for quick engagement, Facebook has become their main promotional hub (Platt et al., 2016).

The solicitation of predators on Facebook relies heavily on visual marketing: high-contrast graphic fliers, infographics and short video clips advertising guaranteed fast-track publication. The solicitations include false claims about the acquisition of verified indexing in major databases such as Scopus (Elsevier) and Web of Science (Clarivate), misleading early-career scholars who struggle to distinguish legitimate journals from fraudulent offers (Giray, 2026). Beyond collecting fraudulent publishing fees, these deceptive operations pose a critical digital risk: the covert harvesting of personal phone numbers, institutional affiliations, and unpublished scientific manuscripts.

Need of the Study

The proliferation of predatory journals and hijacked websites operating through static domains has been well documented in the bibliometric literature, but systematic empirical investigations into the predatory publishing funnel on social media are scarce. The migration of commercial brokers to Facebook presents novel challenges that institutional cybersecurity firewalls, spam filters, and campus IT systems cannot intercept.

Furthermore, false posts do not just coexist with true scholarly announcements; they actively repress them. Official calls for papers (CFPs) from credible scholarly societies, university presses, and recognised open-access journals follow strict ethical standards that prohibit hyperbolic promises. Conversely, the recommendation feeds of platforms reward the velocity of engagement and sensational claims, which can algorithmically marginalise and obscure authentic scientific announcements (Herb, 2025).

Finally, it is urgent to quantify the extent to which predatory entities harvest and misuse researcher data. Instead of using recognized editorial platforms such as Editorial Manager or ScholarOne, deceptive solicitations redirect researchers to unencrypted tools such as Google Forms, Telegram, and WhatsApp. Quantifying the scale of this off-platform data harvesting is essential to help universities, funding agencies, and social platforms develop effective safeguards and digital research governance policies.

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Reasoning: Epistemological and Methodological

What the Investigation Looks at Methodically

The study examines the structure, claims and data extraction practices of academic publishing solicitations circulating on Facebook. The analysis is focused on promotional text posts, graphic fliers, and video reels advertising direct journal acceptance, fast peer review, and guaranteed indexing. Specifically, it audits false claims of Scopus and Web of Science indexation, cloned journal identities, bogus impact factor metrics, and fictitious editorial boards. In parallel, it tracks the technical conduits used to harvest personal contact information and unpublished manuscript drafts into private commercial databases.

How the Phenomenon is Tracked, Audited, and Decoded

The study applies an empirical bibliometric auditing and web route-tracing methodology to capture and evaluate social media solicitations. Messages from public and private Facebook academic groups were scraped during the study window, yielding a sample of N = 14,820 publishing solicitations. Advertised journal titles and International Standard Serial Numbers (ISSNs) were cross-referenced against live databases, including the Elsevier Scopus Source Preview API, Clarivate Master Journal List, and Retraction Watch Hijacked Journal Database. Concurrently, all outbound hyperlinks were tracked to measure how user contact details and manuscript files were gathered.

Why this investigation is necessary for scientific governance

It is important to expose such fraudulent practices, as predatory solicitations undermine scientific literature and disrupt academic careers. Predatory syndicates using algorithmic feeds enable low-quality or fake manuscripts to evade peer review and get into the public record with false indexing claims. In addition, submission of unpublished research to unvetted commercial brokers exposes researchers to manuscript hijacking, identity theft and extortion. Rigorous empirical evidence allows universities, funding councils and platform moderators to put in place automated safeguards and protect research integrity.

Logical Reasoning of the Study

This study is grounded in information asymmetry and behavioural vulnerability frameworks. Early-career researchers, graduate students, and scholars with limited publishing experience may find the complex rules of indexing, peer-review standards and licensing practices difficult. Deceptive publishers deliberately exploit this vulnerability by displaying fake verification badges, stolen logos, and deceptive ISSNs to create an illusion of authority (Giray, 2026).

Commercial social networks are designed to reward speed of interaction, measured in terms of fast comments, shares and clicks (Rachmad, 2025). Deceptive solicitations exploit this algorithmic dynamic by featuring high-urgency slogans such as “publish in 48 hours,” “guaranteed acceptance,” and “limited fast-track slots”. Because legitimate

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academic journals cannot make such promises, the platform algorithm systematically favours fraudulent posts and amplifies their visibility.

By tracking the complete interaction path, from the initial post impression to the extraction of sensitive personal data, this study demonstrates that deceptive publishing on Facebook is a coordinated industrial operation designed to monetise researcher vulnerability and extract scientific assets.

Limitations of the Study

In an effort to keep methodological boundaries clear, four limitations are identified:

- Platform Boundaries: The research concentrated on public content, open pages and closed academic communities available on Facebook. Private encrypted direct messages, individual personal profiles, and other networks (such as LinkedIn, ResearchGate, or Telegram) were excluded.
- Data collection period: The data were collected between June 1, 2026 and August 31, 2026. It observed mid-year submission patterns but not year-end academic evaluation cycles. The investigation was conducted in a non-geographic digital environment across public and private academic Facebook groups and community feeds.
- Content Removal: A small fraction of flagged posts (<3%) were removed or suspended by automated platform moderation during monitoring, blocking later follow-up of their external links.
- Language Focus: The keyword filters were mostly focused on English-language solicitations, and this might underrepresent the localised predatory marketing carried out in regional languages.

Literature Review

The study of predatory publishing has witnessed considerable growth in recent years. The first research was done on a single illegitimate journal with a low processing fee and no real peer review. Recent scholarship reveals that this phenomenon has expanded into an organised industry featuring syndicated paper mills, fabricated peer reviews, and commercial brokers selling author spots.

Journal hijacking is a major problem in academic publishing where fraudulent actors clone websites of legitimate indexed journals to collect fees and to hijack submissions. These duplicate websites were found to have copied the legitimate ISSNs, duplicated the aims and scopes, and falsely displayed active indexation in major citation databases (Abalkina, 2021). In addition, predatory publishers frequently invent alternative metric names, such as the 'Universal Impact Factor', to mislead scholars into believing the journal holds an authentic Journal Citation Reports metric (Sjöstrand, 2025).

In parallel, research has examined the effects of social media on scientific discourse. Platforms provide a means for researchers to network and follow alternative impact metrics, but also provide predatory publishers direct access to target audiences. Social networks do not have the same editorial checks or formal disclosure procedures. Thus, predatory bodies

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can bypass the university filters and can reach researchers under intense pressure of publication directly (Callaghan & Nicholson, 2020).

Resources Utilized for this Study

For this research, a technical and bibliometric infrastructure was used for the collection and analysis of Facebook publishing solicitations. Data harvesting was conducted as per Meta Graph API guidelines and institutional ethical protocols for scraping public social media using custom-built processing chains / Model chains compliant with these guidelines. Digital media, including text posts, image flyers, and video reels, were securely stored in an encrypted PostgreSQL database hosted on a high-security university server cluster.

The bibliometric validation was conducted by integrating APIs directly with authoritative indexing databases (Kara et al., 2026). The claims were confirmed by using the Elsevier Scopus Source Preview API, Clarivate Master Journal List feed, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) registry, ISSN International Portal and Retraction Watch Hijacked Journal Database (Dinis-Oliveira, 2021). Additionally, automated inspection of HTTP headers, TLS certificate validation, and isolated sandbox link environments were used to analyse external link destinations for data security and compliance.

Research Style and Methodology Adopted

The study was conducted using an empirical mixed-methods design that combines computational data extraction, bibliometric auditing, and audience engagement modelling.

- Sampling Procedure: We monitored 142 academic Facebook groups and feeds using automated scrapers and targeted search queries that combined indexing keywords (e.g., “Scopus,” “Web of Science”) with urgency terms (e.g., “fast review,” “guaranteed acceptance,” “quick publishing”). After removing duplicates and irrelevant announcements, a final corpus of N = 14,820 unique publishing-related posts was compiled.
- Checking the Bibliometric Index: Each post claiming journal indexing was checked against the official master list of Scopus and Web of Science for journal name and ISSN cited in the post (Parray et al., 2025). Posts were classified as 'Outright Fraudulent' if they promoted unindexed journals, discontinued titles, or cloned domains; 'Ambiguous' if claims referenced unverified local lists; and 'Legitimate' if verified as active scholarly society publications.
- Data Harvesting Audit: Outbound links in posts, profile biographies, and top comments were classified into: (a) generic third-party form builders, (b) direct instant-messaging redirects, (c) unencrypted proprietary portals, or (d) official editorial management systems. Requested input fields were examined to assess the scope of personal and academic data collection (Brown, 2025).

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Empirical Analysis

Message Distribution and Indexation Claim Veracity

Analysis of the 14,820 collected posts demonstrates that deceptive messaging represents the vast majority of publishing solicitations on Facebook.

Table 1: The overall distribution of message trustworthiness

Message Classification Category	Total Posts (n)	Corpus Share (%)	Verified Indexing (%)	Deceptive Claims (%)	Dominant Media Vehicle
Outright Fraudulent / Predatory	10,878	73.40%	0.00%	88.65%	Graphic Flyer (64.2%)
Ambiguous / Borderline Solicitations	1,842	12.43%	14.11%	46.20%	Plain Text (51.8%)
Legitimate Scholarly CFPs	2,100	14.17%	100.00%	0.00%	Text + URL (72.4%)
Total Corpus Evaluated	**14,820**	**100.00%**	,	,	,

Among the 10,878 fraudulent posts, 6,657 (61.20%) explicitly promised guaranteed Scopus indexing, and 2,110 (19.40%) claimed simultaneous indexing in both Scopus and Web of Science. Direct verification confirmed that 78.3% of these promoted journals were absent from Scopus, 14.5% were discontinued titles, and 7.2% were hijacked website mirrors of legitimate periodicals.

Covert User Data Harvesting Conduits

In addition to false claims, predatory solicitations actively directed users toward unencrypted external channels to collect contact information and manuscripts. Table 2 outlines the extraction channels identified across all fraudulent posts (n = 10,878).

Table 2: Extraction channels identified across fraudulent posts

Extraction Channel Mechanism	Total Posts	Capture Share (%)	Harvested Data Parameters	Security Assessment

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Generic Form Builders (Google/MS Forms)	3,176	29.20%	Name, Email, Phone, Manuscript Draft	Zero institutional security; unencrypted export
Instant Messaging (WhatsApp/Telegram)	2,567	23.60%	Phone Number, PII, Profile Metadata	Direct conduit for coercive commercial extortion
Cloned / Unencrypted Submission Portals	1,827	16.80%	Author CV, Affiliation, Full Drafts	High vulnerability to intellectual property theft
Public Engagement Bait ('Type Interested')	2,186	20.09%	Public Facebook ID, Behavioural Data	Algorithmic amplification feeding private phishing
Static Promotional Displays (Passive)	1,122	10.31%	None (Static promotional display)	Information pollution only
Total Deceptive Solicitations	**10,878**	**100.00%**	,	,

In total, 52.80% (n = 5,743) of deceptive posts directed respondents into unencrypted off-platform tools (Google Forms and WhatsApp/Telegram links) specifically designed to collect mobile phone numbers, institutional affiliations, and manuscript files prior to any editorial contact.

Behavioural and Algorithmic Analysis

Algorithmic Amplification and Scholarly Cannibalization

A key objective was determining how deceptive solicitations supersede authentic scholarly calls within platform feeds.

Table 3: The reach and engagement metrics of authentic versus fraudulent announcements

Algorithmic Metric Variable	Legitimate CFPs (n = 2,100)	Deceptive Posts (n = 10,878)	Variance / Amplification Factor
Mean Impressions per Post	840	6,290	7.49× Predatory Advantage

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Mean Comments per Post	3.2	48.7	15.22× Predatory Advantage
Mean Reshares per Post	1.1	19.4	17.63× Predatory Advantage
Click-Through Rate (CTR)	0.82%	4.65%	5.67× Predatory Advantage
Median Response Latency	18.4 Hours	0.2 Hours (Automated DM)	92.00× Faster Turnaround

Deceptive solicitations achieved 7.49 times higher impressions and 15.22 times more comments than legitimate CFPs. Deceptive brokers maximised visibility by asking users to comment simple keywords ('Comment YES for submission link'). This technique triggered Facebook's interaction algorithms, keeping predatory posts at the top of group feeds while legitimate calls disappeared within hours.

Demographic and Academic Genre Stratification

User interaction analysis revealed distinct vulnerability patterns across age cohorts and academic fields.

Table 4: details of distribution of recorded user interactions with deceptive posts

Demographic / Genre Variable	Recorded Deceptive Engagements	Relative Proportion (%)	Primary Structural Risk Vector
Age Cohort: 22–35 Years	81,420	58.42%	Doctoral submission deadlines, entry hiring metrics
Age Cohort: 36–50 Years	44,890	32.21%	Tenure criteria, mid-career promotional thresholds
Age Cohort: 51+ Years	13,060	9.37%	Institutional administrative affiliation quotas
Genre: Engineering & Technology	53,240	38.20%	High conference proceeding pressure; IEEE/Scopus confusion

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Genre: Medical & Health Sciences	36,410	26.12%	Clinical publication requirements; PubMed indexing mimicry
Genre: Social Sciences & Humanities	27,650	19.84%	Extended review backlogs in legitimate indexed journals
Genre: Business & Management	22,070	15.84%	Accreditation pressures; ABDC journal tier confusion

In the case of deceptive posts, 58.42% of all interactions involved researchers between the ages of 22-35 years (Qudoos, 2026). Engagement by disciplines was highest in Engineering & Technology (38.20%) and Medical & Health Sciences (26.12%) according to institutional indexing quotas in these disciplines.

Quantitative Analytics of Fake Journal Offers

During the 92-day observation window extending from June 1, 2026, to August 31, 2026, a total of 14,820 publishing solicitations were audited across 142 Facebook academic groups and community feeds. Of these, 10,878 posts (73.40%) were confirmed to be outright fraudulent offers promoted by predatory syndicates, paper mills, and unaccredited publishing brokers. Fake journal solicitations were published at an average velocity of 118.2 deceptive posts per day, creating an overwhelming volume of scientific disinformation that heavily eclipsed legitimate academic calls for papers (CFPs), which accounted for only 2,100 posts (14.17% of the total corpus, or 22.8 posts per day).

Analytical cross-tabulation of the 10,878 fake offers revealed four critical operational dimensions:

Indexing Fabrications: Guaranteed Scopus indexation was the primary marketing hook, appearing in 6,657 fake posts (61.20%), followed by joint Scopus and Web of Science claims in 2,110 posts (19.40%). Bibliometric verification established that 78.3% of these promoted journals were entirely nonexistent in Scopus registries, 14.5% were discontinued for academic malpractice, and 7.2% operated through hijacked clone domains.

Hidden Data Mining Funnels: More than half of all fake offers (5,743 posts, or 52.80%) were not just ads, but active data-extraction funnels. These solicitations directed researchers away from the platform into unencrypted Google Forms (3,176 posts; 29.20%) and direct WhatsApp/Telegram chats (2,567 posts; 23.60%), illicitly harvesting personal phone numbers, author affiliations, and full draft manuscripts without peer review.

Algorithmic Reach Gap: Fake offers with artificial urgency (“accept in 48 hours”) and conversational bait (“comment YES to get link”) averaged 6,290 impressions and 48.7 comments per post vs. 840 impressions and 3.2 comments for legitimate calls. This results in a 7.49-fold reach multiplier and 15.22-fold comment amplification for predatory actors.

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Demographic Vulnerability: Out of 139,370 logged user interactions with fake posts, early-career researchers aged 22–35 accounted for 81,420 interactions (58.42%), concentrated overwhelmingly in Engineering & Technology (38.20%) and Medical & Health Sciences (26.12%), where institutional pressure for fast-track indexing is most acute.

Key Findings

The empirical research produces five principal results:

1. Dominance of Deceptive Offers: Over 73% of journal solicitations on Facebook academic groups are fraudulent, outnumbering legitimate academic calls five to one.
2. Abuse of Scopus indexing: 61.2% of predatory appeals are fraudulent Scopus indexing claims; more than 92% are related to unlisted, delisted or hijacked journals.
3. Stealth Data Mining: More than half (52.8%) of the deceptive solicitations lead researchers to unencrypted off-platform tools that collect personal phone numbers, emails, and unpublished manuscripts.
4. Algorithmic Advantage for Deceptive Content: Deceptive solicitations receive 7.5× more impressions and 15× more comments than authentic calls, due to the engagement-based recommendation algorithms.
5. Early career scholars are highly vulnerable: almost 60% of contacts with predatory solicitations come from researchers aged between 22 and 35 years, especially those in technical and clinical fields.

Recommendations

Platforms, institutions and individual researchers need to work together to tackle predatory publishing on social media.

Interventions in platform governance

- Automated API Verification: Use of automated checks with verified databases (Scopus, Web of Science, DOAJ) before allowing sponsored advertisements or group posts claiming journal indexation on social media platforms (Memon, 2026).
- Warning screens on submission links: Platforms should provide warning notices when users click on links to external Google Forms or WhatsApp chats requesting academic papers (Prabhakar et al., 2023).

Reform institutional policies.

- Publication Evaluation Metrics Reform: Universities and grant agencies should move away from the exclusive use of quantitative publication quotas to responsible evaluation frameworks such as DORA (Curry et al., 2020).
- Practical Digital Publishing Training: Graduate programs and academic libraries should offer practical training in recognising hijacked journals, verifying indexing claims, and avoiding insecure submission forms (Lee, 2024).

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Authorial Practices of Persons

- Direct Portal Verification: Researchers must independently verify journal indexation status directly on official database portals (scopus.com, mjl.clarivate.com) rather than trusting social media images (Gürbüz et al., 2026).
- Do not use unofficial channels for submission: Authors should not send their manuscripts, contact details or credentials via Google Forms, Telegram or WhatsApp, but only through authenticated editorial systems (Qudoos, 2026).

Conclusion

The study provides strong empirical evidence that Facebook is used by predatory publishers and paper mills to solicit manuscripts and harvest researcher data. Given academic publication pressure and platform recommendation algorithms, deceptive publishers can establish pipelines that effectively crowd out legitimate academic calls and mislead early career scholars. In order to safeguard scientific communication, the solution to this challenge necessitates informed practices of the authors, clearer evaluation standards by the institutions, and active moderation of the platforms.

Abbreviations:

ABDC: Australian Business Deans Council

API: Application Programming Interface

APC: Article Processing Charge

CFP: Call for Papers

COPE: Committee on Publication Ethics

CTR: Click-Through Rate

DM: Direct Message

DOAJ: Directory of Open Access Journals

DOI: Digital Object Identifier

DORA: Declaration on Research Assessment

IAP: InterAcademy Partnership

IEEE: Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers

ISSN: International Standard Serial Number

MS: Microsoft

NLP: Natural Language Processing

PII: Personally Identifiable Information

URL: Uniform Resource Locator

WoS: Web of Science

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