

Proposed Criteria for Identifying Predatory Conferences

Any academic with an email spam folder realizes that the problem of predatory conferences continues to grow at an alarming rate. Predatory conferences are for-profit, low-quality academic meetings that exploit researchers' need to share and present their research.

The overall conference experience often suffers at predatory conferences. However, not all predatory conference organizers are small, fly-by-night operations working out of third world countries. Predatory conference organizers want to make as much money as possible and there's more money to be made by offering a decently organized conference. Therefore a polished conference experience shouldn't automatically qualify a conference as legitimate and non-predatory. A well-run conference allowing low-quality research to get presented alongside that of research from famous keynote speakers and honest academics in order to maximize revenues remains predatory.

Given the rise in the number of predatory conferences and the increasingly sophisticated organizations selling them, I believe it has become necessary to develop a set of criteria to identify predatory conferences.

Drawing partly on the document "Recommended Practices to Ensure Technical Conference Content Quality", originally presented by Gordon MacPherson at the 4th World Conference on Research Integrity Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, June 2, 2015, I propose the following checklist to classify a conference as predatory.

Criteria for Determining Predatory Conferences

- 1) Any use of deceit automatically labels a conference organizer as predatory.
 - a) Claiming to be a non-profit when the organizer is a for-profit company.
 - b) Hiding or obscuring relationships with for-profit partner companies.
 - c) Falsely claiming the involvement of people on advisory boards or organizing committees.
 - d) Falsely claiming universities or other organizations as partners or sponsors.
 - e) Listing addresses or phone numbers that are nonexistent or false.
 - f) Using organization names that imply they are based in one country or region when in fact they operate out of a different country or region.

g) A lack of transparency by using fake names to hide the identity of organizers or their country of origin. Failing to list the names of individuals owning or controlling the organization.

h) Organizers falsely claiming academic positions or academic qualifications.

2) Inadequate peer review.

a) No peer review takes place or a single reader reviews submissions.

b) Peer review is not independent; the conference organizer, owner, or employees review submissions.

c) Peer reviewers read abstracts or papers in a subject matter outside their field or lack credentials or experience to do so.

d) Vetting of peer reviewers is absent or inadequate.

e) Machine-generated or other “sting” abstracts or papers get accepted.

3) Other criteria common to predatory conferences.

- High fees.

a) The conference fee is higher than typical in the field.

b) Presenters pay more than attendees.

- The conference is overly broad in scope.

a) The organizer simultaneously holds multiple conferences at the same time and place.

b) The same conference is held multiple times a year in different cities.

c) A single organization holds conferences in very different fields.

- Fast acceptance of submissions.

a) Submitted abstracts or papers receive acceptance within a week.

b) Submitted abstracts receive acceptance before the Call for Papers has closed.

- Regular extensions to the Call for Papers submission deadline or accepting papers after the deadline passed.

- Connections to other predatory conferences or journals.

a) Conference papers get funneled to known or suspected predatory journals.

b) Presenters, session chairs, keynote speakers, or conference proceeding editors have connections to other predatory conferences or journals.

- Virtual Presentations
 - a) Acceptance of virtual presentations that are not presented to an audience.
 - b) Papers presented as a virtual presentation are included in conference proceedings without being identified as such.

- Awarding best paper prizes before the end of the conference, awarding multiple “best paper” prizes.

- Regularly accepting papers by undergraduates.

- Using undergraduate or Master’s students as peer reviewers.

- The conference gets marketed as a holiday. Conference websites and emails resemble travel brochures rather than conference notices.

- Using the term “international” in the organization name or conference title when the conference organizers and/or attendees overwhelmingly come from a single country.

- The conference organizer publishes journals that consist primarily of conference papers, especially if papers get published twice in the journal and the official conference proceedings without major revisions.

- The organizer promises that papers will be published in unnamed journals that are indexed in ISI, SCOPUS, or some other commonly-used whitelist.

- There is no attempt to digitally preserve conference proceedings or make them available.

- The organizer regularly sends spam emails to people outside the field of the conference.

- There are insufficient contact details. Or the headquarters location is obscured by using P.O. boxes or virtual offices. Or the listed office is in reality a private home.

- The name of the person registering the organization or its conference websites is hidden.
- Conferences are regularly cancelled or conference venues changed on short notice.
- Conference dinners or associated tours are offered at a profit.
- Listing the names of “supported” organizations when no support is actually given.
- The name of the conference matches or nearly matches the name of an established, respected conference.
- Organizers create a “society”, “association” or “institute” and name it as the sponsor or organizer of the conference.
- Conference websites contain spelling mistakes, grammar mistakes, or unnatural English.
- One person is allowed to make multiple presentations to a single conference.
- There is no limit placed on the number of presenters for a single paper.