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The story of fake impact factor companies and how we detected them

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Abstract

Beginning about three years ago, the world of academic publishing has become infected by fake impact factors and misleading metrics that are launched by bogus companies. The misleading metrics and fake impact factors have damaged the prestige and reliability of scientific research and scholarly journals. This article presents the in-depth story of some of the main bogus impact factors, how they approached the academic world, and how the author identified them. Some names that they use are Universal Impact Factor (UIF), Global Impact Factor (GIF), and Citefactor, and there even is a fake Thomson Reuters Company.

Keywords: Counterfeit, Journal Impact Factor, Indexing, Peer Review, Hijacked journal

During the last decade, the world of academic research and publication was attacked by low quality and commercial journals that mimic the peer-reviewed scientific journals that I call this phenomenon “questionable journals” (1). Later, fake conferences were scheduled and money was collected from authors, but the conferences never occurred (1, 2). Subsequently, the phenomenon of hijacked journals came into existence in October 2011, and I detected it in early 2012 (1, 3–5). The next phenomenon was the outbreak of fake publishers whose journals never appeared anywhere (1). These journals had convincing sounding names, such as the Science Record Journals, the Thomas Publications Journals (Thomaspub), and the Recent Science journals. However, the sad story continued, and in, August 2013, I detected and reported five fake impact factor companies that claimed to calculate impact factors for scientific journals (6). Indeed those impact factors were bogus metrics that were introduced to the academic world by fake companies that were not

registered anywhere by anyone (7). The purpose of this article is to provide some more detailed information concerning how some of the fake impact factors and metrics came into existence and infected the world of academic publishing.

The Global Impact Factor (GIF) was among the first fake metrics (6), and it first appeared on the scene October 24, 2012 by the invisible cybercriminal whom I identified to be Mr. [redacted], using the phone number [redacted] and address [redacted] in the South Asian country [redacted]. The invisible founder of GIF is also actively spamming the several academic forums such as “Researchgate” to discuss the advantages of the fake metric “GIF” over other metrics and broadcasting a lot of nonsense and lies against the Thomson Reuter’s Impact factor and Index Copernicus metric value (ICV). Then, in 2013, the bogus Citefactor and Universal Impact Factor (UIF) were introduced to the academic world by cybercriminals on June 27 and July 11, respectively. These three fake metrics were among the most reputable fake metrics in the world of academic publishing, and my use of the word “reputable” to describe them means that their logos and metrics appeared on the homepage of many journals, including high-quality, peer-reviewed journals published by universities and in some other journals with low or questionable quality. GIF has even gone to the extent of overtly collecting evaluation fees using Paypal, which made it easy to identify who was running this fake company even though he tried to hide his identity using “privacyprotect.org” on the same day he registered the domain “globalimpactfactor.com”. Many other cybercriminals behind the hijacked journals have used exactly the same service, i.e., “privacyprotect.org,” including the cybercriminals behind Afinidad journal (afinidadjournal.org), Wulfenia journal (wulfeniajournal.com), Textile journal (TekstilJournal.com), Cahiers de Paiolive (ijiq.com), GAIA-ATHENS Journal (gix.info and new-sciences.com), The Veliger (theveliger.net), and GMP Review (euromed.uk.com).

There is an interesting story associated with the fake metric identified as the Universal Impact Factor (UIF) (6). The domain “uifactor.org” was registered by Assistant Professor Dr. [redacted], a publishing service provider in the south Asian country [redacted] in July 2013. Among the distinguished and novel services that publishing house offered the academic world were, I would have to say, numerous “academic pain relieving services” with mottos and advertisements that included “Publish your book in America,” “We write your books in 15 minutes and publish it in USA,” “Publish your book with international ISBN,” “We start your journal from A–Z,” “We build editorial team for your journal,” “We index your journal in Impact factor companies” (which I assumed would be GIF, UIF, and some of the other fake metrics). The South Asian publishing house behind the UIF also is involved in selecting topics and writing theses for postgraduate students. So, there is no doubt about the logic behind launching the fake impact factor service “UIF”. The domain “uifactor.org” also is using the hiding service of “privacyprotect.org” to conceal the identity of the person or company behind the UIF and many other “Academic pain relieving services” for authors, researchers, and scientific journals.

Citefactor is the other “reputable” fake metric, and it was launched on three websites, i.e., citefactor.org, citefactor.com, and citefactor.net; however, the main domain for this bogus metric was citefactor.org, and the other two websites usually are redirected to that domain. The person behind Citefactor also used the “privacyprotect.org” service to hide his identity, and we know that he was from the South Asian country [redacted]. However, on October 5, 2014, he changed to a hiding service to that provided by “domainsbyproxy.com.” The bogus company responsible for Citefactor

also is involved in other dishonest and misleading services, including the [redacted], a research archiving service that claims to be in United States of America and the fake organization with the name of “Institute for Scientific Information,” which obviously attempted to steal the reputation of Thomson Reuters. Just a few weeks after registering the domains for Citefactor, this bogus company used the title “Directory Indexing of International Research Journals” and released a long list of Citefactor impact factors for 8,281 scientific journals. “Citefactor list 2012,” which was published in the summer of 2013, reported five metrics for the journals, including “Total Cites,” “Impact Factor,” “5-Year Impact Factor,” “Number of calculated articles,” “Cited Half- life,” and “Article Influence TM Score,” all of which are fake. [Figure 1](#) shows the logo of Citefactor and its self-definition.

[Figure 1.](#)

Logo and a self-definition of Citefactor

On May 25, 2014, Citefactor announced its novel idea of “real time impact factor” to support its claim of being the “World’s Largest Indexing of Scholarly Journals.” [Box 1](#), presents the exact sentences that the cybercriminals at Citefactor used to announce their fake, “real time impact factor.” Citefactor has continued its work, and, as of late March in 2015, had included 12,178 scientific journals in its impact factor list. However, at the same time, the entire Citefactor website disappeared. Just two months before I wrote this story, all of Citefactor’s services and its websites were suspended. However, Citefactor was not this bogus company’s only service, because I found that the same fake company was behind the fake “Institute for Scientific Information.” This fake “Institute” was launched after the cybercriminals registered the domain “[isi-thomsonreuters.com](#)” on February 27, 2014, which they intended to be mistaken for the Thomson Reuters Company and its former title “Institute of Scientific Information.” The domain was registered using a fake address and a fake name in Aberdeen, England, but its Name Servers were pointed to the servers of a web-hosting company in the South Asian country [redacted]. Later, it used the service of “privateregistrations.ws” to hide the identity of the cybercriminal behind this fake company, and, currently, the entire website is offline. [Box 2](#), below, presents the content of the homepage of the fake company’s website. The fake “Institute for Scientific Information” was active only for a short time, from February to December 2014, but, during these 11 months, it calculated fake impact factors for 162 scientific journals, most of which were from the same South Asian country.

Box 1.

Citefactor’s announcement launching its “real time impact factor” service on May 25, 2014

Bestowed with the eminence of the finest service provider for open access journals, CiteFactor with its announcement of a new feature launch called as the ‘Real Time Impact Factor’ for research paper is creating ripples amongst industry enthusiasts.

Box 2.

Self-definition of the fake “Institute for Scientific Information” as published on the homepage of “<http://www.isi-thomsonreuters.com>” from February to December 2014

The mission of Institute for Science Information (ISI) is to provide comprehensive coverage of the world’s most important and influential journals and research results. ISI is today’s premier research and solution platform, helping you identify, analyze, and share information quickly in the Arts, Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, Engineering and Technology inter - disciplines.

Institute for Science Information (ISI is the world’s leading source of Journal impact factor information for businesses professionals and scientists. We combine industry expertise with innovative technology to deliver critical information to leading decision makers in the science, technology, engineering, financial, legal, tax and accounting, healthcare and media markets.

ISI was established by a group of renowned Professors, researchers, scientists and educationists having multi geographical representations in 1999 with an objective of providing quality metrics and journal analytics to the researcher. ISI is offering academic database services to researcher like citation indexing, journal analytics and maintaining citation databases covering thousands of academic journals, research artifacts, findings, analysis, books, proceedings and any approved documents.

Currently, there are many fake impact factor companies and misleading metrics, perhaps as many as 20–30, but the actual number is unknown. These fake companies have infected the world of academic publishing, and it really hurts those of us who wish to uphold scientific authenticity and credibility when we see these low quality and questionable journals (6). Even more discouraging is that fact that some truly reputable peer-reviewed journals and some universities have been duped by the cybercriminals and actually have added the logo of the fake impact factor companies and their assigned metrics on their journals’ websites. In one specific case, I called the Editor-in-Chief of a high-quality, university-based medical journal to ask him to remove the metrics assigned to his journal by one of the most “reputable” fake impact factor companies. Much to my amazement and disappointment, he refused to do so even though he knew that the metric was fake. I end this article with a hope that one day in the future, the academic world can be freed of such scams as fake conferences, fake journals, hijacked journals, real conferences that are integrated with hijacked journals, and questionable journals that masquerade as peer-reviewed journals. I also hope that I will see an end to the “Academic Pain Relieving Service,” which engages in such unethical and harmful activities as selling the authorship for journal papers, buying the authorship of papers written by others, writing postgraduate theses, and plagiarism.

Conflict of Interest:

Mehrdad Jalalian is an editor of the “Electronic Physician”.

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