Ethical considerations of the Andrra Qielli “sting” by Albana Berisha Qehaja

Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva

Independent researcher, P. O. Box 7, Miki-cho post office, Ikenobe 3011-2, Kagawa-ken, 761-0799, Japan.

ARTICLE INFO

Letter to Editors

ABSTRACT

This letter examines the ethics of a “sting” paper submitted by Dr. Albana Berisha Qehaja, a faculty member of the Department of Management and Informatics, Faculty of Economy, University of Prishtina, Republic of Kosovo. In that paper, which stung this journal, IJRBS, Dr. Qehaja created a fake paper, with a fake name and fake institutional affiliation, as well as specially crafted email and ORCID accounts to masquerade the identity of the true author of the fake paper, namely Dr. Qehaja. Such behavior is not only an act of extreme scholarly malpractice, it is one of the most unethical behaviors in academic publishing because it violates all of the journal’s and international ethics’ practices for submission of a paper to a journal. Other academics thinking of employing such unethical tactics for any publishing-related objective should reconsider their options and carefully calculate the ethical, legal and possibly criminal consequences of such actions.

© 2020 by the authors. Licensee SSBFNET, Istanbul, Turkey. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Dear International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science Editors,

A now-retracted paper written by Dr. Albana Berisha Qehaja¹, and that was published in the *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (IJRBS)*² (Qehaja, 2019), has several unethical aspects worthy of reflection since they may serve as an example to other academics who might consider copying what Dr. Qehaja did. In 2017, Dr. Qehaja obtained her PhD at the Department of Management and Informatics, Faculty of Economy, University of Prishtina, in the Republic of Kosovo. That “sting” paper was in fact not published as “Albana Berisha Qehaja”, but rather with the “author” name “Andrra Qielli”, who claimed to be affiliated with “Triumph University, Tirana, Albania”, as was revealed in the Kosovan and international media.

What elements of Dr. Qehaja’s paper were unethical? Apparently, through public admission and revelations, all aspects of that paper were either false, fake, or fraudulent, all of which were created by Dr. Qehaja. Specifically, Dr. Qehaja created a fake author (“Andrra Qielli”), a fake affiliation (“Triumph University, Tirana, Albania”), an Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID) to disguise the fake “author”³, and an email (gmail) to support the fake author’s communication and submission of purposefully manipulated content to deceive the journal and its editors and reviewers. Fake elements are increasing in academic publishing, and are one major factor eroding its integrity (Teixeira da Silva, 2017a).

The possible oversight and errors by the journal and publisher will be dealt with separately so as to focus exclusively on the ethical infractions of the real author (Albana Berisha Qehaja) and so as not to confuse or distract the reader. In essence, this “fake” paper was submitted to *IJRBS* to expose apparent editorial and peer review oversight, as a “sting” paper, to support her claims that faculty members at the same institution were receiving rewards and/or privileges based on publications in low-level journals that did not

¹ https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Albana_Berisha_Qehaja (Department of Management and Informatics, Faculty of Economy, University of Prishtina, Republic of Kosovo) (last accessed: October 29, 2020)

² <https://www.ssbfn.net/ojs/index.php/ijrbs/index> (eISSN: 2147-4478) (last accessed: October 29, 2020)

³ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5792-447X> (last accessed: October 29, 2020)

* Corresponding author. [ResearchGate](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jaime_A_Teixeira_da_Silva)

© 2020 by the authors. Hosting by SSBFNET. Peer review under responsibility of Center for Strategic Studies in Business and Finance.

<https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v9i6.925>

conduct proper peer review. That paper had been translated from Albanian to English. Therefore, it was impossible to detect any textual similarity or plagiarism using the plagiarism detection software, iThenticate. Such journals, in some circles of academia, are referred to as “predatory” journals, although they can be indistinguishable from low-level or unscholarly journals, or even exploitative journals (Teixeira da Silva et al., 2019). According to the same media source, Dr. Qehaja may have had structural, moral and/or financial support (payment of an open access €110 article processing cost) from ORCA, the Organization for Improving the Quality of Education.

Which of the journal’s ethical guidelines⁴ were contravened? The *IJRBS* guidelines state “publication malpractice is strictly prohibited.” By providing fake, false and misleading information upon submission, Dr. Qehaja displayed a lack of integrity, violated the submission ethics codes, and thus committed misconduct. The guidelines also state: “The authors agree ... that its publication is approved ... tacitly or explicitly by the responsible authorities where the work was carried out.” The real author of this fake paper, Dr. Qehaja, was and is still currently employed by the University of Prishtina, although it is unknown if ethical approval was officially obtained from or provided by the university or its Faculty of Economy.

Why are sting operations in the form of fake papers with fake elements unethical? As already alluded to above, fake papers with fake elements violate stated ethical guidelines and submission requirements put in place by journals in an attempt to repel unethical or fraudulent authors, and they waste the valuable time of editors and peer reviewers (Al-Khatib & Teixeira da Silva, 2016). However, ethical guidelines rarely detract unethical or fraudulent authors who have a predetermined purpose. One of the most high-profile cases in academia, and an extreme case of ethical exceptionalism (Teixeira da Silva, 2017b), is of the hundreds of fake papers with fake authors and fake institutions – in a style similar to that created by Dr. Qehaja – submitted by John Bohannon, who “stung” Jeffrey Beall-blacklisted OA journals and other OA journals that were indexed or whitelisted, such as by the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) (Teixeira da Silva & Al-Khatib 2016). The DOAJ, where *IJRBS* is also indexed⁵, follows and adheres to the “Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing” created by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)⁶. The DOAJ has struggled to secure the integrity of its own whitelists of open access journals and publishers (Teixeira da Silva et al., 2018).

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) indicates the following in the fourth clause of their authorship criteria⁷: “Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.” Dr. Qehaja must now be held accountable, ethically, legally, and possibly even criminally, for the fake paper she published and fraudulently submitted with the intent purpose of deceiving the journal.

Other academics seeking to employ such unethical tactics for any publishing-related objective should very carefully reconsider their options and calculate the ethical, legal and possibly criminal consequences of such actions. In order to hold an entity – such as a journal or editors – accountable for its actions, all ethical options need to be exhausted, and an academic should not be forced to resort to underhanded or unethical tactics and the use of fake papers to achieve this objective. Doing so may cause them more reputational damage in the long-run, even if they feel rewarded or satisfied in the short term.

Conflicts of interest and disclaimer

The author declares no conflicts of interest. The author has been in contact, via email, with multiple protagonists of this case, which is ongoing.

References

- Al-Khatib, A., & Teixeira da Silva, J. A. (2016). Stings, hoaxes and irony breach the trust inherent in scientific publishing. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 32(3), 208–219. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-016-9473-4>
- Qehaja, A. B. (2019). Strategic management in Albanian SMEs. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 8(6), 344–350. Retrieved from <http://www.ssbfn.net.com/ojs/index.php/ijrbs/article/view/568> (retracted)
- Teixeira da Silva, J. A. (2017a). Fake peer reviews, fake identities, fake accounts, fake data: beware! *AME Medical Journal*, 2, 28. <https://doi.org/10.21037/amj.2017.02.10>
- Teixeira da Silva, J. A. (2017b). Ethical exceptionalism: can publishing rules be manipulated to give the impression of ethical publishing? *Bangladesh Journal of Medical Science*, 16(4), 610–614. <https://doi.org/10.3329/bjms.v16i4.33623>
- Teixeira da Silva, J. A., & Al-Khatib, A. (2016). Questioning the ethics of John Bohannon’s hoaxes and stings in the context of science publishing. *KOME*, 4(1), 84–88. <https://doi.org/10.17646/KOME.2016.16>
- Teixeira da Silva, J. A., Dobránszki, J., Al-Khatib, A., & Tsigaris, P. (2018). Challenges facing the DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) as a reliable source of open access publishing venues. *Journal of Educational Media & Library Sciences*, 55(3), 349–358. [https://doi.org/10.6120/JoEMLS.201811_55\(3\).e001.BC.BE](https://doi.org/10.6120/JoEMLS.201811_55(3).e001.BC.BE)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A., Dobránszki, J., Tsigaris, P., & Al-Khatib, A. (2019). Predatory and exploitative behaviour in academic publishing: An assessment. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 45(6), 102071. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2019.102071>

⁴ <https://www.ssbfn.net.com/ojs/index.php/ijrbs/ethics> (last accessed: October 29, 2020)

⁵ <https://doaj.org/toc/2147-4478> (last accessed: October 29, 2020)

⁶ <https://doaj.org/bestpractice> (last accessed: October 29, 2020)

⁷ <http://www.icmje.org/icmje-recommendations.pdf> (last accessed: October 29, 2020)