

Description

There have been several events occurring in the scientific community throughout the year 2017. In the previous article, we went through some of the infamous events in academia in 2017 such as the lawsuits and injunctions issued against Sci-Hub and the dispute between German universities and Elsevier. In this article, we would go through some more such infamous events that made academia headlines in 2017 and had a great impact on the STEM industry.

Federal Trade Commission's (FTC's) Injunction against OMICS

After Sci-Hub, the OMICS group was the target of a massive lawsuit. The group is likely to get banned in the U.S. owing to several allegations of deceptive business practices. America's Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recently won an injunction against OMICS. The FTC filed the lawsuit on August 2016 against OMICS' CEO, Srinubabu Gedela. The suit also included the OMICS Group, iMedPub, and the conference series.

OMICS handles 700 journals and 3,000 conferences. The FTC alleged that OMICS journals manipulated impact factors to encourage researchers to publish with them. They also kept the researchers in dark about the publication fees before they submitted their papers. After the paper's acceptance, OMICS would inform the authors about the fees. Moreover, they would also prevent the authors from withdrawing their papers in case they wanted to. This prevented authors from publishing elsewhere. The FTC have also accused OMICS of organizing fake or predatory conferences. In fact, a sting operation showed an OMICS conference accepting papers on the biomechanics of flying pigs. The FTC alleged that OMICS journals claimed to have conducted peer reviews that never actually happened. The FTC also insisted that OMICS' editorial boards included prominent academics without the latter having a clue about it. These allegations against OMICS reflect its predatory practices.

Restrictions on OMICS and the Response

The FTC's lawsuit objects to OMICS pretending to publish real science for a profit. Judge Gloria Navarro in Nevada has agreed with the FTC and hence, issued an injunction. In her ruling, Judge Navarro found that OMICS used misrepresentation in order to encourage authors to choose their journals. The OMICS group has a practice of sending emails to request papers on behalf of known academics without their knowledge. Judge Navarro said that without an injunction it was likely that

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OMICS would continue to use deceptive business practices.

The injunction placed restrictions on the OMICS group. It prevents OMICS from advertising speakers who will not be at its conferences. OMICS journals can no longer make false claims about who sits on their editorial boards. They cannot pretend to conduct fake peer reviews. OMICS can no longer claim wrong indexing and citation rates of its journals. The court also requires that OMICS journals inform the authors about the total publication cost, before submission of papers. This temporary injunction is the first step toward putting a permanent stop to OMICS' deceptive practices. The FTC would rely on academics to let them know if OMICS violates the temporary injunction. At that point, they would file a contempt of court motion, that could lead to OMICS returning money to researchers.

Gedela, OMICS CEO, however, is of the opinion that the lawsuit has been motivated by traditional publishers who are losing their market share to OMICS and other open access journals. Gedela made it clear that the injunction would not stop OMICS' operations in the United States. Some researchers, like Dr. Madhukar Pai, were happy to learn about the Federal Trade Commission's lawsuit against OMICS. However, Dr. Pai did not think an American injunction could effectively stop the deceptive practices of an Indian publisher. The pressure to publish and be an invited speaker made it possible for predatory conference series to exist.

Mass Resignation of Editorial Board Members of *Scientific Reports*

Earlier this year, several members of the editorial board of *Scientific Reports* magazine resigned because of plagiarism issues. According to Michael Beer, a researcher at John Hopkins University, Baltimore, the magazine had published an article which was a plagiarized version of his previous work. Being a member of the editorial board of *Scientific Reports,* the article came to his notice. He asked the magazine to retract the paper. When the magazine decided to issue a corrigendum instead, Beer found the decision inappropriate and resigned. Several other researchers of Johns Hopkins, who were also members of the editorial board, supported his call and decided to resign.

A few researchers from the Shenzhen campus of the Harbin Institute of Technology in China had published this controversial paper. It was based on algorithms that Beer published with his team in *PLOS Computational Biology*. The paper cited Beer's work in its original form. However, according to Beer, much of the 2016 paper in *Scientific Reports* restructured and published most of the content of his *PLOS* paper. Richard White, the editor of *Scientific Reports*, agreed that the Chinese authors failed to give references to Beer's work. However, they found it appropriate to issue a corrigendum to address the issue instead of retracting the paper. The researchers were not in favor of this decision. They decided to resign to express their disapproval.

What did the Researchers Say?

Researchers like Aravinda Chakravorti, Steven Salzberg, and Ted Dawson, who have been part of *Scientific Reports*, did not agree to the magazine's decision. In fact, they raised questions on the kind of peer review the editorial board conducted. With the rising number of plagiarism issues in the academic community, researchers are of the opinion that more stringent steps must be taken by the journals to avoid repetition of such plagiarism issues.

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These were only a few of the important events that shook the academic community in 2017. Let us wait to see what turn these events take in the coming year, and embrace upon the new year, as we bid farewell to 2017.

What impact will the FTC injunction have on OMICS? What do you think about the rising number of plagiarism issues in the scientific community? Which are the infamous events in academia in 2017 that affected you the most? Please share your thoughts with us in the comments section below.

Category

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Author
daveishan

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