

Natalie Ridgeway
Executive Officer,
COPE

17th July 2019

Dear Natalie,

I would like to alert you of a new form of author fraud that we have discovered.

We recently became aware of a website (<http://123mi.ru>) that serves as an online marketplace between researchers that want to sell authorship on a manuscript that has been accepted for publication and researchers that want to buy authorship. It is a Russian language site; Google translation of the headline reads:

*We sell publications of finished articles in Scopus and Web of Science journals
(articles written and accepted in journals; sold in parts or in whole).
From you only money, from us the publication and indexation.*

Neither the article titles or journal titles are disclosed on the website -- the site states the journal title will be revealed on receipt of payment. However, the following information, or a subset thereof, is shown for each article:

- Journal discipline
- Nationality of journal/publisher
- Nationality of co-authors
- Which author positions are available for purchase
- Short description of the article
- Scopus and/or Web of Science indexing details

A summary of our analysis performed on 15th July reveals:

- Authorship on 344 articles are offered for sale
- 32/344 articles are allegedly indexed in Web of Science (9% of articles)
- 303/344 articles are allegedly indexed in Scopus (88% of articles)
- the majority of listed journals are from developing economies but the UK, USA and Netherlands are also present
- the majority of customers appear to be based in Russia and Kazakhstan but other countries are represented including UAE, China and the UK

The primary transaction appears to be author-to-author (with the owners of the service presumably taking a cut) but beyond allowing post-acceptance changes in the author lists, it's not clear to what extent journal editors or publishers are aware of, or involved in, this enterprise

We take the integrity of our collection very seriously. We are continuing our investigation and taking measures aimed to bring this enterprise to a halt as well as identify and address issues with journals alleged to be indexed in Web of Science.

I wanted to bring this to your attention early as you may want to warn COPE members of this activity as soon as possible and perhaps take this opportunity to share best practice guidelines regarding post-acceptance changes to author lists.

Please do feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss further.

With all best wishes,

Nandita Quaderi

Editor-in-Chief, Web of Science