












“Members’ misrepresentation practices: The case of Russian journal editorial boards”

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MEMBERS' MISREPRESENTATION PRACTICES: THE CASE OF RUSSIAN JOURNAL EDITORIAL BOARDS

Abstract

Editorial boards are vital components of scholarly journals, ensuring the integrity, quality, and academic rigor of published research. They play a key role in guiding a journal's vision, selecting content, and upholding ethical standards. Journal reputations are reinforced by the endorsement of recognized scholars. Although many scientists worldwide have chosen to distance themselves from Russian institutions following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, we noticed that members of the global scientific community were still included on the editorial boards of journals published by an international publisher and edited by academic institutions in the Russian Federation. Given their importance, during 2024, we performed an email survey of members of non-Russian institutions serving on the editorial boards of 140 such journals and sent the letters to 709 international members of these boards. Based on 165 responses received, the findings reveal that 70.9% of international members of these editorial boards were either unaware of their membership, or did not fulfill their editorial duties, or were retired, or were deceased (17 cases). Inclusion of these individuals without their knowledge or consent clearly constitutes an unauthorized misrepresentation as to editorial board memberships, which might be harmful to the reputation of specific scientists. After the inquiries, 60.1% of respondents reported their decision to withdraw their names from these editorial boards as an ethical conflict resolution. The results of the analysis help to understand how journals and researchers respond to ethical and geopolitical challenges, ensuring that their practices comply with international standards and values.

Keywords

editorial boards, scientific integrity, reputation
manipulation, journal governance

JEL Classification

D83, F50, I23

INTRODUCTION

On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. This triggered a wide range of responses in the academic publishing community, which is well summarized in Nazarovets and Teixeira da Silva (2022). Notable is the decision of 15 international publishers on "suspending sales and marketing of products and services to research organizations in Russia and Belarus", while they "continue to publish and distribute manuscripts from authors in these countries in the independent way" (Multi-Publisher Statement on Ukraine, 2022). Not only manuscripts, but also journals founded, published, and owned by academic institutions in the Russian Federation are still widely present in the international academic sphere. Many of those journals now have an English-language version (we call them "Russian journals" thereafter). The Scopus database (owned by Elsevier) indexes more than 800 Russian journals, 77 of which were added to the index during 2022–2023, which is especially notable after the full-scale invasion. The Web of Science (WoS, owned by Clarivate) decided to "suspend all evaluation of new journal submissions from Russia and Belarus" and "made the decision to close

its office in Russia effective immediately and we will work to cease commercial activity in Russia in the coming weeks” on March 11, 2022 (Clarivate, 2022). Currently, it still indexes about 500 Russian journals. As of September 16, 2024, there are 205 COPE journal members from the Russian Federation and 41 COPE members from Ukraine. Nearly 200 journals are published by Springer Nature alone (COPE, 2024; Hryn'ova et al., 2025).

Rigor, transparency, and ethics in the composition of journal editorial boards are a cornerstone of the research quality assurance and integrity in the peer-review process. Furthermore, the reputation, consent, and highest academic values of the editorial board members are prerequisites of responsible academic publishing practices and supporting mechanisms for assurance and integrity.

Full-scale military invasion of Ukraine created an unprecedented case at the international level, highlighting the ethical conflict for scholars worldwide in their collaboration with Russian academic institutions and affiliation with Russian journals' editorial boards.

Misrepresenting membership of well-recognized scholars and nominal assurance and peer-review activities in Russian journals' editorial boards might be a way to mask academic isolation, uncovering this ethical and integrity conflict.

To explore the scale of the conflict, the current paper aims to demonstrate and discuss the results of the email survey conducted in 2024 among the members from non-Russian institutions affiliated with the Editorial Boards of Russian journals.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

An integral component of any scientific research is the dissemination of obtained results and ideas among the broader academic community, particularly through publications in recognized peer-reviewed scientific journals. This ensures verification, discussion, and integration of new knowledge into future research practices (Greussing et al., 2020). Accordingly, editorial boards play a crucial role in this process, not only coordinating the peer-review process but also shaping a journal's policy and scientific direction (de-Marcos et al., 2024), as well as ensuring adherence to standards of academic integrity (Louie et al., 2025). In this context, editors and editorial board members act as “gatekeepers of science” (Crane, 1967), controlling access to the publication space and determining which research deserves academic recognition across the entire research landscape (Marušić, 2010).

It is particularly important to maintain geographical and cultural diversity and gender equality within editorial boards, as this enables a more comprehensive collective understanding of complex social phenomena and contributes to the forma-

tion of more representative empirical knowledge free from bias (Dhanani & Jones, 2017; Mahdjoub et al., 2022). Although existing studies (Manan et al., 2023; Xue & Xu, 2024) point to the underrepresentation of women and individuals from developing and low-income countries, they also reflect a slow but positive trend. Wu et al. (2020) argue that institutional diversity within editorial teams has the potential to positively influence the quality of scientific journals, which may accelerate this process. This drives journals to form editorial boards that possess high scientific authority and also represent different regions, academic schools, and social groups.

However, the recognition of the important role played by editorial boards, shaping the journal's quality assessment, academic reputation, and indexing, can be exploited as a tool of manipulation by unscrupulous publishers. In particular, the “publish or perish” culture characteristic of the modern academic environment (Amutuhaire, 2022; Hanson et al., 2024) creates an additional risk: authors, eager to publish their results quickly, may turn to questionable or predatory journals. These journals actively exploit the external markers of academic legitimacy, imitating the presence

of an authoritative editorial board, claiming peer review and indexing processes that are, in reality, not conducted (Ruiter-Lopez et al., 2019; Ojala et al., 2020). In developing countries, predatory journals pose a particular threat, as they contribute to the spread of misinformation and pseudoscientific ideas among researchers and students. The absence of clear publication ethics policies, limited access to quality sources, insufficient information literacy, and financial barriers create a favorable environment for the activities of unethical publishers (Otiike et al., 2022).

On the other hand, one of the most common tools used to create the illusion of scientific legitimacy is a fictitious or incompetent editorial board. This issue is thoroughly described by Gallent Torres (2022) and O. Van Loon and A. Van Loon (2024), who point out that a significant number of predatory journals may lack an editor-in-chief. Editorial boards are often composed of hundreds of individuals invited without verification of their qualifications, and may be geographically clustered. Such practices not only violate academic ethics but also undermine trust in scientometric databases, which may index these journals without detecting the falsifications (Macháček & Srholec, 2022).

In light of current geopolitical events, particularly Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, issues of academic integrity and publication ethics have acquired a new dimension. As Nazarovets and Teixeira da Silva (2022) noted, in response to the invasion, various international organizations, government ministries, publishers, universities, and ranking agencies introduced sanctions against Russian academic institutions. These measures included temporary suspension of cooperation, restrictions on access to publishing platforms, and refusal to accept articles prepared in collaboration with sanctioned institutions. A significant number of global scientific publishers expressed support for Ukraine and implemented various actions in response to Russian aggression, including limiting or ceasing the sale and marketing of their products and services in Russia and Belarus (e.g., Elsevier, Emerald Publishing, Springer Nature, among others). Clarivate (2022) suspended the evaluation of new journal indexing applications from Russia and Belarus in the Web of Science and terminated its commercial operations in Russia.

In addition to publishers, individual journals have also taken a clear ethical stance. For example, the Journal of International Studies (2022), Central Europe (2022), Human Technology (2022), and many others issued a strong editorial statement condemning the Russian invasion and expressing solidarity with Ukraine.

These measures have sparked debates about collective responsibility, the apolitical nature of science, and the distortion of the concept of academic freedom (Kangas et al., 2023). The existing restrictions create complex ethical dilemmas not only for researchers but also for other participants in scholarly communication, including editors of international journals. The lack of clear guidelines regarding the publication of works authored by researchers affiliated with Russian institutions has led to situations where reviewers refuse to evaluate such submissions, and editors are left to independently navigate the balance between academic integrity and moral responsibility (Nielsen & Kaisto, 2024).

Some researchers and journals refer to the position of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE Council, 2024), which states that editorial decisions should be based solely on the academic quality of the material, not on nationality, political views, or geopolitical context. However, this principle has been subject to reinterpretation in light of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the ethical dilemmas it has raised for the global academic community. A notable case in this regard was the *Journal of Molecular Structure*, whose editorial board in 2022 officially announced its refusal to accept manuscripts from authors affiliated with Russian academic institutions. The board emphasized that this decision was not a form of discrimination based on nationality, but rather an ethical response to the actions of a state that funds these institutions (Matthews, 2022; Retraction Watch, 2022). In 2025, the journal's editorial board decided to lift the moratorium, acknowledging internal disagreements both at the time of its introduction and its reversal. These discussions reflected the complexity of balancing academic neutrality with ethical responsibility (Journal of Molecular Structure, 2025).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has not only affected international academic publishing but has also deeply impacted the functioning of

Ukrainian scientific journals and editorial boards. As shown in the survey conducted by Zhenchenko et al. (2023), Ukrainian editors have faced significant challenges, including structural and organizational changes as forced staff relocation, switch to working remotely, funding and staff cuts, transformation of the business models, and psychological stress. Despite these hardships, many editorial teams continued their work, often remotely, driven by a sense of professional duty and solidarity with the academic community.

The topics of published articles have also shifted, with a growing number of studies directly related to the war in Ukraine. Some journals, not only in Ukraine but in the world, have even issued special thematic issues dedicated to the war, aiming to support Ukrainian researchers and provide a scholarly platform for documenting and analyzing the multifaceted consequences of the conflict. Such issues were presented in the journal *Problems and Perspectives in Management* (Kozmenko et al., 2023), the *International Political Science Review (IPSR)* (Reidy et al., 2024), *International Community Law Review* (Tamada, 2024), and others.

The ambiguity within the academic field regarding responses to geopolitical aggression has created conditions in which Russian journals continue to include a significant number of editorial board members from non-Russian institutions. In some cases, Ukrainian researchers are found among the editorial boards of Russian journals, which raises serious ethical and reputational concerns for the Ukrainian academic community. Therefore, the present study aims not only to investigate the participation of members from non-Russian institutions on the editorial boards of Russian journals but also to analyze the underlying motivations and implications of such affiliations.

2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Given the large initial dataset, we focused on the journals satisfying the following selection criteria:

- the Russian journal is published by an international publisher (Elsevier (Scopus), Clarivate (WoS), Springer Nature, Taylor & Francis); or

- the journal was newly added to the Scopus database in 2022 or 2023.

We chose Scopus instead of WoS because of data availability.

Among the 300 journals that met these criteria, we selected those with two or more international members on their editorial boards.

This resulted in a final dataset of 140 journals.

Next, we examined the editorial boards of these journals and created a database of international board members. Russian journals typically do not provide contact information for editorial board members, such as email addresses or personal web pages. Despite this, we managed to collect 709 names of international members on the editorial boards of these 140 Russian journals.

Where available, we used academic email addresses, collected from the universities' personal webpages or scholars' publications, for the period May-August 2024.

Each of the 709 scientists received an email from us inquiring whether they are still members of the editorial board of the specified Russian journal. Although our inquiry contained a single question, the typical responses allowed us to expand our analysis based on several criteria:

- Availability of a reply to our inquiry (yes/no);
- Professional activity status (active/retired or deceased);
- Confirmation of editorial board membership (yes/no);
- Involvement in editorial activities for the journal (yes/no);
- Decision regarding editorial board membership (withdrawal/stay).

To provide additional information about the related Russian journal, we have incorporated several facts based on our investigation. Such information includes:

Source: Plastun et al. (2024a, b), Plastun and Makarenko (2025).



Figure 1. Survey geography: by number of letters sent, letters

- Facts of propaganda in the journal (for example, the journal published articles from authors in the impostor institutes¹ created by Russia in the occupied Ukrainian territories);
- Publisher of the journal is an active supporter of Russian aggression against Ukraine (for example, signed the so-called Rector's letter or is affiliated with the Russian Academy of Sciences);
- The Editor-in-Chief is affiliated with the Russian academic organization – an active supporter of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Respondents' names were anonymized, and the list of journals is not disclosed, making it impossible to identify scholars. Non-anonymized data are not accessible due to the sensitivity of the information and the potential risk of harm to scholars who participated in the survey.

3. RESULTS

Between May and August 2024, we sent emails to 709 members of the editorial boards of Russian journals. As of August 20, 2024, the total number of received confirmations of actual membership status in editorial boards is 165, which corresponds to a 23.3% reply rate.

The survey results are grouped by country. The core focus of the research is on the results based on the responses of the interviewed scientists and external confirmation of their status (deceased, retired).

3.1. Countries

A geographical breakdown of the survey is presented in Appendix A.

The largest number of letters were sent to the USA, Germany, the UK, Italy, France, Ukraine, Poland, Israel, Spain, and Switzerland (Figure 1). 72.8 % of letters were sent to these 10 countries.

Figure 1 indicates that the editorial boards of the Russian journals used for the survey involved most American, German, and British scholars (42.3% of the number of letters sent). Ukrainian scientists were involved in 4.4% of cases.

The same sample of countries is kept in terms of the number of respondents (Figure 2), which is evident from the number of letters sent.

The United States, Germany, and Ukraine account for 41.2% of the responses received, while the top 10 countries to which we sent the majority of letters represent 71.5% of the responses. At the same time, the responses of Ukrainian scientists are about 12.1% of the total number of responses received.

¹ Since 2014, parts of Ukraine have been occupied by the Russian Federation. All institutions in the occupied territories have been forced to move to other areas of Ukraine, losing all their material base and part of their personnel. On the occupied Ukrainian territories, Russia has created "impostor" entities using the captured Ukrainian scientific infrastructure and integrated them into the Russian scientific community. These new entities are often named similarly to or the same as the existing Ukrainian institutions-in-exile. The presence of such entities in the international academic sphere helps to legalize and normalize the appropriation of the occupied territories of Ukraine by Russia within the international scientific community.

Source: Plastun et al. (2024a).

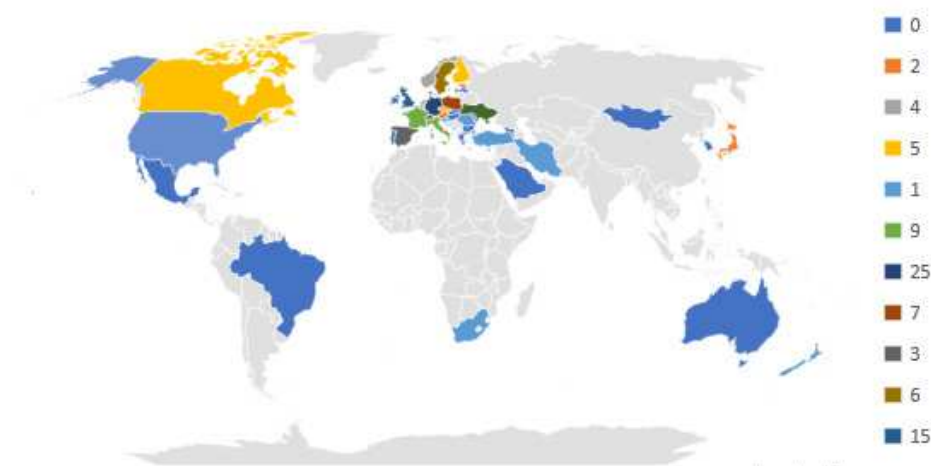


Figure 2. Survey geography: by the number of confirmations received, letters

Source: Plastun et al. (2024a).



Figure 3. Survey geography: share of responses, %.

The distribution of countries by the ratio of received confirmations to sent letters is shown in Figure 3. The overall response ratio is 23.3%.

3.2. Observations

Among the 709 emails sent, we identified 8 cases of deaths and 9 cases of retirement of scientists who are still listed as members of the editorial boards of Russian journals. These cases were classified as “dead and retired members.” For example, the fact of the death of the member was confirmed either from publicly available sources or from the colleagues’ or department assistance personnel’s response to the inquiry sent. The share of such cases is 2.4%. Their

names continue to be used on journal websites and journal pages, which mislead the global scientific community.

Regarding the involvement in editorial activities in Russian journals, 100 scientists did not fully perform their duties, formally served on the board, knowing about their affiliation, or were not asked to review articles and perform other membership duties at all. In addition, the editorial board membership with these Russian journals came as a surprise to 45 of these 100 respondents. They were unaware of the existence of such a journal or of their affiliation with it. These 45 scientists can be classified as “fake members”.

Among the responses received, 22 scientists continue cooperating with Russian journal editorial boards. Five scientists made no clear statement on their position regarding membership in Russian journals or considered academic sanctions and boycotts of Russian science inappropriate. Meanwhile, 89 members announced their intention to resign or have already written resignation letters to the editorial boards (Springer Nature).

This information is summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Overview of scientists contacted in this study

Category	Share of replies, %
Total Contacted	709
Dead	8
Retired	9
Other replies received	148

Table 2. Categorization of 148 replies received in %*

Category	Share of replies, %
Continue to participate	14.9%
No clear position	3.4%
Plan to withdraw	60.1%
Fake members	30.4%
Silent members	67.6%

Note: * Provided categories “Plan to withdraw”, “Fake members”, and “Silent members” may overlap.

3.3. Position of international organizations

We have contacted international publishers and databases to comment on the fictitious editorial boards of Russian journals that they publish or index. Their replies are summarized in Table 3. They

do not plan to take any action to ensure the scientific integrity of the journals they reference.

Table 3. Positions of publishers on fictitious editorial boards of Russian journals

Publisher	Response
Elsevier (Scopus)	<i>“Scopus cannot interfere with the editorial autonomy of journals and concerns that are related to scientific content and quality of individual items.”</i>
Clarivate (WoS)	<i>“Clarivate is not a primary publisher and does not become involved in the editorial management of individual journals, or in the business practices of any publisher.”</i>
Springer Nature	We have received no reply to questions related to fictitious editorial boards of Russian journals published by Springer Nature
Taylor & Francis	<i>“The Portfolio Team has advised that we cannot comment on T&F’s contractual relationships publicly.”</i>

The recommendations, derived from the survey findings and the publisher’s position, should include a bunch of unprecedented measures for the whole academic community. Not only publishers, journals, editorial board members (prospective and current), editors-in-chief, authors, but also regulatory bodies, university management, or databases should adjust their policies regarding the issues raised to enhance the verification of presence, concrete codes of conduct, and transparent disclosure of personal identifiers of editorial board members. Policy changes might be a sort of systemic solution to enhance ethical transparency in the publishing process and to articulate a concrete position of publishers regarding the aggression of some countries against the territorial integrity of others.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper highlights how Russian journals falsify the international part of their editorial boards.

We have sent inquiries to 709 international members of the editorial boards of 140 Russian journals. 148 replies were received, of which 67.6% (100 scientists) mentioned that they have never performed editorial tasks or/and for the first time heard from our letters that they are editorial board members. Also, we have identified at least 17 cases of “dead souls” (retired or dead). After the inquiries, 60.1% of those who replied decided to withdraw from the editorial boards of the Russian journals under study.

With this paper, we would like to encourage scientists to check that their names are not affiliated with the Editorial boards of Russian journals by international publishers or scientific databases. Such affiliations are used by propaganda inside Russia to argue that the international scientific community ap-

proves actions of the associated Russian institutions, many of which are under sanctions for their support of the war against Ukraine.

At present, science databases do not rush to exercise control over the disinformation published on their platforms. We think it is now time to have a serious conversation about their policies to ensure that no scientist's name can be published without the scientist's consent.

While the study is pioneering in this area and its relevance is dictated by unprecedented circumstances and emotional context, among the limitations of the research, we should mention first of all the absence of communication with the heads of editorial boards of the Russian journals due to ethical reasoning from our side.

At the stage of journal sample selection, the list of journals is not exhaustive and covers only internationally visible or English-language publications.

At the stage of email address collection, inactive university email accounts or changes in affiliation, and the summer break season potentially might be the reasons for the absence of replies from some respondents.

At the stage of response production, there are some self-selection biases connected to personal scholar attitude and emotional reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and ongoing sanctions, as well as the direct tone of inquiries sent.

At the stage of processing and describing the research results, there is a possibility of misclassifying certain cases of responses. Besides that, the sample of journals is limited. Thus, the findings should be interpreted as indicative tendencies rather than statistically representative results.

Some of the limitations are related to the possibility of data validation. First of all, for privacy protection, respondent data are presented in anonymized form, which limits external validation. Some respondents' claims (e.g., "I was unaware of my membership") could not be independently verified due to the absence of public confirmation or changes on journal websites. Also, journals' open web sources do not always contain up-to-date or archived information, multiplying by the fact that there is a lack of access to earlier versions of websites or journals and possible changes in ownership or platforms.

Among the prospects of the research, we are continuing the email survey of the Russian journal editorial boards members, working on the stage two of the research and sending more than 1,500 letters to such members to increase its scale and rate of the response.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Letters sent and responses received from members of the editorial boards of Russian journals in May-August 2024

Country	Responses received	Letters sent	Share of responses received, %.
Armenia	0	1	0.0%
Australia	0	11	0.0%
Austria	2	16	12.5%
Belgium	4	5	80.0%
Brasil	0	3	0.0%
Bulgaria	0	2	0.0%
Canada	5	15	33.3%
Croatia	1	1	100.0%
Cyprus	0	1	0.0%
Czech Republic	5	14	35.7%
Denmark	1	4	25.0%
Estonia	2	6	33.3%
Finland	5	11	45.5%
France	9	50	18.0%
Georgia	0	1	0.0%
Germany	25	103	24.3%
Greece	0	4	0.0%
Hungary	0	3	0.0%
Iran	1	1	100.0%
Ireland	0	3	0.0%
Israel	4	24	16.7%
Italy	9	54	16.7%
Japan	2	17	11.8%
Korea	1	3	33.3%
Latvia	0	2	0.0%
Mexico	0	2	0.0%
Moldova	0	1	0.0%
Mongolia	0	1	0.0%
Montenegro	0	1	0.0%
Netherlands	4	14	28.6%
New Zealand	1	4	25.0%
Norway	4	10	40.0%
Poland	7	24	29.2%
Portugal	0	4	0.0%
Romania	1	3	33.3%
Saudi Arabia	0	1	0.0%
Singapore	0	1	0.0%
Slovakia	0	3	0.0%
Slovenia	0	2	0.0%
South Africa	1	4	25.0%
South Korea	0	2	0.0%
Spain	3	17	17.6%
Sweden	6	12	50.0%
Switzerland	3	16	18.8%
Turkey	1	4	25.0%
UK	15	57	26.3%
Ukraine	20	31	64.5%
USA	23	140	16.4%
Total	165	709	23.3%