Beyond Predatory Publishing : The Case for Verifying Journal Identity in Indian Higher Education - A Policy Perspective

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Abstract

Purpose : This perspective examined why cloned (hijacked) journals create a verification problem that differs from conventional predatory publishing, and what policy response suits Indian higher education after the UGC-CARE list was discontinued in 2025.

Design/Methodology/Approach : The paper is a policy perspective and is based on published research, UGC regulations and notices, and two illustrative incidents of deceptive publishing from editorial practice in 2026, using signaling theory and information asymmetry as the lens.

Findings : Predatory journals fabricate signs of legitimacy, while clones steal those of a genuine journal and so defeat the checks authors trust most. Indexing records can themselves be compromised. When the UGC-CARE list was discontinued in 2025, verification passed from a central list to each institution, and the heaviest burden probably falls on state universities and colleges, where studies of predatory journals show high exposure.

Practical Implications : A multi-layered approach is required. Regulators should keep a dynamic national registry of verified journal identities, cross-checked against independent records. Funders and appraisal systems should reward verified publications, and not publication counts. Institutions should embed verification in doctoral training and submission workflows, rather than add it on.

Originality/Value : Studies of cloned journals mostly describe how clones operate. Drawing upon an analysis of policy options, this paper distinguishes between identity verification and quality assessment and applies it to the regulatory transition in India in 2025, arguing for a governed registry that is not an approval list, and suggests a phased implementation model. This paper is conceptual, and empirical testing is required to test the propositions.

Keywords : **cloned journals, hijacked journals, predatory publishing, research integrity, research evaluation, UGC-CARE, India**

JEL Classification Codes : D82, D83, I23, I28

Received : March 15, 2026 ; Revised : August 20, 2026 ; Accepted : October 25, 2026 ; Published Online : November 15, 2026

Peer review, Scopus or Web of Science indexing, an ISSN, and a credible editorial board are taken to show that the work behind them has been vetted (Baas et al., 2020). These same markers make a journal worth faking, and two kinds of misleading outlets have grown around them over the last 15 years. Jeffrey Beall

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DOI : https://doi.org/10.17010/pijom/2026/v19i11/175310

named the first, the *predatory journal*, which charges authors to publish while offering little or no real editorial scrutiny (Beall, 2012, 2017). The second, *the cloned or hijacked journal,* is newer and harder to spot: it copies a legitimate journal's title, ISSN, scope, and often its website design, then collects fees in that journal's name (Abalkina, 2024b; Dadkhah et al., 2016). In 2024, one operation cloned 13 journals of Elsevier, Springer, and other major publishers, some so closely that only the web address gave them away (Abalkina, 2024b, 2025).

India is close to the center of this problem : Abalkina (2025) named it among the countries where most authors publishing in hijacked journals are based. Studies since 2016 point to substantial Indian authorship in predatory outlets (Dora & Kampa, 2023; Seethapathy et al., 2016), and many Indian researchers misjudge the cost of legitimate open-access publishing and fall prey to pseudo-journals (Bhasker & Vijay Solomon, 2025). Cloned journals, too, have been documented in the Indian market (Parray et al., 2025), including through a survey of authors of one journal alleged to be a clone (Khedkar et al., 2022). The issue has become more pressing because of a recent policy change: in February 2025, the University Grants Commission discontinued the UGC-CARE list (University Grants Commission, 2025a).

Existing research leaves a gap where three strands meet. Studies of cloned journals describe how clones operate and are detected (Abalkina, 2024a, 2025; Dadkhah et al., 2016; Parray et al., 2025); one survey of authors of an alleged clone found pressure to publish in Scopus-indexed journals among the causes (Khedkar et al., 2022), but none examined the evaluation rules behind that pressure or the verification arrangements institutions now rely on. Studies of Indian predatory publishing document exposure but treat deceptive journals as one category (Dora & Kampa, 2023; Seethapathy et al., 2016), and the closest policy analysis of the move away from UGC-CARE frames the risk mainly as journal quality (Kashinath & Mandavilli, 2026). To our knowledge, journal identity, the dimension on which cloned journals succeed, has received little attention.

This paper makes three contributions to that gap. It proposes a framework that separates identity signals from quality signals, applies it to the 2025 replacement of the UGC-CARE list by institutional self-assessment, and moves from detection to design by comparing alternatives and setting out a registry and phased implementation plan.

Evidence Base and Scope

This paper is a policy perspective, not an empirical survey. Table 1 maps its main claims to four kinds of evidence that do not support the same conclusions: research on predatory journals, research on cloned journals, official policy documents, and the authors' own case evidence and inference.

Table 1. ***Evidence Base for the Main Claims***

Claim	Research on Predatory Journals	Research on Cloned Journals	Policy Documents, Cases, and Inference
Indian authors and institutions are exposed	Colleges accounted for about 51% of Indian first-author papers in predatory journals (Seethapathy et al., 2016); state universities about 43% in library science (Dora & Kampa, 2023).	Clones documented in the Indian market (Parray et al., 2025); survey of authors of one alleged clone; an editor's note records the genuine journal's society disputing the label (Khedkar et al., 2022).	No study measures clone exposure by institution type
Evaluation pressure drives demand	Publication pressure named as a major factor (Seethapathy et al., 2016).	Pressure to publish in Scopus-indexed journals among the causes in one survey (Khedkar et al., 2022).	Rules and rankings documented (National Institutional Ranking Framework, 2025; University Grants

			Commission, 2018, 2022); their effect on clone demand is inferred.
Quality and indexing checks fail against clones	Predatory features are well described (Cobey et al., 2018; Shamseer et al., 2017); some predatory journals are themselves indexed (Abalkina, 2024a)	Clones copy title, ISSN, and website (Dadkhah et al., 2016); 67 hijacked journals penetrated Scopus (Abalkina, 2024a)	Proposition 1 (conceptual); the two incidents in Table 3
Decentralization shifts the burden to low-capacity institutions	Exposure concentrated in colleges and state universities	None specific to clones	Equity concerns about resource-constrained institutions (Kashinath & Mandavilli, 2026); capacity gradient inferred (Proposition 2)
Clones harm the genuine journal	Not applicable	Editors' added workload, neutralizing the clone, and correcting database records (Abalkina, 2025)	Both incidents involved impersonated Indian journals (Table 3)
Impersonation reaches documents and official lists	Not applicable	Hijacked content in indexes (Abalkina, 2024a)	Forged acceptance letter (Table 3); UGC warning of a fake CARE website in 2019 (Anand, 2019)
A shared registry would lower verification cost without becoming an approval list	No evidence	Stronger verification and response by indexing databases recommended (Abalkina, 2025)	Design proposal, untested (Proposition 3; Table 5)

Source : Authors' synthesis of the cited studies and documents.

Two Threats, Two Mechanisms

The argument is introduced in the context of two economic ideas. When consumers are unable to observe quality prior to purchase, low-quality products may drive out good-quality products, as authors/consumers have to deal with that very issue in peer review that takes place out of their sight (Akerlof, 1970). As Spence (1973) demonstrated, markets work around this problem as parties signal observable characteristics as proxies for unobservables, and the signal works to separate the good types from the bad only if it is more expensive for the bad types to signal. In publishing, the markers listed above have done just that.

What you need in addition to a standard signaling account is quality signaling, which provides information about what a journal does, and identity signaling, which connects claims to the publisher/organization/society who is actually running the site and receiving the fee. Predatory journals produce fake quality signals (Cobey et al., 2018; Shamseer et al., 2017), and a careful author can typically detect the fraud by searching an indexing database. There's nothing wrong with the signal on cloned journals — it is just their association with the site that collects the fee (Abalkina, 2021; Dadkhah et al., 2016). Copying destroys the information value of the signals, and verifying identity remains expensive (as the author has to collect information from multiple sources to verify identity for each submission). The contrast is summarised in Table 2, and the following three propositions are presented :

Table 2. ***Comparison of Predatory and Cloned Journals***

Dimension	Predatory Journal	Cloned Journal
Relation to legitimacy signals	Fabricates them	Appropriates a real journal's signals
Identity	Its own, newly created	Borrowed from an existing title
Typical targets	Any field; broad, shifting scope	Discontinued, print-only, regional-language, or poorly maintained titles; occasionally major-publisher titles
Does an indexing check expose it?	Usually yes, though some predatory journals are themselves indexed	Often no: the original is genuinely indexed, and the clone may have altered the database record itself
What exposes it?	Absence from indexing databases; false metrics	Mismatch between the indexed record and the website's domain, publisher, contact details, or language
Who is harmed?	Authors and the literature	Authors, the literature, and the legitimate journal whose identity is stolen

Source : Authors' synthesis based on Abalkina (2021, 2024a, 2025), Beall (2015), Dadkhah et al. (2016), Parray et al. (2025), and Shamseer et al. (2017).

↳ **Proposition 1.** Verifying quality signals reduces acceptance of predatory journals but not of cloned journals, which carry genuine signals.

↳ **Proposition 2.** Where verification is decentralized without shared identity infrastructure, each institution bears the full cost of identity checks, and verification effort is lowest where capacity is lowest, so exposure concentrates in low-capacity institutions.

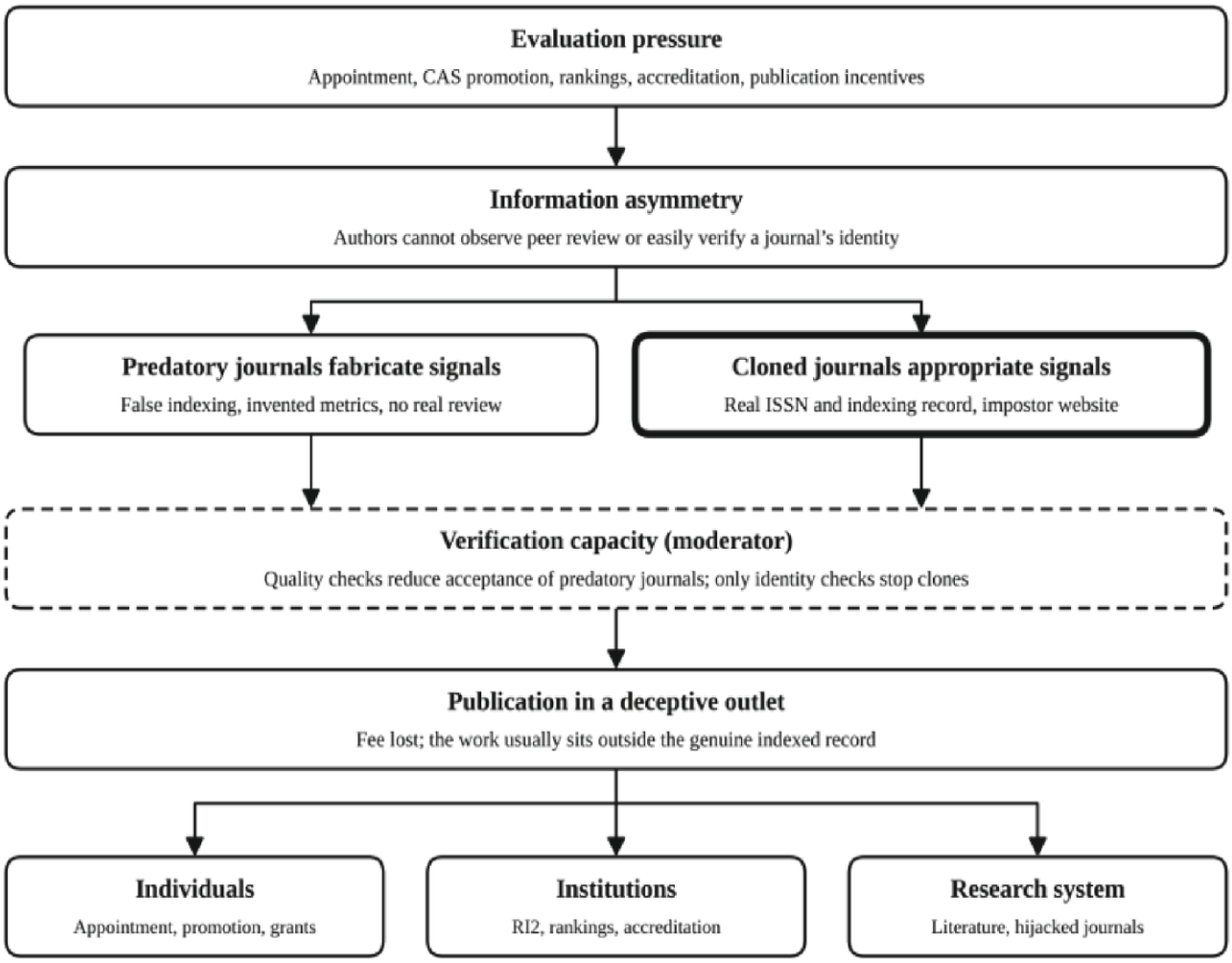
↳ **Proposition 3.** A shared identity registry lowers the marginal cost of identity verification, but if registry membership becomes a condition for evaluation credit, then the registry takes on a quality-gating function and invites gaming that follows any measure made into a target (Strathern, 1997). Design should therefore separate identity from quality.

Clones prefer titles with no active website, because the journal is print-only, has ceased publication, or publishes in a language other than English (Abalkina, 2025; Parray et al., 2025), therefore, nothing online contradicts the impostor. Indexing databases are not a fixed point for these checks. Abalkina (2024a) found that at least 67 hijacked journals had penetrated Scopus since 2013: 33 had indexed unauthorized content, 23 had compromised the homepage link on the genuine journal's profile, and 11 both (Abalkina, 2025). An author following a database link can still reach the clone, so identity checks need more than one independent source. Figure 1 summarizes the argument and the links between Propositions 1 and 2.

Case Example

These mechanisms can be explained by two events that the editorial work of the second author in 2026 describes. They both featured the impersonation of Scopus-indexed Indian journals, but no names of the platforms or individuals are given. The evidence considered was two-page screenshots of the first listing and a copy of the second letter, and Table 3 tabulates the signals, warning signs, and checks. They rest on the second author's records, which she has retained and can make available to the reader on request. In the former, a multi-journal

Figure 1. ***Conceptual Framework : From Evaluation Pressure to Consequences***



Source : Authors' synthesis drawing on Akerlof (1970), Spence (1973), Dadkhah et al. (2016), and Shamseer et al. (2017).

Table 3. ***Two Incidents of Journal Impersonation from Editorial Practice, 2026***

Feature	Incident 1 : Cloned Journal Listing	Incident 2 : Forged Acceptance Letter
Journal Impersonated	An established Scopus-indexed Indian marketing journal	A Scopus-indexed Indian finance journal
Channel	A listing on a multi-journal publishing platform	An acceptance letter sent to authors based outside India
Evidence Examined	Two screenshots of the listing; the second showed it blanked	A copy of the letter
Genuine Signals Used	The journal's exact title	The journal's ISSN, web address, SCImago quartile badge, and the Editor-in-Chief's name and signature
Warning Signs	Its own abbreviation; a different DOI prefix; a "Journal ID" that failed the ISSN check-digit test; a free webmail address; academic-network logos; self-contradictory statistics	A promise of fast production; a request to cite the publisher's journals
What Exposes It	Identity checks on the ISSN, the DOI prefix,	Confirming acceptance through contact

	and the publisher of record.	details listed on the Contact Us page of the journal website (the official domain-registered email address).
Outcome of Checks	The ISSN, DOI prefix, and publisher record did not match the genuine journal.	The genuine journal had no record of the submission.
Risk to Authors	No verifiable record that the work was reviewed; the listing was later blanked.	Reliance on a submission the genuine journal never recorded.

Source : Second author's editorial records (2026).

publishing platform cataloged a journal with the exact title of an established marketing journal, with an ISSN-like Journal ID, which failed a check-digit test on the ISSN ; only identity checks on the ISSN, the DOI prefix, and the publisher of record revealed it. In the second, non-Indian authors were sent an acceptance letter on the letterhead of an Indian finance journal with its real ISSN, web address, and the signature of the Editor-in-Chief, thus transferring impersonation to documents.

How Evaluation Policy Sustains Demand

Doctoral Level

Until 2022, national regulations required Ph.D. scholars to publish a refereed paper before submitting a thesis (Vaidyanathan, 2019). The UGC's 2022 PhD regulations removed that mandate (University Grants Commission, 2022), following a 2019 committee recommendation to scrap it (Vaidyanathan, 2019), but the pressure persists: some universities may keep their own conditions, and candidates know that publications will count for later posts.

Career Level

Under the UGC 2018 Regulations, shortlisting for Assistant Professor awards two marks per publication in peer-reviewed or UGC-listed journals (up to 10 marks in universities, six in colleges), and promotion and senior appointments require minimum publication counts and research scores (University Grants Commission, 2018). Institutions may translate this into a preference for Scopus or Web of Science indexing, so counts become a direct input into hiring and promotion, which is the condition under which a count can be gamed.

Institutional Level

Accreditation is a central concern for Indian institutions (Srikanth Reddy et al., 2023), and accreditation and national rankings reward research output; the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), for example, counts publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science (National Institutional Ranking Framework, 2025).

The Supply Gap

Legitimate indexed journals have limited capacity and are selective, and the number of researchers needing indexed publications may exceed what they can absorb; this is our inference, not a measured finding. Predatory journals fill the gap with speed and ease, and cloned journals do so more effectively, offering speed together with an apparently genuine indexed identity (Khedkar et al., 2022). This is the pattern Strathern (1997, p. 308) described: "When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure." Cloned journals are, in effect, a market for meeting the indexing requirement without meeting the standard it represents.

Where Current Safeguards Fall Short

India has used central lists before. The UGC-approved list was criticized for including doubtful journals (Patwardhan et al., 2018); its replacement, the UGC-CARE list, established in 2018, was the main national safeguard until the UGC discontinued it on February 11, 2025, on an expert committee's recommendation adopted at its 584th meeting in October 2024 (University Grants Commission, 2025a), amid wider regulatory change following the National Education Policy 2020 (Bagga, Gupta, et al., 2025). The chairman cited over-centralization, delays in updating, and the inclusion of predatory journals through inadequate vetting ("UGC Discontinues CARE List Journals," 2025). The UGC instead issued suggestive parameters and asked institutions to set up internal review committees to apply them (University Grants Commission, 2025a, 2025b); the closest policy analysis reads this as a shift from centralized vetting to decentralized quality governance (Kashinath & Mandavilli, 2026).

The reasoning is defensible: static lists age quickly, cannot keep pace with new deceptive outlets, and invite gaming, and Beall's list stopped being updated in 2017 (Abalkina, 2025). The problem is what the new arrangement leaves out, and who carries the burden.

Quality Checks are not Identity Checks

The suggestive parameters ask institutions to assess peer-review policy, editorial board credentials, research ethics, and indexing, and their preliminary criteria list the ISSN, publisher and contact details, and a website on a certified domain (University Grants Commission, 2025b). As worded, these ask whether the items are present, not whether they match the genuine journal's record, so a well-made clone, which displays the real board, cites the real indexing, and reproduces its policies, can pass them and be approved in good faith (Proposition 1).

Decentralization Follows the Capacity Gradient

Verification now depends on each institution's internal committee, and capacity is uneven. Studies of predatory journals point to colleges (Seethapathy et al., 2016) and state universities (Dora & Kampa, 2023) as the most exposed, though they differ on which dominates, and neither concerns clones (Table 1). These institutions are likely to have smaller library budgets, fewer database subscriptions, and less research-support staff, a concern also raised in the wider post-CARE policy literature (Kashinath & Mandavilli, 2026). Decentralization therefore places the heaviest new burden on those least equipped to carry it. No comparable study measures clone exposure by institution type, so for clones this is an inference (Proposition 2).

No One Owns Journal Identity

Identity information is scattered across the ISSN register, indexing databases, publisher websites, and volunteer efforts such as the Retraction Watch Hijacked Journal Checker, and we are not aware of any Indian authority that records which website is the authentic home of a given indexed title. The UGC-CARE list did include lists of cloned journals, but it is unclear whether they will be updated after the discontinuation (Abalkina, 2025), and they recorded known clones, not each title's authentic home. A committee must therefore assemble the evidence alone for every submission; free tools such as Scopus Preview show indexing status, not authenticity.

Consequences at Three Levels

Individuals

If an author pays a clone, the author will lose the fee, and the paper will lose its position. A publication on a cloned site is not included in the publication record of the original journal, and the library advises that such publications will not be included in Scopus or Web of Science (Makhafola, 2023), although some clones have managed to get unauthorized publications indexed (Abalkina, 2024a). Notice of this problem may result in the paper being discounted for appointment, promotion, or grant. The pressure to publish and low institutional support can make early-career researchers and doctoral scholars the most vulnerable.

Institutions

The Research Integrity Risk Index (RI2) proposed by Meho (2025) measures the share of an institution's output in journals delisted from major databases, its retraction rate, and its self-citation share, flagging profiles that suggest metric gaming. An institution will be penalized for publishing papers in predatory journals that are subsequently removed from the list, potentially impacting rankings and partnerships. The papers of a clone are different: the original journal will still appear in the index, and an index based on delisting will not flag such papers, and the weakness remains obscure until someone manually reviews the journal. However, this is our inference, not a finding.

The Research System

Deceptive outlets allow unvetted findings to be published in the literature, which can then be referenced by others. Cloned journals inflict the same harm as predatory journals to research dissemination and literature and add another : they damage the real journal whose identity they take ; the editors then have to deal with authors who have been deceived, neutralize the cloned journal, and warn readers (Abalkina, 2025). Print-only and regional journals are common targets (Abalkina, 2025; Parray et al., 2025) and in India, these are often small journals, whose economics and national policy are already changing (Bagga, Sawhney, et al., 2025).

Alternative Policy Responses

Five alternatives to a registry have been found or utilized, and each solves a part of the problem, which is compared with the proposed registry in Table 4. The issues are whether it confirms identity, quality, or both, and who pays for it.

Table 4. ***Comparison of Alternative Policy Responses***

Option	Main Benefits	Main Limitations	Relative Cost	Implementation Challenges
Institutional self-assessment with the UGC suggestive parameters (current approach)	Avoids the over-centralization and delays that ended the central list; lets institutions adapt criteria to disciplines ("UGC Discontinues CARE List Journals," 2025)	As worded, asks whether identity items are present, not whether they match the genuine record (University Grants Commission, 2025b); burden falls on low-capacity	Low centrally; recurrent and unevenly spread across institutions	Committee capacity; consistent checklists; training

		institutions (Kashinath & Mandavilli, 2026)		
Reinstated central quality list (CARE-type)	One national reference that evaluators already know	Earlier lists drew criticism for doubtful journals (Patwardhan et al., 2018); CARE ended after criticism of over-centralization, delays, and weak vetting ("UGC Discontinues CARE List Journals," 2025); judges quality, not identity	High and recurrent (curation, appeals)	Legitimacy and transparency of decisions; keeping pace with new outlets
Reliance on international indexes (Scopus, Web of Science)	Already used in rankings (National Institutional Ranking Framework, 2025); no new body needed	Hijacked journals have penetrated Scopus and some predatory journals are indexed (Abalkina, 2024a); print-only and regional titles are easy to clone (Abalkina, 2025)	Low marginal; access costs for some institutions	Dependence on foreign commercial gatekeepers; slow correction of compromised records
Blacklists and community checkers (Beall's list, Cabell's, Retraction Watch Hijacked Journal Checker)	Target deception directly; the Checker is regularly updated (Abalkina, 2025)	Beall's list stopped in 2017, and Cabell's is paywalled; the Checker lists known cases (more than 350 by May 2025), so it is reactive (Abalkina, 2025)	Low (Checker) to medium (subscription)	Coverage lag; reliance on volunteer curation; no Indian authority behind them
Awareness and training alone	Low cost; builds lasting skills; needed under every option	Depends on individual vigilance against signals built to pass visible checks; does not lower the cost of verifying each submission	Low	Reaching early-career researchers across many institutions; reinforcement over time
Identity registry with shared verification (proposed)	**Shares the fixed cost of identity checks; neutral on quality, so it complements the options above; open to institutions and checkers**	**A new body to maintain; impersonation risk (UGC warned of a fake CARE website in 2019; Anand, 2019); risk of drifting into an approval list**	**Medium: set-up, then**	**Publisher cooperation; data governance; update speed; the safeguards in Table 5**

Source : Authors' synthesis of the cited sources. Cost ratings are the authors' qualitative judgments.

No single option covers both identity and quality at acceptable cost. The recommendations therefore keep institutional assessment, indexing databases, community checkers, and training, and add an identity layer built on three principles: verification must establish identity, not just quality; evaluation should reward verified publications rather than raw counts; and verification capacity should be built where exposure is highest. Safeguards must stop the new layer becoming an approval list.

Policy Recommendations

Regulators : UGC, AICTE, NAAC, and NIRF

The central measure is a national journal identity registry, designed as in Table 5. In the 2025 suggestive parameters, it is necessary to add a check of the website, domain, and payment channel of a journal with the

registry or, if not yet available, according to at least two independent records. Ranking and accreditation should be based on publications whose journal identity has been verified (registry or institutional verification) and should be based on a few publications documented in the registry or verified by the institution and not on the number of publications, thereby reducing the reward for volume. Indexing databases are the natural partners and also a point of failure, so regulators should ask them to verify the homepage links of the journals which are included in Indian evaluation and should take quick action against the reported clones.

Funders : ANRF, ICSSR, ICMR, and DST

Payment of the article processing charges (APCs) should be a checkpoint, and funders should demand that grantees confirm the journal identity prior to submitting the paper and should pay article processing charges only to payment channels recorded in the registry, which turns the fee, the clone's revenue source, into a checkpoint.

Institutions

University consortia, affiliating universities, or the INFLIBNET Centre could run a shared verification desk, so that no single state university or college has to build this expertise alone, extending the practice of journals such as the *Indian Journal of Marketing* and the *Indian Journal of Finance*, which have published bibliometric analyses of themselves (Joshi et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2025). The desk would verify the ISSN/ DOI prefix of a journal against official records, independently confirm the publisher's website as well as the corresponding email, and also verify the existence of the editorial board and their affiliation to the institutions they claim (Dadkhah et al., 2016; Parray et al., 2025). These checks should be included in doctoral coursework ; departments may mandate a documented verification step prior to inclusion of the paper in a thesis, appraisal, or CAS application, and deceived researchers should be treated as victims and not be penalized, as punishment does not encourage disclosure.

Researchers and Legitimate Journals

Researchers should always start at the publisher's portal or an indexing database and verify the website with at least one other source such as the record in the ISSN portal or the Retraction Watch Hijacked Journal Checker, as links from databases may be spoofed. They should verify domain names, contact addresses, etc. with the publisher's email domain, and never pay fees into a person's account or into an intermediary. Legitimate journals, particularly print journals and regional publications, have a way to minimize exposure by having an official website, a registered domain, and a public notice in the event of a clone being identified.

Registry Design and Safeguards

Table 5 sets out how the registry would be governed and operated.

Table 5. ***Proposed Registry : Governance, Verification, Updating, Reporting, and Safeguards***

Dimension	Proposed Design
Governance	• UGC sponsors; INFLIBNET Centre operates (proposed).
	• India's national ISSN center acts as a data partner.
	• Advisory board: publishers, librarians, indexers, and early-career researchers.
	• Charter limited to identity; independent audit.

Scope and Entry	• Journal titles that count in Indian evaluation. • Publishers or institutions can request entry; no quality threshold applies. • Other titles can be verified on request.
Verification Process	• Three independent sources: ISSN record; publisher of record via official channel; domain, and DOI prefix. • Contact domain, fee-payment channel, last-verified date also record-ed. • One status: verified, pending, disputed, or clone alert.
Update Mechanism	• Updates triggered by changes of publisher, domain, or payment channel. • Annual re-verification (indicative). • Dated public log; mismatches reported to the indexing database.
Reporting Process	• One point of contact for authors, editors, publishers, and institutions at the national level. • Reports are verified prior to flagging a clone. • Confirmed clones are shared with community checkers and indexing databases. • Complaints to registrars and payment providers, where appropriate (Abalkina, 2025).
Safeguards Against Becoming an Approval List	• Charter bars quality judgments and rankings. • Evaluation bodies credit verified identity via registry or documented check; absence is no penalty. • Open data and change-log; appeal route for publishers. • Independent review prior to roll-out and at regular intervals. • Annual report: entries, disputes, and response times.

Source : Authors' proposal. Time limits and review intervals are indicative.

Phased Implementation

Table 6 sets a phased path from mandate to review; the timings are indicative.

Table 6. *Phased Implementation Framework*

Phase	Indicative Timing	Key Actions	Lead Actors	Safeguard or Output
1. Mandate and design	Months 0–6	Issue the mandate; constitute the operating body and advisory board; publish the charter, data fields, and verification protocol; amend the suggestive parameters to require identity cross-checks	UGC; INFLIBNET Centre; national ISSN Centre	Charter limited to identity; public consultation
2. Pilot	Months 6–18	Enter journals counted by a pilot group of institutions that includes state universities and colleges; run a shared verification desk; open the reporting channel; test update and dispute workflows	UGC; pilot institutions; publishers; indexing databases	Pilot measures: verification time, errors, clones detected, user burden
3. Integration	Months 18–36	Extend to all titles counted in evaluation; add the funder declaration and fee-channel rule; credit verified identity in rankings and accreditation; publish open data	UGC, AICTE, NAAC, NIRF; ANRF, ICSSR, ICMR, DST; institutions	Public change-log; annual transparency report

4. Review	From month 36	Independent evaluation of cost, accuracy, and approval-list drift; decide whether to continue, redesign, or end the registry	Independent evaluators; advisory board	Published evaluation; sunset clause

Source : Authors' proposal.

Limitations and Future Research

This is a conceptual perspective paper, and the three propositions are not tested. The evidence base is uneven (Table 1): exposure studies have been conducted on predatory journals ; there is limited evidence on cloned journals in India ; and one of the studies was challenged in an editor's note recording the objection of the society named to be the genuine publisher of the journal ; and there is no study that measures clone prevalence by institution type. The comparison of alternatives, cost ratings in Table 4, and timings in Table 6 are the authors' qualitative judgments. The analysis is applicable to India's evolving regulatory landscape, with certain aspects of the 2025 transition based on government notifications and media reports.

Four lines of work follow: An estimate of how often clone publications occur in Indian-authored work by matching Scopus records with the community checker lists ; audit studies of author and committee verification of journals (Propositions 1 and 2); a registry pilot to measure verification time, error and detection rates, cost and drift towards use of approved lists (Proposition 3); and comparative work on how identifier systems such as ISSN and DOI registration handle disputes and updates, and on distinguishing deceived from knowing authors so that non-punitive reporting is not gamed.

Conclusion

Cloned journals overcome checks against predatory journals by sending proper signals with a fake operator. This paper proposes that there is a need for a shared layer for identity, which should be maintained to be as narrow as possible, so as not to become another approval list. The evidence is more supportive of the direction of reform than the detail of its design. The test is whether an author or a committee can obtain in minutes and from independent records evidence that a website is the real home of the journal it pretends to be.

Authors' Contribution

- **A. Arun Kumar :** Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing - Original Draft.
- **Priyanka Gilani :** Conceptualization, Investigation, Resources, Writing - Review & Editing.

Conflict of Interest

The first author, Dr. Arun Kumar, certifies that he has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript. Priyanka Gilani is Editorial Director at Associated Management Consultants Private Limited, which publishes this journal and the two journals described in the case example. She had no role in the editorial handling or peer review of this manuscript, which was reviewed by three blind reviewers not associated with this journal.

Funding Acknowledgment

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this perspective article.

AI Disclosure Statement

AI-assisted tools such as Grammarly and QuillBot were used exclusively to enhance language. During the preparation of this work, the authors used Claude (Anthropic) to generate Figure 1 and to format the conceptual content of the figure. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the figure as needed and take full responsibility for the content. Turnitin was used to check plagiarism and similarity score. The authors retain full responsibility for the manuscript's originality, accuracy, and integrity.

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