



# The Lure of the Podium: The Seductive Appeal of Predatory Conference Speaker Invitations

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## Abstract

This letter highlights an escalating concern regarding predatory conference speaker invitations that are currently plaguing academia. Such invitations are frequently issued to individuals outside their areas of expertise, for instance, non-healthcare professionals being invited to health-related conferences. This issue poses a substantial threat as it compromises the integrity of legitimate academic discourse and carries the risk of propagating unchecked and potentially detrimental information. To avoid becoming ensnared by these predatory practices, it is paramount to undertake thorough due diligence. Consequently, this letter also outlines the characteristics of predatory speaker invitations. These guidelines underscore the necessity for the academic community to remain vigilant and judicious, thereby recognizing these overtures for what they truly represent: a deceptive temptation that leads away from authentic scholarly engagement toward a facade of recognition and prestige.

**Keywords** Academic integrity · Predatory practices · Health conferences

In another letter to the editor, Pal et al. [2] warned the academic community about the considerable threat posed by so-called predatory awards. These accolades are dubious honors bestowed by non-credible entities that often seek financial gain under the guise of recognizing professional achievement. This warning comes in addition to concerns over predatory publishing practices, which have long plagued the academic community [3]. Following the proliferation of predatory awards, conferences, and journals, it is essential to draw attention to a closely related issue: predatory speaker invitations. This letter intends to illuminate the intricate mechanisms at play in these dubious invitations. By highlighting the broader issue of these invitations, which are often extended even to individuals outside their respective fields, such as non-healthcare professionals receiving invites to health-related conferences, this letter aims to demonstrate

the indiscriminate nature of these predatory practices. This tactic not only undermines the sanctity of genuine academic discourse but also risks the dissemination of unvetted and potentially harmful information. It is imperative for the academic community to be vigilant and discerning, recognizing these invitations for what they truly are as follows: a deceptive lure away from genuine scholarship and towards a mirage of recognition and prestige.

Predatory speaker invitations refer to invitations extended to individuals to speak at conferences or other events with the primary goal of exploiting the invited speaker. They are often offered by entities organizing conferences that lack legitimacy and academic rigor. These invitations, often flatteringly personalized, target a wide range of professionals, including those outside the specified conference's field. They exploit the prestige and credibility typically associated with academic speaking roles, casting a wide net to ensnare as many potential participants as possible. The primary aim, much like the predatory awards, is to profit from registration fees or to enhance the perceived credibility of the conference with the names of unsuspecting academics. The proliferation of such invitations, especially in fields, like health and medicine, raises serious concerns about the integrity of academic conferences and the potential spread of misinformation. For instance, after publishing an article on the application of ChatGPT in the nutrition domain [1], I began

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receiving numerous speaking invitations in various health fields (e.g., cardiology, neurology, and oncology) in which I am not an expert. It becomes clear that these invitations are often based on keyword searches or automated processes, without any genuine consideration of the speaker's qualifications or expertise.

To avoid falling victim to predatory speaker invitations, it is essential to conduct due diligence. Here are some characteristics of predatory speaker invitations:

1. **Poorly written invitations** Predatory speaker invitations often exhibit low-quality writing, including grammar and spelling errors, awkward phrasing, and a general lack of professionalism.
2. **Inadequate vetting** Predatory organizers may not properly vet their speakers, and they might invite individuals without considering their expertise or qualifications, solely for the purpose of increasing the event's appeal.
3. **Lack of legitimacy** Predatory invitations often come from organizations or events that lack credibility, transparency, or a genuine focus on knowledge sharing or networking. They may have vague or suspicious sounding names and websites.
4. **Hidden fees** In some cases, predatory organizers may charge speakers exorbitant fees to participate, often without providing adequate services or benefits in return.
5. **False promises** Organizers may make unrealistic promises, such as offering significant exposure, career opportunities, or high-quality networking, to entice speakers into participating.
6. **Misleading affiliations** Predatory invitations may claim associations with reputable institutions, conferences, or brands to make them seem more legitimate than they actually are.
7. **Spammy or unsolicited emails** Many predatory speaker invitations are sent as unsolicited emails or messages, often in bulk, to a wide range of potential speakers. These invitations may lack personalization and appear spammy.
8. **Pressure tactics** Some predatory organizers may use aggressive or manipulative tactics to convince individuals to accept their invitations, such as creating a sense of urgency or fear of missing out.
9. **Poor event quality** Events associated with predatory speaker invitations may be poorly organized, have low attendance, and fail to deliver on their promises.
10. **Lack of information** Legitimate speaker invitations typically provide detailed information about the event, its purpose, agenda, and expected outcomes. Predatory invitations often lack such information or provide only vague details.

The pervasive prevalence of predatory practices, be it through deceptive awards or speaker invitations, carries significant ramifications for the academic community. Beyond the immediate financial losses and credibility damage incurred by unsuspecting individuals, these practices erode the very foundation of academic integrity. They undermine the credibility and trustworthiness of legitimate conferences and academic institutions. Individual careers can suffer immeasurable harm, as participation in sham conferences can lead to a waste of time, resources, and reputation. To combat this problem, institutions and academic bodies must take proactive measures. They can establish clear guidelines for conference selection, encourage due diligence among scholars, and create platforms for reporting and sharing experiences related to predatory practices. Collaboration between academia, researchers, and organizers can help identify and blacklist predatory conferences. It is through such collective efforts that the academic community can protect its values and uphold the integrity of academic conferences. With diligence and vigilance, we can ensure that genuine academic pursuits continue to thrive, fostering knowledge dissemination and scholarly advancement.

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