

## **Scientists buy their careers on social media**

[Martina Frei](#) / *Infosperber* 28.01.2023

***For money you become a co-author of a scientific paper. High-ranking trade journals are also affected.***

Anyone who acts as an author on a scientific publication must have made a substantial contribution to this work - or simply transferred money

Such deals are offered on Facebook, Telegram and relevant websites: money for authorship. British engineer [Nick Wise](#) found at least 600 advertisements for these counter transactions on two Telegram channels. The Russian scientist Anna Abalkina reported more than 2,300 such offers on the International Publisher LLC website in March 2022.

The scientific magazine «[Nature](#)» quotes [Deborah Kahn](#) from the «[Committee on Publication Ethics](#)», which mainly represents scientific publishers and has been campaigning for integrity in scientific publications for 25 years, as "a big business" that is operated by increasingly sophisticated providers.

**Apparently 20,000 customers have already been served**

According to Abalkina, interested parties can choose from a wide range of offers for 180 to 5,000 euros, for example at "International Publisher LLC", whether they want to be the first author or just a co-author (this is cheaper), which topic the scientific work deals with and when to appear.

According to her, six authorships were sold to Switzerland, 2,971 went to Russia, 589 to Kazakhstan, 432 to China, 125 to Ukraine and 116 to the United Arab Emirates.

**Recent focus on well-known magazines**

Abalkina compared the offers on the website with specialist articles that were actually published later. Almost every listing on the site lists the manuscript's subject, number of co-authors, approximate publication date, and other details. With this information, Abalkina searched for the relevant specialist articles.

460 studies or other scientific publications to date, several details matched the advertisements so well that there was a strong suspicion that at least one author had bought through «International Publisher LLC». ([460 Studien oder anderen wissenschaftlichen Publikationen](#)) Since autumn 2020, "International Publisher LLC" has tried to place the "authors" in well-known scientific journals.

Although Abalkina published her work on the pre-print server "arXiv" more than a year ago, it has not yet been scientifically reviewed - but it is still causing a stir, even in respected scientific publishers.

Since May 2022, Springer Nature Verlag has withdrawn 12 specialist articles because there is a suspicion that the authors have "bought in". Further investigations are underway, «[Nature](#)» said.

In July 2022, the "International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning" withdrew 30 alleged scientific articles because they showed suspicious similarities to advertisements on the "International Publisher LLC" website.

In November, the "Journal of Alloys and Compounds" withdrew a paper for which authorship was offered for payment on an Iranian Telegram channel.

**«difficult to prove»**

According to an expert at «[Springer Nature](#)», the fakes are "difficult to prove." The number of unreported cases could be much higher, suspects [Anna Abalkina](#), who works at the Institute for Eastern Europe at Freie Universität Berlin and is therefore focusing on countries like Russia.

In 2012, Russian President Vladimir Putin decreed that the proportion of Russian publications in scientific journals should increase and that at least five Russian universities should be among the top 100 worldwide by 2020, reports Abalkina. That increased the pressure to publish.

Anna Abalkina is convinced that the problem will increase. "We hunt them - and they are always one step ahead."

### **"Putting your name under an analysis when you haven't seen the data is scientific fraud" - the "Surgisphere" case**

Undeserved co-authorship has also been a common evil in Western countries for decades. ([seit Jahrzehnten ein häufiges Übel](#)) In some samples, about every third scientific work was written by an author who had only been given this authorship on an honorary basis, but not because they had made a substantial contribution to the publication. ([etwa jeder dritten wissenschaftlichen Arbeit](#))

A prominent Swiss example from the recent past is the clinic director of the heart clinic at the University Hospital in Zurich, [Frank Ruschitzka](#). The professor acted as co-author on a widely acclaimed study that was published with great fanfare in The Lancet in May 2020 - and had to be withdrawn two weeks later. ([zwei Wochen später zurückgezogen](#))

The discrepancies, implausible information and gross errors in this study literally jumped out at the eyes of independent scientists at the time. The three co-authors, on the other hand, including the head of the Zurich Heart Center, missed them.

When criticism arose, the company Surgisphere, which allegedly compiled the data for this study, refused to release it for independent verification.

The co-authors had to admit ([mussten eingestehen](#)) that they were not able to check the primary data from "Surgisphere" - although the University Hospital Zurich had claimed in the press release ([Pressemitteilung](#)) when the study was published: "The research team led by Mehra and Ruschitzka undertook the study Use of the Surgical Outcomes Collaborative database by.»

How "Surgisphere" - according to the Neue Zürcher Zeitung ([NZZ](#)) a company "with only a handful of employees" and no experts in statistics or biomedicine - managed to obtain data from over 96,000 patients within a short time remained a mystery - but also in this regard the co-authors obviously did not suspect anything.

It is not known that money flowed at that time. But: "Putting your name under an analysis if you haven't seen the data is scientific fraud," said a specialist ([Fachfrau](#)) to the [British Medical Journal](#). And the British scientist Tom Jefferson observed: "History repeats itself." More than a decade earlier, he and his colleagues had warned about issues such as guest authorship.

The Zurich chief cardiologist got off lightly: the University of Zurich warned him to be more careful with publications in the future and snarled at him for 30 hours of unpaid work at

the university's "Competence Center for the Reproducibility and Quality of Scientific Results".

Original document in German:

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