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Hijacking By Email: A New Fraud Method

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Abstract

Research misconduct is not a new problem in the research field. However, in recent years, the researchers themselves could be a victim of a newly expanded trouble: being hijacked by email. Being obsessive about publishing one's research results and finding the "real journals" seems not to be enough in recent years. In this article we will have a closer look to this issue and discuss two real examples happened to us. At the end, there are a few tips which could be helpful in encountering with such issues. We hope that dessiminating such data could raise the public and academic awareness and finally eliminate the expansion of this fraud method.

Keywords: Email, Hijack, Scientific Misconduct

1. Introduction

Science expansion has had a great influence on quality life of human beings. Although there is still a long way to go, most of the international health measures have improved during recent decades. It is not surprising to consider our routine (and maybe simple) daily projects as a cornerstone for making a better life for all. But sadly, while some efforts are made to improve research based on the correct principals (1), some artifacts are threatening this good will.

Research misconduct in its general term has expanded from researchers to publication domains. According to Merriam Webster dictionary the term highjack means: stop and steal (a moving vehicle), to steal (something) from a moving vehicle that you have stopped, to take control of (an aircraft) by force (2).

Various techniques have been developed to cheat researchers including hijacked journals, faked declarations, tempting impact factors, email spoofing, cheating publishers, unreal editorial board and fake conferences (3). As an alarm for this emerging problem, the years 2012 and 2013 had been called "the year of fake journals" and 2014 as "the year of fake impact factor" (4). As it seems that there is not enough attention to this matter, this symbolic designation can be a good trigger for understanding the real iceberg phenomenon.

But, unfortunately, being obsessive about publishing one's research results and finding the "real journals" seems not to be enough in recent years so this is not the end of the story. Newer methods which are used more specific than the former ones (i.e. methods which are mentioned above) are mainly underestimated. We have received some reports (as well as the experience of ourselves) showing not only seminars and congresses (5) but also high rank individuals are not secure from these fake invitations. They are mostly identity thieves or money launderers. At the end of this article you will find a recent email which was sent on behalf of Ban Ki-moon, secretary general of the United Nations (Samples 1 and 2).

Reading this email, while we have a background for "fake" things look funny. However, finding one of these in our mailbox among all other "real" things can be so tricky. We intended to keep this alarm "ON" and remember to investigate all parts of the emails which request information from us. These tips can be helpful:

1- First of all, it is very unlikely to receive such messages from the highest rank of an international organization by himself while there has been no communication with them before.

2- These messages mostly request personal information.

3- They may call us with name and even present some of your personal information. But this is not a sign for their honesty! These are information which we have published them ourselves before.

4- These messages usually have something to do with money as this is a global interest for human.

5- These messages usually come from internationally known organizations like UN, WHO and WB.

6- The contact information is usually fake. However, if somebody answered the call, this is not still a proof of their honesty!

Finally, we may feel that with all these methods of fraud, how can we trust our emails? The fact is that these incidences are rare. But as a professional duty, we believe disseminating this information can prevent further regret.

2. Samples

2.1. Sample 1: A Fake Email That Was Claimed to be Sent from UN

"The United Nations Headquarters, New York

United Nations Compensation Unit, In Affiliation with World Bank Our Ref: U.N/WBO/042UK/2014.

Congratulations Beneficiary

How are you today? Hope all is well with you and family? You may not understand why this mail came to you. We have been having a meeting for the past 7 months which just ended few days ago with the secretary to the UNITED NATIONS. This email is to all the people that have been scammed in any part of the world and families, individuals, organizations that needs financial support, the UNITED NATIONS in Affiliation with WORLD BANK have agreed to compensate them with the sum of USD$5 Million Dollars.

This includes every foreign contractors that may have not received their contract sum, and people that have had an unfinished transaction or international businesses that failed due to Government problems etc. We found your name in the list of those who are to benefit from these compensation exercise and that is why we are contacting you, this have been agreed upon and have been signed. You are advised to contact Aaron Smith of our paying center in Africa, as he is our representative in Nigeria, contact him immediately for your Cheque/ International Bank Draft of USD$5 Million Dollars.

This fund is in form of a Bank Draft for security purpose ok? So he will send it to you and you can clear it in any bank of your choice. Therefore, you should send him your full Name and telephone number your correct mailing address where you want him to send the Draft to you. Contact Aaron Smith of MAGNUM PLC PAYMENT CENTER with your payment Code:ST/DPI/829 immediately for your Cheque at the given address below:

DIRECTOR IN CHARGE: Aaron Smith

E-MAIL: deptclaimsuncc@gmx.com

TELEPHONE: +2348105744165

FAX: +234-1-8968850"

2.2. Sample 2: A Fake Email That Was Claimed to be Sent from UN

"I apologize on behalf of my organization for any delay you might have encountered in receiving your fund in the past. Thanks and God bless you and your family. Hoping to hear from you as soon as you cash your Bank Draft. Making the world a better place.

You are required to contact the above person and furnish him with the following of your information that will be required to avoid any mistakes:

1. Your Full name:
2. Your Country:
3. Contact Address:
4. Telephone Number:
5. Fax Number:
6. Marital Status:
7. Occupation:
8. Sex:
9. Age:

Congratulations, and I look forward to hear from you as soon as you confirm your payment making the world a better place.

Regards,

Secretary-General Ban

http://www.un.org/sg/"

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