



# FINDINGS FROM A PAPER MILL

Svetlana Kleiner

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## Paper mill fields

- **Biomedicine**
- **Genetics**
- **Computer Science**
- **Microbiology**
- **Crystallography**
- **Medicine/Pharmacology**
- **Engineering**
- **Economics/Finance**
- **Psychology**
- **Education**
- **Sociology**
- **Business/Management**
- **Geology**
- **Botany**

## International Publisher LLC (Abalkina 2021)

### Suspicious collaborations

- Authors may not know each other;
- Authors do not have common research interests;
- Authors are affiliated with different universities;
- Authors specialize in different disciplines;
- Authors may not specialize in the topic of the paper.

### Co-authors

- Declining share of single-authored papers;
- Average number of affiliations 3.2;
- Average number of co-authors 3.9.

### Other features

- Dubious emails;
- Suggested peer reviewers who are dubious;
- Authorship changes mid-cycle (optional).

## Why people do it

- **Promotions**
  - Competitive fields develop a cargo cult of publication numbers, i.e. “publish or perish”
- **Thesis defence**
  - In many countries, there is a minimum amount of publications necessary for PhD or Habilitation. Without this number, people are not allowed to defend their theses
- **Better contracts**
  - In many countries, Scopus-indexed publications are stipulated by contracts
- **Better salaries**
  - In many countries, even one Scopus/WoS indexed publication per year raises the author’s salary to an actually livable level
- **Monetary bonuses for publication in “decent” spaces**
  - In many countries, every indexed publication leads to one-time bonuses for each publication

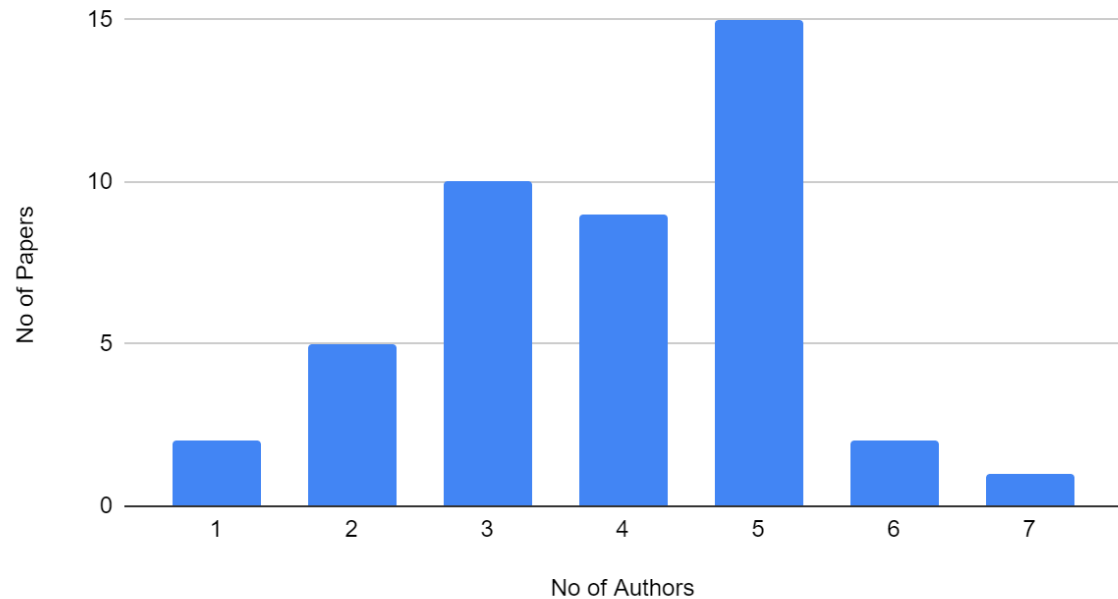
## The company in question

- Post-Soviet organization with offices in at least 5 countries.
- Services on offer:
  - Editing
  - Formatting
  - Translation
  - Selecting the journal
  - Corresponding with the journal
  - Indexing in Scopus

# The Data

**Average author per paper: 3.9**

No of Papers vs No of Authors

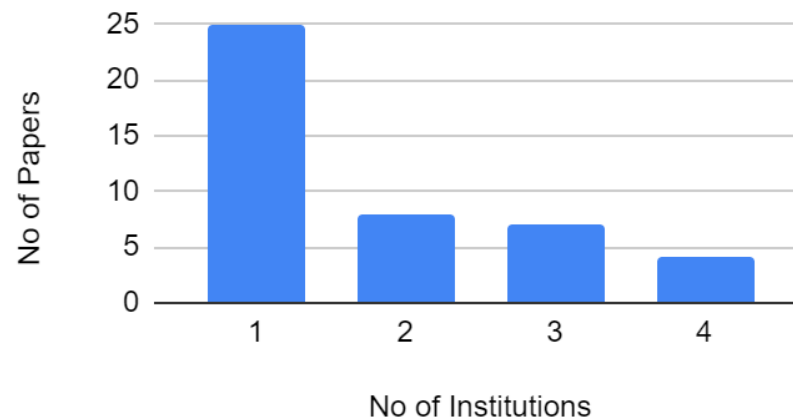


## The Data

### Average institution per paper: 1.8

- 25 papers, i.e. 57%, come from only one institution

No of Papers vs No of Institutions





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## Communication with authors

**57% replied to our requests and actually tried to explain what happened!**

- **Seemed genuinely surprised that reviewers had been suggested on their submission:**
  - Authors on 21 papers
- **Immediately admitted to using a third party for translation services:**
  - Authors on 4 papers

## The most frequent explanation

“The fact is that the researchers who served as reviewers for our submission were recommended to me by my former supervisor. I'm not personally familiar with these people and have never been interested in their institutional pages. The email address and contact information were also provided by my former supervisor. I hope you can find it yourself someday.”

-- *Authors on 11 different papers*



## Why do they do it – again?

- **Promotions**
  - Competitive fields develop a cargo cult of publication numbers, i.e. “publish or perish”
- **Thesis defence**
  - In many countries, there is a minimum amount of publications necessary for PhD or Habilitation. Without this number, people are not allowed to defend their theses
- **Better contracts**
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- **Better salaries**
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- **Monetary bonuses for publication in “decent” spaces**
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- **SOME MIGHT BE ALREADY TOO HIGH UP TO PREFER A THIRD PARTY DOING THE WORK**



**THANK YOU**

Svetlana Kleiner  
Senior Research Integrity Adviser  
Editorial Excellence  
[Svetlana.kleiner@springernature.com](mailto:Svetlana.kleiner@springernature.com)