

Geopolitical conflict's impact on author affiliation: Misattribution of Ukrainian cities in research

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Abstract

This preliminary study investigates the impact of geopolitical events, specifically the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine, on academic publishing. It focuses on whether researchers listed Ukrainian cities as part of Russia in their author affiliations, despite international law recognizing these cities as Ukrainian. Using PubMed, the study analyzed articles published since 2014 that referenced Ukraine's 50 most populous cities and those hosting the top 50 medical universities. The analysis identified 413 articles where Ukrainian cities were misattributed as Russian, representing 2.3% of relevant articles on PubMed. Simferopol and Sevastopol were the most frequently misattributed cities. These findings highlight how geopolitical conflicts can influence academic record-keeping, raising concerns about accuracy and integrity in scholarly work. This preliminary study emphasizes the importance of vigilance in academic publishing, especially in the context of geopolitical tensions.

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Original Manuscript

Geopolitical conflict's impact on author affiliation: Misattribution of Ukrainian cities in research

Running title: Misattribution of Ukrainian cities in research

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Abstract

This preliminary study investigates the impact of geopolitical events, specifically the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine, on academic publishing. It focuses on whether researchers listed Ukrainian cities as part of Russia in their author affiliations, despite international law recognizing these cities as Ukrainian. Using PubMed, the study analyzed articles published since 2014 that referenced Ukraine's 50 most populous cities and those hosting the top 50 medical universities. The analysis identified 413 articles where Ukrainian cities were misattributed as Russian, representing 2.3% of relevant articles on PubMed. Simferopol and Sevastopol were the most frequently misattributed cities. These findings highlight how geopolitical conflicts can influence academic record-keeping, raising concerns about accuracy and integrity in scholarly work. This preliminary study emphasizes the importance of vigilance in academic publishing, especially in the context of geopolitical tensions.

Introduction

The annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014 and the subsequent war in Donbas, with Russian support for separatists from April 2014, set the stage for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This invasion severely impacted Ukraine's health system, leading to increased morbidity and mortality.^{1,2}

This preliminary study investigates whether these geopolitical events also influenced academic publishing, specifically whether researchers listed Ukrainian cities as being part of Russia in their author affiliations, despite international law recognizing these cities as Ukrainian.

Methods

I compiled a list of the 50 most populous cities in Ukraine and identified the cities hosting the country's 50 most renowned medical universities (n=20 cities).³ Using PubMed's proximity search,⁴ I retrieved all articles published since January 2014 where authors listed these cities as affiliations under either Ukraine or Russia. This search was conducted for (i) all PubMed articles and (ii) articles from the top-100 general internal medicine journals by JCR impact factor.⁵

I categorized these articles into four groups: 'Russian/PubMed,' 'Ukrainian/PubMed,' 'Russian/top-100,' and 'Ukrainian/top-100.' For the 'Russian/PubMed' and 'Russian/top-100' groups, I sorted the articles by city and year of publication. I also calculated the proportion of articles listed as Russian by dividing the number of 'Russian' articles by the total number of articles (both 'Russian' and 'Ukrainian' articles combined). To ensure accuracy, I manually checked the articles twice to remove any irrelevant entries. The Supplementary Material includes details of the top-100 journals and the PubMed search query used.

Results

The results of the study are shown in Table 1. I identified 413 articles in the 'Russian/PubMed' group (26 irrelevant articles were excluded), 17,480 in the 'Ukrainian/PubMed' group (no irrelevant articles from a random sample of 1,748), 8 in the 'Russian/top-100' group (no irrelevant articles), and 260 in the 'Ukrainian/top-100' group (no irrelevant articles). The cities most frequently misattributed were Simferopol and Sevastopol. The proportion of articles misattributed as Russian was 2.3% in the PubMed group (ranging from 0.4% in 2014 to 3.5% in 2022) and 3.0% in the top-100 journals group.

Discussion

In summary, this preliminary study identified 413 articles in PubMed where authors affiliated with Ukrainian cities were erroneously listed as being from Russia, constituting 2.3% of such articles. Similarly, within the top-100 general internal medicine journals, 8 articles (3.0%) contained this misattribution. These findings highlight the influence of geopolitical conflicts on academic publishing, specifically the misattribution of Ukrainian cities to Russia.

The results reveal a notable trend in misattributing Ukrainian cities to Russia in scholarly articles, reflecting broader challenges in maintaining academic integrity amidst geopolitical tensions. Several factors might contribute to these misattributions. Authors may face political pressure, personal safety concerns, or institutional policies that influence how they list their affiliations. While this study does not delve into these motivations, understanding them could provide a more comprehensive view of the issue. Future research could benefit from qualitative approaches, such as interviews or surveys with affected researchers, to explore these underlying factors.

The primary limitation of this study lies in its reliance on PubMed's proximity search, which may not capture all relevant articles due to variations in indexing and search algorithm limitations. Additionally, the study's focus on biomedical journals might not represent trends in other scientific disciplines, suggesting the need for broader investigations across various fields of research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the subtle impact of geopolitical conflicts on academic publishing. By bringing attention to the misattribution of Ukrainian cities to Russia in scholarly articles, it highlights the importance of vigilance and accuracy in academic record-keeping, particularly in times of geopolitical unrest. Addressing these misattributions is crucial for ensuring the integrity of academic publications.

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Ethical approval: as this study did not involve the collection of personal health-related data, it did not require ethical review in accordance with current Swiss legislation.



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Table 1. Occurrences of Ukrainian cities misattributed as Russian affiliations in scholarly articles, sorted by Ukrainian city and year of publication, across all PubMed articles and the top-100 general internal medicine journals (1st January 2014 - 30th May 2024)

	N (%) ¹
All PubMed articles	
Author affiliation (Ukrainian city misattributed as Russian affiliation)	
Simferopol	194 (47.0)
Sevastopol	185 (44.8)
More than one Ukrainian city	21 (5.1)
Kerch	4 (1.0)
Donetsk	3 (0.7)
Kharkiv	2 (0.5)
Yevpatoria	2 (0.5)
Odesa	1 (0.2)
Lugansk	1 (0.2)
Year of publication	
2014-2024	413 (2.3)
2014	3 (0.4)
2015	9 (1.0)
2016	22 (2.1)
2017	20 (1.6)
2018	30 (2.1)
2019	30 (1.8)
2020	44 (2.1)
2021	67 (2.8)
2022	84 (3.5)
2023	70 (2.6)
2024	34 (3.0)
PubMed articles published in the top-100 general internal medicine journals	
Author affiliation (Ukrainian city misattributed as Russian affiliation)	
Simferopol	6 (0.8)
Sevastopol	2 (0.2)
Year of publication	
2014-2024	8 (3.0)

¹ For author affiliations, the percentage is calculated as the number of articles where the specified city is misattributed as Russian affiliation, divided by the total number of articles misattributed as Russian (i.e., 413 articles for all PubMed articles and 8 for PubMed articles published in the top-100 general internal medicine journals). For the year of publication, the percentage is calculated as the number of articles misattributed as Russian with the specified year of publication, divided by the total number of articles (i.e., both articles considered Russian and Ukrainian combined).



Supplementary Files

Multimedia Appendixes

Details of the top-100 journals included in the study and the PubMed search query used.

URL: <http://asset.jmir.pub/assets/3b4634e138a220c4008093cb31cd358e.docx>