Exploring Publication Ethics Issues in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences: A COPE Study

Conducted by COPE and supported by Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group)

Deborah Kahn, COPE Trustee, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Subcommittee member and Global Publishing Director, Taylor & Francis
Research background

COPE perceived as STM-focused

Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group): the world’s largest publisher of humanities and social sciences journals (2018 Clarivate Analytics)

Enhance understanding of the publication ethics landscape for AHSS editors
The aim

To better understand the publishing ethics needs of arts, humanities and social sciences journal editors, and to identify areas where they may need specific guidance and support.
Online focus groups
COPE members only.

Used GoToMeeting software for typed chat.

Two x 75 minute sessions.

Online survey
Open to academic editors of AHSS journals, both COPE members and non-members.

30 questions.

656 usable responses.
Demographics

**IN WHICH COUNTRY ARE YOU BASED?**

- USA: 37%
- United Kingdom: 21%
- Rest of Europe: 14%
- Australia and New Zealand: 3%
- Asia: 4%
- Canada: 4%
- Central and South America: 4%
- Middle East: 2%
- Rest of Africa: 2%
- Other: 0.3%

**DO YOU HAVE AN EDITORIAL ROLE ON A SCHOLARLY JOURNAL?**

- Voluntary or honorarium editor: 13%
- Employed editor: 83%
- Editor within the last 12 months: 9%
- Other: 0%

**HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU HAD AN EDITORIAL ROLE ON A SCHOLARLY JOURNAL?**

- 21+ Years: 11%
- 11-20 Years: 18%
- 6-10 Years: 23%
- 3-5 Years: 30%
- 0-2 Years: 17%
Limitations

• Distribution of the sample
• Sample size and generalisation about subject-level differences
• Geographical representation
• No subject comparison group
• Self categorisation of subject groupings
• Respondent self-selection
The results
What is driving publication ethics issues?

Online access to papers and the peer review process
“Ties between reviewers and authors that make blind review impossible are also worries. In particular, a reviewer can often easily uncover the author because working papers are published online prior to submission to a journal.”
Journal editor, social sciences.

Globalisation, inclusion and diversity
“Increased numbers of writers from non-English speaking backgrounds whose language issues seriously affect how we can work with their material. We presently have a good diversity of reviewers but this must be kept up through active searching for appropriate reviewers.”
Journal editor, social sciences.

Technology and authorship
“Machine-authored manuscripts are beginning to seem like a real possibility.”
Journal editor, humanities and social sciences.

New technologies around data gathering and analysis
“With the increased mainstreaming of “big data”, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, there will be new ethical issues that emerge in terms of data privacy, reproducible research, and knowledge generation. I could imagine investigators using methods they do not understand completely and inadvertently publishing misleading or identifying information.”
Journal editor, social sciences.

Academic culture and incentives
“Weighing speed of publication given REF (Research Excellence Framework) requirements in the UK... is it ethical to ask an emeritus professor to wait to be published if a junior professor in the UK needs a publication now for REF 2020?”
Journal editor, humanities and arts.
- 57% consult COPE resources.
- 18% considered them to be an extremely important source.
- Guidelines particularly useful (43% rated as extremely useful).
- 48% unaware of the support COPE provides.
- 22% unaware of COPE.
The challenges

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<th>Most serious&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Most widespread&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Most frequent when experienced&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Least confident in dealing with&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<td>Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards</td>
<td>Addressing language and writing quality barriers while remaining inclusive</td>
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<td>Data and/or image fabrication issues</td>
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<td>Fraudulent submissions</td>
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<td>Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments</td>
<td>Fraudulent submissions</td>
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<td>Data and/or image fabrication issues</td>
<td>Addressing language and writing quality barriers while remaining inclusive</td>
<td>Issues around the way in which authors receive and respond to criticism</td>
<td>Intellectual property and copyright issues</td>
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Challenges: fraudulent submissions

- 44% consider these to be among the most serious ethical issues
- 24% lack confidence in addressing them
- Types of fraudulent submissions include:
  - Hoax articles
  - Submissions by a third party
- Can lead to retractions and reputational damage.
Challenges: data and/or image fabrication

“Data fabrication can be a big concern since the validation of reported results is often not within practical means of the reviewers (as they would have to have access to the raw data and be willing to replicate the analyses being reported).”

Business, Finance and Economics journal editor, US
Challenges: language issues

Reported as widespread and frequent

- Balancing language and diversity
- Tensions between quality and global representation
- Peer reviewer diversity
Key areas of opportunity

- **Fraud, fabrication, and intellectual property**
  While issues around language are most prevalent, it is issues around fraud, fabrication, and intellectual property that are most serious and difficult to deal with for those surveyed.

- **Language concerns**
  Specific issues around language are not currently given prominence in COPE's offering and more could perhaps be done here. Recently added resources appear to go some way to fill some gaps, for example in addressing issues of diversity and inclusion, and, as COPE continues to add more flowcharts and guidelines to its resources, these needs should be addressed.

- **Authorship standards**
  Arts, humanities, and social sciences journal editors also indicated that they could use more support in their responsibilities to mentor authors, mediate between conflicting interests, and moderate authorship standards, particularly, though not exclusively, in relation to qualitative work.

- **Advice**
  Some indicated a desire for a more direct relationship with COPE and for more tailored advice. While COPE's resources may not be able to stretch to one-to-one advice, the COPE Forum should be promoted to members from the arts, humanities, and social sciences as a source of support.
What next?

• A foundation for further collaboration and research between COPE and arts, humanities and social sciences journal editors

• Developing existing or creating new guidance

• Raising awareness of existing resources among arts, humanities and social sciences journal editors
Read the study

publicationethics.org