EXPLORING PUBLICATION ETHICS IN THE ARTS, HUMANITIES, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) Initial Research Findings

Top 5 publishing ethics challenges faced by today’s journal editors

1. Addressing language and writing quality while remaining inclusive - 64%
2. Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards - 58%
3. Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments - 55%
4. Issues around how authors receive and respond to criticism - 54%
5. Self-plagiarism - 50%

WHY THIS RESEARCH?
COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) aims to provide practical publication ethics guidance for editors working in all disciplines. We wanted to better understand the publication ethics issues faced by arts, humanities, and social sciences journal editors and, with support from Routledge, carried out this research to assess current and future needs. The results will help us provide better support and guidance to journal editors working in these disciplines.

THE METHODOLOGY
The research was conducted in two stages:
1. We held two initial, exploratory focus groups to identify current ethical issues editors face, future issues they anticipate, and what sources of support they currently use or need.
2. This informed an online survey of a larger number of editors, which helped us understand the prevalence of these issues, how frequently editors are encountering them, and which challenges they need most support with.
WHO RESPONDED?

We gathered insights from 656 editors of journals in the arts, humanities, and social sciences who responded to the online survey. This included voluntary and employed editors working independently or in teams, and with varied levels of experience.

Insights from 656 editors of journals in the arts, humanities, and social sciences

EXPERIENCE LEVELS

- 0-2 Years: 17%
- 3-5 Years: 31%
- 6-10 Years: 23%
- 11-20 Years: 18%
- 21+ Years: 11%

SUBJECT FOCUS

- Social Sciences: 47%
- Humanities: 46%
- Education: 20%
- Multi/Interdisciplinary: 20%
- Business, Finance & Economics: 15%
- Library & Information Science: 13%
- Arts: 10%
- Law: 5%
- Other: 10%
WHAT JOURNAL EDITORS TOLD US:

TODAY’S MOST PRESSING PUBLICATION ETHICS ISSUES

Said the most prevalent and frequent issue was addressing language and writing quality barriers while remaining inclusive.

Have encountered issues around the way authors receive and respond to criticism.

Encountered issues with detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards. This was particularly prevalent among Business, Finance and Economics editors.

Respondents said the most serious issues were detecting plagiarism and poor attribution, fraudulent submissions, and data and/or image fabrication issues.
We asked journal editors what situations or behaviours may cause ethical issues in five years’ time.

- Authorship and attribution issues and problems with peer review are expected to increase.
- Journal editors thought the issue of making scholarly publishing more inclusive would have to be addressed, and that this would involve dealing with different international standards and minimising English language dominance.
- While not one of the most prevalent issues, data and/or image fabrication was highlighted as one that will become more of a problem, exacerbated by big data and artificial intelligence.
- The current output-driven academic culture is expected to increase pressure to publish and exacerbate issues such as self-plagiarism and predatory publishing.

Half of the respondents had encountered self-plagiarism with 22% saying it arose frequently. Editors reported that this was likely to increase with the current academic culture of measuring outputs.

Respondents felt least confident in dealing with data and/or image fabrication, fraudulent submissions, and IP and copyright.

WHAT JOURNAL EDITORS TOLD US: KEY PUBLICATION ETHICS ISSUES OF THE FUTURE

Want more?

Register for the full findings

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