Ethical challenges in the arts, humanities and social sciences: initial research findings and solutions

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Our Aim

To better understand the publication ethics needs of arts, humanities and social science journal editors, and to identify areas where they may need specific guidance and support.

**Q.** What issues are journal editors dealing with that are problematic?

**Q.** What is it that journal editors need from COPE in terms of support?

**Q.** What is COPE currently not providing?
Methodology

Online focus groups

- COPE publisher members
- 10 respondents
- Two x 75 minute sessions
- All from major publishers

Online survey

- Academic editors
- 30 questions
- Mix of major publishers and smaller society and university publishers
Online survey respondents: role profiles

- 83% Editors working on a voluntary basis
- 64% Independent editorial decision makers
- 56% Editorial decision making in teams
- 37% COPE members
- 77% Associated with major publishers
Online survey respondents: editorial experience

- 21+ years: 11%
- 11-20 years: 18%
- 6-10 years: 23%
- 3-5 years: 31%
- 0-2 years: 17%
Online survey respondents: geographies

- United States: 37%
- United Kingdom: 21%
- Rest of Europe: 17%
- Australia and New Zealand: 9%
- Asia: 4%
- Canada: 4%
- Central and South America: 4%
- Middle East: 2%
- Rest of Africa: 2%
Online survey respondents: subject areas

Social Sciences: 47%
Humanities: 46%
Education: 20%
Multi/Inter-disciplinary: 20%
Business, Finance & Economics: 15%
Library & Information Science: 13%
Arts: 10%
Law: 5%
Other: 2%
KEY PROFESSIONAL & ETHICAL ISSUES
Top 5 ethical issues reported

- Remaining inclusive while addressing language (64%)
- Detecting possible unattributed copying (58%)
- Recognizing and responding to bias in reviews (55%)
- Handling author responses to criticism (54%)
- Self-plagiarism (50%)
What were the most serious & difficult ethical issues facing editors?

- Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards
- Fraudulent submissions
- Intellectual property and copyright issues
- Data and/or image fabrication issues

Journal editors felt least confident about dealing with these issues
Data and/or image fabrication: an area of under confidence

“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
What did editors see as future ethical issues?

Inclusion and diversity
Editors must encourage a more diverse range of voices, while maintaining quality

“Increased numbers of writers from non-English speaking backgrounds whose language issues seriously affect how we can work with their material”

Social Sciences editor, Australia and NZ
What did editors see as future ethical issues?

Using data
Data-related ethical issues will become more prominent with big data and AI

“With the increased mainstreaming of ‘big data’ machine learning and AI … I could imagine investigators using methods they do not understand completely and inadvertently publishing misleading or identifying information”

Social Sciences editor, US
What did editors see as future ethical issues?

**Academic culture**

An output-driven academic culture will continue to cause more instances of ‘salami–slicing’ and self-plagiarism.

“Machine-authored manuscripts are beginning to seem like a real possibility”

*Humanities and Social Sciences editor, US*
CURRENT SOURCES OF SUPPORT
Which sources of support were most important to editors?

- Senior editorial colleagues/Editor-in-Chief (70%)
- Editorial boards (50%)
- Contacts at publisher (43%)
- Non-editorial colleagues (29%)
- Professional bodies (24%) and societies (18%)
- COPE (18%) or HEI ethics committees (17%)
Which policies were most frequently used by editors?

- Post-publication corrections and retractions
- IP and copyright
- Plagiarism
- Ethics
- Open access
SUMMARY &
NEXT STEPS
What can we conclude from these initial findings?

Increasing **inclusivity** and **diversity** requires editor support

Plagiarism and **data** integrity issues are growing in HSS

Editors draw on academic peer support networks when handling ethical issues
Coming soon: white paper

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