

Introduction

Ethics and Plagiarism in Scientific Communication

Ética y plagio en la comunicación científica

Guest-edited special issue:

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Both scientific and academic communication should be guided, amongst others, by the principles of honesty, integrity, probity and truthfulness. Misleading, misrepresenting, defrauding, lying, betraying, concealing, confusing, etc. are practices that are incompatible with the transmission of scientific knowledge and academic activities. The reality, however, is different: there is abundant evidence showing that dishonest and fraudulent activities are still present in both processes.

Development, penetration and expansion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have led to significant changes in the methods and procedures of transmission and acquisition of knowledge. In scientific communication, both targeted to the general public (through mass media, social networks, etc.) and targeted to specialists (through scientific journals, congresses and conferences, research reports, etc.), these changes, combined with other factors, can promote and encourage dishonest practices. The same applies to the transmission of knowledge in education: numerous experts suggest that there has been an increase in the prevalence of dishonest behaviours, especially by students and particularly those that have to do with the perpetration of academic plagiarism in the process of teaching and learning.

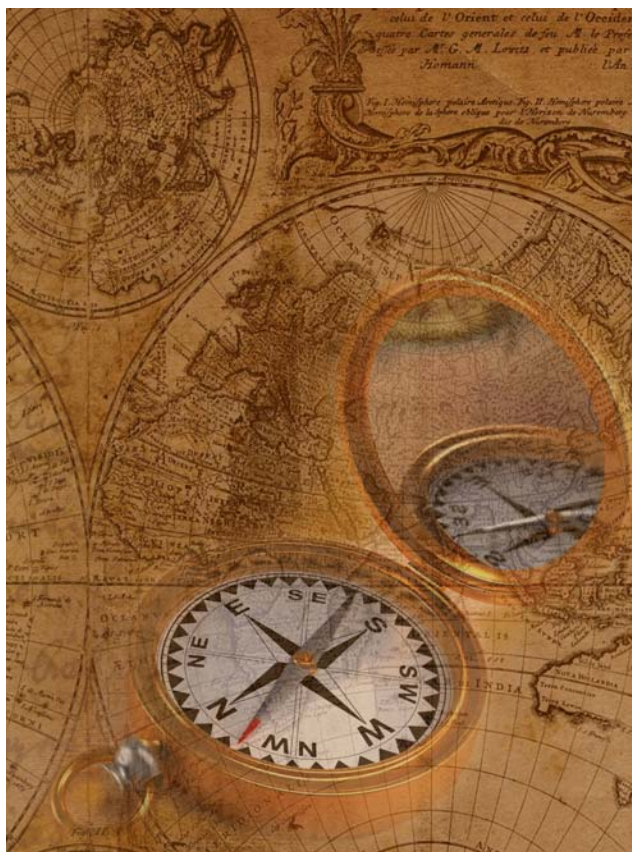
In light of this situation, both the managers and editors of scientific publications and media, as well as responsible bodies of academic institutions and research centres, must ensure compliance of core values such as honesty, integrity, fairness and truthfulness in the creation of scientific and academic communication and transmission.

This special issue is intended to publicize and disseminate recent contributions and advances in the field of ethics and honesty in scientific and academic communication, with special emphasis on the phenomenon of plagiarism and other dishonest practices. It attempts to provide answers to some of the questions raised initially in the 'call for papers': What basic principles should guide the dissemination of scientific results? How to promote ethical values linked to communication and scientific dissemination among researchers? In relation to editors of scientific journals, what role do they play or should they play to ensure honesty in scientific communication? What strategies have been or should be implemented to combat dishonesty in the transmission of scientific knowledge? How can governments, responsible bodies of science policy, and research funding institutions act to ensure honesty and truthfulness in the communication of research project results? What is the level of prevalence of various dishonest practices, such as plagiarism amongst students? What are the causes or factors associated with plagia-

rism and other fraudulent practices amongst students? What measures and strategies exist to combat dishonest practices by students, what is their effectiveness and how they could be improved? The articles in this dossier can be classified into three categories: the first, consisting of two works focuses on issues related to ethics and integrity in research; the second consists of two contributions that deal with ethics within teaching and learning, and finally, the third, concentrates on analysing the attitudes and opinions of university students about downloads and consumption of audio-visual products through the Internet, with particular emphasis on illegal downloads.

In the first article «Plagiarism and academic integrity in Germany» Ruipérez and García-Cabrero, who are researchers at the National University of Distance Education (UNED), perform a thorough review of how academic and scientific dishonesty is approached and faced in Germany, with special emphasis on detecting and combating plagiarism at doctoral thesis level. This is a significant contribution in that it helps, above all, to understand how Germany has addressed the problem of plagiarism in doctoral dissertations from collaborative experiences (such as the Wiki «VroniPlag») and by creating the figure of Ombudsman of Science, which has enabled a homogenization of guidelines and principles for action against dishonest conduct in science in the whole country.

The second article, «Antifraud Editorial Policy in Spanish and Latin American Scientific Publication: JCR Social Sciences Edition», conducted by Hernandez-Ruiz (a researcher based at the University of Alicante, Spain), discusses and describes how the editorial policy of the Spanish and Latin American area social sciences scientific journals deal with questions of editorial ethics. The analysis of the editorial policies and ethical codes of the 107 journals indexed in the area of Social Sciences in the Journal Citation Reports (2014) provides a series of remarkable results: despite the existence of international standards to address the issue of ethics and fraud in scientific publications, they are considered by very few publications analysed by the study. There is great heterogeneity in terms of anti-fraud measures proposed in the journals and with different levels of demand and rigor; there is little treatment of issues such as authorship of articles, plagiarism and self-plagiarism, fabrication of data, and so on, and most regulations focus on the original character of the study submitted and the advertence of no simultaneous sending of the same work to various journals. In addition, results demonstrate the journals with a higher impact have better and more profuse treatment of scientific ethics in their editorial policy than lower impact ones. Finally, the author explains the need to adapt and reach a consensus about own editorial standards for journals in the field



of social sciences favouring the «establishment of uniform standards of performance for publishers, authors and reviewers of this area».

In the third work presented in the monograph, «Chinese University EFL Teachers' Knowledge of and Stance on Plagiarism», Hu Guangwei, from the Nanyang Technological University (Singapore), and Xiaoya Sun, from the Xi'an International Studies University (China), inform us about the understanding and appreciation about academic plagiarism by English language teachers from more than 30 Chinese universities. In the study, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the authors present results that suggest that the opinion and knowledge about what constitutes plagiarism of Chinese teachers participating in the study did not differ from the prevailing one that we can find in the Anglo-Saxon academic world; this is an issue on which many studies have been developed seeking to correlate the differential concept of plagiarism with aspects and factors such as knowledge transfer culture, the historical and social characteristics of each context/country and its scientific traditions and philosophical-ideological aspects. Still yet, the authors highlight the fact that the participating teachers who have carried out any part of their training in Anglo-Saxon universities, have higher levels of knowledge about what is academic plagiarism and how to avoid it compared with those teachers who have received their complete training in Chinese or non-Anglo-Saxon institutions.

The fourth article entitled «The Impact of Activity Design in Internet Plagiarism in Higher Education» focuses on investigating whether teaching strategies and the design of training activities can act as a preventing factor and reduce the commission of plagiarism in academic activities carried out by university students. The study, conducted by Gomez-Espinosa, of the International University of La Rioja (Spain), and Francisco and Moreno-Ger, from the Complutense University of Madrid (Spain), was based on a quasi-experimental design that was intended to analyse the weight and influence of the characteristics of learning activities prescribed to students at an online university in the frequency of academic plagiarism committed by them. As a general conclusion of the work, this shows that it is possible to reduce the incidence of plagiarism through the design of training activities that are motivating for students and encompasses a certain degree of autonomy from students in their development.

Finally, the last work of this dossier, it is the article elaborated by Duarte-Hueros and Ruano-López, researchers from the University of Extremadura (Spain), and Duarte-Hueros, from the University of Huelva (Spain). The manuscript, entitled «The Audio-visual Content Downloads among University Students», focuses on a study, through a survey of the attitudes and opinions of university students, about downloads and consumption of audio-visual products and resources via the Internet. Results obtained show a high frequency in the consumption of audio-visual content and a high incidence of piracy practices (mostly, illegal downloading) explained by economic and convenience justifications by the students surveyed. The limited knowledge among students about the legal aspects of resources located on the Internet and the downloading, usage and sharing of them is also highlighted. It is evident, therefore, there is a need to intervene in improving the knowledge on legal issues and the ethical use of digital content and resources by young people.