

Trustworthy publishing

Information and communication technology has changed the nature of publishing beyond all recognition. Publishing, and academic publishing in particular, is dependent on technology - the online world has become the norm. An extensive virtual network exists in which those involved are all potentially connected. New modes and patterns of interaction and expectation have developed which challenge our social norms and moral integrity.

This network can be defined in three sections: academia, technology and publishing. Within each section there exists a set of relationships which must be trustworthy to be effective. Academia is founded on higher education institutions each of which comprises the institution, its academics and its students. Relationships are two-way between institution and academic, academic and student, and student and institution (Rogerson, 2013). Technology deployment involves three main groups: vendors of both hardware and software; developers of both infrastructure and application; and direct and indirect recipients where direct recipients comprise clients and users and indirect recipients comprise individuals, the general public and society as a whole (Rogerson 2014). Once again all possible relationships are two-way. Finally, publishing primarily comprises publisher, author and reader with two-way relationships existing between them.

It is within this complex set of relationships that academic publishing exists. Driven by institutional strategy and priority, academics and students undertake research which is written up and submitted for publication. Technology-enabled access to data and literature informs the research and writing processes. Choice of journal, method of submission, process of review and production of publication are similarly technology-enabled. Much of the publishing activity takes place online with many of the players never meeting face-to-face. Trusting relationships should exist throughout the publishing activity but in the online world this can be challenging. We are fundamentally trusting of each other – such trust is destroyed when an incident occurs that demonstrates untrustworthiness. Trusting relationships in the physical real world rely heavily on non-verbal cues such as body language and tactile interaction but in the online world such cues rarely exist (Rogerson, 2013). Therefore academic publishing, which is now an online activity, is exposed to the breakdown of trusting relationships.

Plagiarism, falsification and copyright infringement are examples of causes of breakdown in trust. These issues fall within the broader field of publication ethics which is the lead topic for this first issue of Volume 14 of the *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*. The issue begins with an invited paper, *Challenges to ethical publishing in the digital era* by Mirjam Curno. Dr Curno is a trustee and council member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). In her paper, Curno discusses three issues which illustrate vividly the challenges to the “ethical conduct of authors, reviewers and editors alike.” Her call for publication ethics education of all those involved should be supported. There then follows four shorter responses to Curno’s paper by well-respected academics from different fields and holding different roles.

Robert Hauptman supports Curno’s position. He reminds the reader that ethical issues exist across the disciplines and as such might have different emphasises and forms. His remark that data falsification might ultimately cause harm is a salutary warning. It places the act of publication in a different context. Richard Keeble’s response, *Publication ethics: Stressing the positive* presents a different perspective. He suggests that the “commercialisation in higher education” presents a different set of ethical challenges. He argues such challenges have their roots in the “political, social, economic and ideological fields” and as such can only be resolved in these fields. There is a sense that what is done in academia to promote ethically robust publishing needs to be backed by those in these outside fields. *The Ethics Pipeline to Academic Publishing* by Tricia Bertram Gallant supports

Curno's emphasis on the role of publishing leadership. However, like Keeble, she looks beyond the publishing boundaries arguing that the urgent need is to address "systemic failure to create ethical cultures". In an ethical society, publishing ethics is likely to be accepted and flourish. Edgar Whitley provides a view from a current editor with Emerald in *Challenges to ethical publishing in the digital era: A journal editor's response to the limited mind reading skills of academic authors*. Whilst supporting Curno's analysis his emphasis is on unethical behaviour through ignorance. He calls for action to address this ignorance.

Whether we are authors, publishers or readers, we have responsibilities and obligations to act in an ethically acceptable way within academic publishing. If the integrity of academic literature is to be maintained in the digital era authors must be educated in publication ethics, publishers should actively promote ethical practice and decision makers should be mindful that strategy does not compromise ethical robustness. Only then will we have trustworthy relationships across the publishing landscape and society will prosper.

References

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