

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Analysis of academic norms and copyright cognition of scientific and technological journals: Questionnaire survey based on authors and editors

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ABSTRACT

Background: Clarify the connection and difference between academic norms and copyright, to provide a reference for constructing an academic ethics system. **Methods:** This study designed a questionnaire through expert interviews and adopted a closed-question approach. The questionnaire adopts closed-ended questions, with single-choice questions and multiple-choice questions. Publish questionnaires on the Questionnaire Star platform and disseminate them through WeChat Moments, WeChat Groups, WeChat Side-text, and QQ. A total of 256 people submitted questionnaires. **Results:** Among the participants, 128 (50%) were editors, 89 (34.77%) were teaching and research posts, and 39 (15.23%) were graduate students. Most of the interviewees are not clear about the concept of academic norms and copyright, especially the senior teaching and research workers. However, most of the interviewees can sensitively detect that the case has academic misconduct, but it is not clear whether the case of academic misconduct violates academic norms or copyright. **Conclusions:** Editors of scientific and technological journals should particularly grasp the concepts of both, accurately grasp academic norms when reviewing manuscripts, propose reasons for using or not using manuscripts, build a defense line for purifying the academic environment, and provide better publishing platforms and management services for researchers.

Key words: journal, norms, copyright, questionnaire, academic misconduct

BACKGROUND

In recent years, various withdrawal incidents have occurred frequently both domestically and internationally, and many studies have analyzed various withdrawal phenomena and preventive measures.^[1-5] Bao


et al. found that the reasons for the withdrawal of medical manuscripts from 2015 to 2017 in Scopus include academic misconduct or duplicate publications.^[6] Yang and Shi revealed that plagiarism was the main reason for the withdrawal of papers from various countries from 2014 to 2018.^[7] Han's research, like Yang's, reported that the number of withdrawals has decreased, but the issues of data, methods, and results in the reasons for withdrawals go beyond plagiarism.^[8] Wang's research indicated that in recent years, Chinese author papers that have been withdrawn from foreign journals are mostly due to intermediaries such as "paper factories" and the repeated use of third-party survey images, resulting in unreliable conclusions.^[9] Tang *et al.* studied the withdrawal of Chinese scientific and technological papers across the entire database of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), mainly due to plagiarism and incorrect article data.^[10] Ma *et al.*

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studied the withdrawal of papers in the field of Chinese humanities and social sciences, mainly due to hidden academic misconduct.^[11] However, is the scientific spirit violated by the withdrawal of manuscripts' academic norms or copyright? The above papers have not been further classified in this regard. There is limited research on academic norms and copyright awareness, as well as their relationship, and the concepts of the two are often confused. Scholars have studied the cognitive differences between authors and editors regarding academic misconduct in academic publishing, and believe that the main reason is the unclear definition of the specific manifestations of academic misconduct and misconduct.^[12] Therefore, it needs to be clarified concepts such as academic norms and copyright. In order to avoid academic misconduct and withdrawal incidents from the source, it is necessary to know the understanding of academic norms and copyright concepts among editors of scientific and technological journals and researchers in the field of natural sciences. If scientific researchers fail to clarify the concepts of academic norms and copyright during the process of learning and developing research habits, it will bring trouble to subsequent research work. When the journal editorial department decides to withdraw a manuscript, failure to provide convincing reasons for the author can also lead to disputes and misunderstandings between the editorial department and the author.

This study aims to present the current understanding of academic norms and copyright from different perspectives through various practical scenarios set in the questionnaire. Through data analysis, we aim to understand the reasons for cognitive similarities and differences, we can analyze the countermeasures to solve them, in order to standardize and coordinate these behaviors in practical work, ensure the standardization of related work, and promote academic norm construction and copyright protection.

RESEARCH METHODS

Survey objects and methods

The survey subjects and methods were published on the "Questionnaire Star" platform from August 14 to August 18, 2022. The survey targets scientific researchers and editors of scientific journals in the field of natural sciences in universities. The design of the survey questionnaire is based on the extensive literature review, and after consulting with 6 senior editors (including 4 full senior editors and 2 associate senior editors), it adopts a closed question format with a single-choice question (Question 1) and multiple-choice questions (Question 2–9). The introduction section of the questionnaire introduces the definitions of academic norms and copyright, also explains the methods of filling

out the questionnaire to avoid the occurrence of invalid questionnaires. A total of 256 people submitted questionnaires through WeChat Moments, WeChat Groups, WeChat Side-text, and QQ. Two members of the research group conducted data verification, and 256 questionnaires were all valid.

Questionnaire settings

The questionnaire covers two sections: personal basic situation and awareness of academic norms and copyright. The questionnaire includes the following questions. Five basic personal information of the interviewees, including gender, age, education background, job position, and professional title (Table 1).

RESULTS

Basic information

Among the participants in the survey, there are 128 (50%) editorial positions, distributed in 21 provinces and municipalities including Guangdong, Zhejiang, Beijing, *etc.* Among the survey participants, 89 people (34.77%) work in teaching and research positions, distributed in 11 provinces and municipalities, such as Guangdong, Yunnan, and Anhui; 39 graduate students (15.23%) did not participate in work, distributed in 7 provinces including Guangdong, Anhui, Guangxi and so on (Table 2).

Survey results and analysis of academic norms and copyright awareness

Understanding of academic norms and copyright concepts

According to the survey results, the vast majority of editors, teaching and research workers, and graduate students believe that "the two concepts are different" (Table 2). Only 14.84%, 17.98%, and 17.95% of people believe that "the two concepts are somewhat similar" (Table 3). Among the teaching and research workers, 2 people (2.24%) believe that "the two concepts are the same", upon querying the backend data, it was found that the professional titles of the two individuals were professor and associate professor respectively. Academic norms refer to the basic norms formed within the academic community for conducting academic activities or the basic norms related to academic activities formulated according to the laws of academic development. Copyright is a right related to authors as stipulated in the Copyright Law.^[13] In recent years, the academic community has attached increasing importance to academic norms, and copyrights related to academic norms, including ethics, have gradually appeared in school lectures and even become mandatory courses. Therefore, the graduate group has no less understanding of academic norms and copyright concepts than the other two groups. When they were young, the

Table 1: Questionnaire

Part	Number	Questions
Part 1	1	Gender
	2	Age
	3	Education background
	4	Job position
	5	Professional title
Part 2	1	Are the concepts of academic norms and copyright the same?
	2	What is the violation of “Gene edited baby incident”?
	3	What is the violation of the author intentionally not labeling the references that should be cited when describing references?
	4	What is the violation of starting surgery on experimental animals without undergoing anesthesia as required?
	5	What is the violation of the journal editorial department leaking the information of reviewers to the author after sending it for external review?
	6	What is the violation of an author submitting a manuscript to two magazines simultaneously in order to catch up with the schedule?
	7	An author used published images in the review and had already cited them. May I ask what his approach is?
	8	Do you need to pay the original author for reprinting a published paper in a certain journal with the original publication information marked?

Table 2: Relevant information of participants in the survey

Items	Groups	Sample size/n	Proportion/%
Gender	Male	102	39.84%
	Female	154	60.16%
Age	20–29	48	18.75%
	30–39	70	27.34%
	40–49	88	34.38%
	50–59	47	18.36%
	≥60	3	1.17%
The highest education level	Undergraduate	37	14.45%
	Master’s degree	116	45.31%
	Doctoral degree	103	40.23%
Job position	Editor	128	50%
	Teaching and researching	89	34.77%
	Postgraduate	39	15.23%
Professional title	No title	49	19.14%
	Primary title	15	5.86%
	Intermediate title	58	22.66%
	Associate professors	84	32.81%
	Senior professors	50	19.53%

Table 3: Different groups’ understanding of academic norms and copyright concepts (n [%])

Job position	The two concepts are the same	The two concepts are somewhat similar	The two concepts are different
Editor (n = 128)	0	19 (14.84%)	109 (85.16%)
Teaching and researching (n = 89)	2 (2.24%)	16 (17.98%)	71 (79.78%)
Postgraduate (n = 39)	0	7 (17.95%)	32 (82.05%)

The proportion is the ratio of the sample size of this item to the sample size of job classification.

supervisors had not systematically received academic standard education. Most of supervisors gradually accumulate and establish concepts of academic norms and copyright in their work. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct academic and standardized lectures on the

group of master’s and doctoral supervisors.

Improper description of relevant references

More than half of the respondents believe that the phenomenon of “authors intentionally not labeling the

references that should be cited when describing references” violates both academic norms and copyright (Table 4). However, there are still people within the three groups who believe that this phenomenon alone violates academic norms or copyrights, indicating that there are still many people who are not clear enough about the concept of improper citation of references. The academic community believes that literature that reads and references their ideas during the process of writing a paper should be listed as a reference. The second item of Article 22 in the *Copyright Law of the People’s Republic of China*^[13] also mentions that “in order to introduce, comment on a certain work or explain a certain issue, appropriate citation of a published work by others in the work” is in accordance with the provisions of the *Copyright Law of the People’s Republic of China*. If we intentionally do not include citations in our paper, the relevant content is assumed to be original, which violates the copyright of the original author and academic norms. It is difficult for editors to identify literature that should be cited without intentional labeling. If the author directly copies the text of the source literature, the text copy can be identified through the similarity detection system. If the source literature is “modified”, even the similarity detection system cannot distinguish it. In terms of improper citation of references, there is also a phenomenon of authors randomly compiling references. The author has developed a practice of citing high-quality journal documents to make editors and reviewers agree with the author’s viewpoint. To monitor this type of academic misconduct requires editors to check the references one by one.

Journal leaks reviewer information

In the case of the journal editorial department leaking the information of reviewers to authors after sending it for external review, the vast majority of respondents believe that it violates academic norms (Table 5), while other respondents believe that this case violates copyright. Copyright includes 16 personal and property rights, including the right of publication and the right of authorship. The disclosure of reviewer information by the editorial department to authors is not related to copyright, but rather to academic norms. At present, the vast majority of domestic journals adopt single-blind review or double-blind review.^[14] Using these two evaluation methods to disclose reviewer information to the author after sending for external review is a serious academic misconduct and a violation of academic norms. If open review is adopted, the identities of both parties are known to the other party at the beginning of external review, and are often used in online open access (OA) journals.^[15] Journal editors should not disclose the information of reviewers, nor should they disclose the content of manuscripts. They should actively avoid manuscripts with conflicts of interest. Similarly, if

reviewers disclose the content of the author’s article during the review process, or intentionally delay the review time and provide unfair evaluations due to peer competition, it also violates academic norms and copyright.

Multiple submissions for one draft

For “an author who submitted a manuscript to two magazines simultaneously in order to keep up with the schedule”, only 32.81% of editors, 42.70% of teaching and research workers, and 35.90% of graduate students believe that it violates both academic norms and copyright regulations (Table 6). Almost half of the respondents believe that submitting more than one manuscript only violates academic norms, depending on the specific situation. Multiple submissions of one manuscript violate academic norms. The submission of the same manuscript to different journals not only wastes the review resources of the journal, but also encroaches on the publishing resources of other contributors, resulting in longer review times for other contributors, and even rejection of manuscripts due to the same direction. If the manuscript has already signed a copyright transfer agreement at the time of submission, according to Article 33 of the *Copyright Law of the People’s Republic of China*:^[13] “If the copyright owner submits a manuscript to a newspaper or journal, and fails to receive a notice from the newspaper or journal to decide to publish it within 15 days from the date of publication, or fails to receive a notice from the journal to decide to publish it within 30 days from the date of publication, the same work may be submitted to another newspaper or journal. Unless otherwise agreed by both parties”. This means that the author violates academic norms and the Copyright Law by submitting multiple submissions within 30 days of submission.^[13] There is also a situation where the editorial department of the journal does not need to submit a manuscript for a long time after the author submits it, and it is unclear the progress of the manuscript. If the author wants to transfer to another journal, it is best to inform the editorial department in writing before transferring to another journal to avoid violating the Copyright Law. In addition to submitting multiple submissions, the author’s plagiarism, forgery, tampering, and violation of research ethics also violate academic norms.

Use published images in the review

A total of 14.06% of editors, 65.17% of teaching and research workers, and 41.03% of graduate students believe that the practice of “an author using published images in the review has already been cited” violates both academic norms and copyright regulations (Table 7). A review is a paper written by summarizing, organizing, analyzing, and refining a large amount of data, materials, and main viewpoints from original

Table 4: Investigation results of improper bibliographic description of references by different groups (n [%])

Job position	Violation of academic norms and copyright	Violation of academic norms	Violation of copyright	Violation of other regulations
Editor (n = 128)	66 (51.56%)	55 (42.97%)	6 (4.69%)	1 (0.78%)
Teaching and researching (n = 89)	53 (59.55%)	24 (26.97%)	11 (12.36%)	1 (1.12%)
Postgraduate (n = 39)	20 (51.28%)	17 (43.59%)	2 (5.13%)	0

The proportion is the ratio of the sample size of this item to the sample size of job classification.

Table 5: Investigation results of different groups on the leakage of peer review expert information in journals (n [%])

Job position	Violation of academic norms and copyright	Violation of academic norms	Violation of copyright	Violation of other regulations
Editor (n = 128)	7 (5.47%)	110 (85.94%)	4 (3.13%)	7 (5.47%)
Teaching and researching (n = 89)	14 (15.73%)	70 (78.65%)	3 (3.37%)	2 (2.25%)
Postgraduate (n = 39)	4 (10.26%)	31 (79.49%)	2 (5.13%)	2 (5.13%)

The proportion is the ratio of the sample size of this item to the sample size of job classification.

Table 6: Survey results of multiple submissions of one draft by different groups (n [%])

Job Position	Violation of academic norms and copyright	Violation of academic norms	Violation of copyright	Violation of other regulations
Editor (n = 128)	42 (32.81%)	68 (53.13%)	15 (11.72%)	3 (2.34%)
Teaching and researching (n = 89)	38 (42.70%)	43 (48.31%)	7 (7.87%)	1 (1.12%)
Postgraduate (n = 39)	14 (35.90%)	24 (61.54%)	1 (2.56%)	0

The proportion is the ratio of the sample size of this item to the sample size of job classification.

Table 7: Survey results of different groups on the use of images in other languages (n [%])

Job position	Correct	Incorrect: It violates academic norms	Incorrect: It violates copyright regulations	Incorrect: It violates both academic norms and copyright regulations	The answer is illogical
Editor (n = 128)	73 (57.03%)	6 (4.69%)	27 (21.09%)	18 (14.06%)	4 (3.13%)
Teaching and researching (n = 89)	13 (14.61%)	2 (2.25%)	15 (16.85%)	58 (65.17%)	1 (1.12%)
Postgraduate (n = 39)	7 (17.95%)	8 (20.51%)	8 (20.51%)	16 (41.03%)	0

The proportion is the ratio of the sample size of this item to the sample size of job classification.

research papers on a specific topic. If images from other sources are directly used in the review, it is not in line with academic norms. From a copyright perspective, the images in the paper belong to intellectual works and enjoy the same copyright as published papers. Most of the copyrights of published papers (including images) have been transferred to the journal unless the authors of some OA papers enjoy the complete copyright of the papers (including images). Article 22 Item 2 of the *Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China* stipulates that “in order to introduce, comment on a certain work or explain a certain issue, appropriate citations of published works by others shall be made in the work”, as a three-time literature review, the paper is not written to

introduce or comment on the works of others, but rather for new topics, it does not comply with the Fair Use Clause of the Copyright Law. If using images from other articles in the review, authorization from the journal and the author is required, and even a fee is required to use them. Therefore, journal editors should focus on reviewing the authorization information of images used in review, and control the copy ratio of text and images in the full paper.

Reprint published papers issues

Regarding the issue of “reprinting published papers, labeling original publication information, and whether it is necessary to pay the original author a second draft”,

the vast majority of respondents believe that there is no need to pay a second draft fee (Table 8). Article 35 of the *Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China* stipulates that if the copyright owner submits a manuscript to a newspaper or journal...after the publication of the work, except for those declared by the copyright owner not to be reprinted or excerpted, other newspapers and magazines may reprint or publish it as an abstract or material but shall pay remuneration to the copyright owner in accordance with regulations. Therefore, further improvement is needed in the respondents' understanding of the secondary remuneration for papers reprinted in journals. It should also be noted that when publishing a second paper in different languages, the information of the first paper should also be marked in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Law.^[16]

DISCUSSION

Analysis of academic norms and copyright concepts

Academic norms

Norms can be interpreted as qualitative information regulations for a certain engineering operation or behavior. The standard is mainly formed due to the inability to accurately quantify, so it is called a standard. The English meaning for "norm" is the usual or normal situation, way of doing something, etc. Norms cover many conceptual ranges, including logical levels (such as moral norms, academic norms, and ethical norms), method level (such as technical specifications), and formal level (such as writing standards and indexing standards).^[17-19] This article discusses academic norms, which refer to the basic norms formed within the academic community for conducting academic activities, or the basic guidelines related to academic activities formulated based on the laws of academic development. It involves the entire process of academic research and various aspects of academic activities, from literature review to research idea design, experimental operation, data collection and comparative analysis, paper writing, achievement declaration, and paper publication.

Copyright

According to the interpretation of the *Han Dian*, copyright includes 16 personal and property rights such as publication rights and authorship rights, and is a law that advocates for the rights of authors. From the *Five Resolutions on Improving and Developing the Publishing Industry* formed at the National Publishing Conference in 1950, to the *General Principles of Civil Law* passed by the 6th National People's Congress in 1986, to the "*Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China*" passed by the 7th National People's Congress in 1990, and several revisions in 2001, 2010, and 2020,^[20] each revision is constantly improving and covering the previous

concepts after the emergence of new things, including copyright, copyright licensing and transfer contracts, protection of copyright and rights related to copyright. The revision in 2020 specifically added provisions on penalties for infringement and integration with other laws and international treaties.

Connections and differences

The scope of academic norms and copyright is different: academic norms belong to the ethical category, while copyright belongs to the legal category. The law is the bottom line and the lowest standard of human behavior. Anyone who violates the law will be punished by the law. Ethics belongs to morality and is a higher-level code of conduct. According to the *Academic Norms for Philosophy and Social Sciences Research in Higher Education Institutions (Trial)* issued in 2004, the concept of academic norms includes political ideology, scientific spirit, intellectual property rights, academic ethics, academic citation standards, standardization of academic achievements, academic evaluation standards, academic criticism standards, etc.^[17] Academic norms are applicable to the entire process of scientific research, from the design of research topics to the release and evaluation of results, all of which must comply with certain academic norms. Copyright places more emphasis on protecting the expression forms of academic achievements, such as patents, papers, designs, etc.^[21] The first section of Chapter 2 of the *Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China* is similar to the "intellectual property" and "academic achievement standards" in academic norms, which include the copyright owner and their scope of rights. This section synthesizes the relevant academic moral standards in writing, publication, and the process. *Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China* is more related to the publication of achievements, in addition to the personal rights of the copyright owner, it is also related to property rights.

Academic norms and copyright codes of conduct are different: academic norms establish codes of conduct and norms in the process of academic research, such as adhering to academic ethics and avoiding plagiarism. Its purpose is to maintain the fairness, credibility, and integrity of academic research. Copyright involves the registration, maintenance, authorization, and infringement of copyright. Its purpose is to protect academic achievements and intellectual property, encourage academic innovation and sharing, and avoid piracy and plagiarism.^[22] Therefore, academic norms and copyright play different roles in protecting different fields of academic research.

The consequences of violating academic norms and copyright are different: violating academic norms can be divided into conscious and unconscious. If an

Table 8: Survey results of different groups on the need for second remuneration for original authors (n [%])

Job position	Necessary	Not necessary
Editor (n = 128)	49 (38.28%)	79 (61.72%)
Teaching and researching (n = 89)	38 (42.70%)	51 (57.30%)
Postgraduate (n = 39)	9 (23.08%)	39 (76.92%)

The proportion is the ratio of the sample size of this item to the sample size of job classification.

unconscious violation of academic norms does not result in serious consequences, society tends to adopt an inclusive attitude towards it. If it is a conscious violation of academic norms, punishment will be imposed based on the severity of the violation, ranging from criticism and education to the cancellation of honorary titles, degrees, professional titles, dismissal, *etc.* Whether intentional or not, violating copyright is a violation of the law and must also violate the requirements of norms. Rights can be claimed through legal channels, and violators will be subject to legal sanctions.

In addition, academic norms exist before copyright. Before there was copyright, or the term “copyright”, there were already academic norms. As is well known, China’s imperial examination system began in the Sui Dynasty,^[23] subsequently, various norms emerged.^[24] The imperial examination norms should be the most widely circulated and widely applicable academic norms in ancient China.^[25] Gradually, preventing fraud has risen to the legal level.^[26] During the Northern Song Dynasty in China, in order to protect the blueprint of the *Nine Classics*, the court ordered the prohibition of arbitrary printing of this book.^[27] This indicates that the concept of copyright had already sprouted during the Northern Song Dynasty, and this form of protection continued until the Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty. The *Copyright Law of Qing Dynasty* promulgated in 1910 was the first copyright law in China.^[28]

There are both certain connections and differences between academic norms and the concept of copyright. Editors should grasp the concepts of both in real time, use a clear mind, accurately grasp academic norms when reviewing manuscripts, identify academic misconduct manuscripts, propose reasons for using or not using manuscripts, and build a defense line for purifying the academic environment.

CONCLUSION

In summary, academic norms and copyright play a very important role in scientific research. Academic norms and copyrights can ensure that researchers are respected and protected in the process of knowledge creation and transmission, improve research quality and credibility, promote academic exchange, cooperation and sharing,

and improve the efficiency of scientific research. They are of great significance for promoting the healthy development of scientific research and promoting academic exchange. Due to the continuous changes in academic norms with the development of the times, editors should timely grasp and implement the latest academic norms and laws and regulations, have the obligation to give policy lectures to readers and authors in various occasions. Conditional journals should collaborate with the graduate management department of their research institution to provide targeted lectures to graduate supervisors, providing researchers with better publishing platforms and management services. In addition, presses and editorial departments should encourage editors to go out and learn and communicate, establish a review process to prevent academic misconduct, and establish open and transparent publishing ethics standards.

DECLARATION

Author contributions

Yu J: Propose research direction, design paper framework, draft paper, participate in paper revision, finalize the manuscript. Wu JJ: Questionnaire production, collection, statistics, analysis of data. Qi FF: Literature research and organization, participation in paper revision, finalization. Sun HL: Assist in questionnaire production and data processing, participate in paper revision and finalization. Xu J: Design research ideas, conduct feasibility investigation and analysis of research plans, implement research processes, revise and review papers.

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Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Data sharing

Data used to support the findings of this study are

available from the corresponding author at xujie@mail.sysu.edu.cn.

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