Social communications

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ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDITORIAL POLICY IN SCIENTIFIC ONLINE JOURNALS: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

In today's conditions of digitalization of scientific communication, online journals occupy a leading position in disseminating research results.

On the one hand, they provide quick access to new knowledge, expand the circle of scholars and readers, and contribute to the integration of national science into the global space. On the other hand, the digital environment itself creates a number of challenges related to ensuring academic integrity, transparency of editorial processes, and trust in publications.

A key tool for maintaining high standards in the field of scientific publishing is editorial policy. It defines the principles of selection, peer review, and dissemination of materials and is based on ethical foundations such as objectivity, impartiality, reliability, and responsibility to the academic community. In international practice, a number of standards and codes (COPE, DOAJ, ICMJE) have been developed, outlining the basic requirements for editorial activity.

However, with the growth of Predatory journals, plagiarism issues, and the commercialization of science, there is a need for a deeper reflection and adaptation of ethical norms to new realities. This is particularly relevant for Ukraine, which is actively integrating into the global scientific space while facing the need to increase the quality and trustworthiness of its own online journals.

The purpose of this article is to define the theoretical foundations of ethical editorial policy, analyze the key challenges facing scientific online journals, and outline prospects for their further development.

This article reveals the essence of the main ethical principles in editorial policy as well as the key problems and risks in the field of scientific online publishing.

The editorial policy of a scientific journal is defined as a system of principles, norms, and rules that regulate the process of selecting, reviewing, and publishing materials. It performs not only an organizational but also a communicative function, as it ensures transparent interaction between authors, editors, reviewers, and readers.

The basis of editorial policy lies in ethical principles that form the foundation for trust in scientific publications. These include objectivity in decision-making, impartiality and avoidance of conflicts of interest, transparency of editorial procedures, authenticity and originality of research results, and editorial responsibility to the academic community.

Considering international practice, ethics is an integral component of editorial policy. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)[1] has developed guidelines for editors regulating work with plagiarism, duplicate publications, and corrections of errors. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE)[2] has formulated recommendations regarding authorship, conflicts of interest, and fair peer review. The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)[3] establishes criteria of transparency and best practices for journals seeking indexing.

For scientific online journals, technological tools for implementing ethical standards are of particular importance. Among them are assigning DOI identifiers to ensure uniqueness and traceability of publications, using ORCID for precise identification of authors, applying plagiarism detection systems (Turnitin, Unicheck, etc.), and integrating with international databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar.

Thus, the editorial policy of a scientific online journal is a multidimensional phenomenon that combines ethical principles, international standards, and digital technologies. It ensures not only the quality of scientific publications but also builds trust in the journal as a participant in the global system of scholarly communication.

Despite the new opportunities that digitalization of science has opened for the dissemination of knowledge, it has also caused a number of ethical problems faced by scientific online journals.

1 Committee on Publication Ethics. (2011). Code of conduct and best practice guidelines for journal editors. COPE. URL: https://publicationethics.org

2 International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. (2022). *Recommendations for the conduct, reporting, editing, and publication of scholarly work in medical journals.* ICMJE. URL: http://www.icmje.org

3 Directory of Open Access Journals. (2022). *DOAJ best practice guide*. DOAJ. URL: https://doaj.org

One of the most widespread violations is plagiarism, which undermines trust in scientific activity and devalues the results of conscientious researchers. Equally dangerous is the phenomenon of self-plagiarism, when authors reuse their previous work without proper references, creating the illusion of novelty.

Preserving the accuracy and reliability of references is of particular importance for the editorial policy of scientific online journals, as the reputation of the journal and the precision of scholarly communication depend on this. Violations in citation practices distort academic discourse and reduce trust in publications[4].

Another significant problem in modern academic practice remains the manipulation or even fabrication of empirical data, leading to the dissemination of unreliable results and negatively impacting the development of science as a whole. Researchers may "fabricate" or conceal actual results to avoid undermining their chances of future publication.

Conflicts of interest also represent a serious threat to the quality of scholarly communication, emerging both at the peer review stage and in the course of editorial decision-making. Personal, institutional, or commercial ties of reviewers and editors can compromise the objectivity of evaluating scholarly work, thereby lowering trust in a journal.

The phenomenon of Predatory journals deserves special attention. These outlets present themselves as academic journals but in reality neglect the basic standards of academic integrity.

Their characteristic features include rapid acceptance of materials without proper peer review, absence of transparent editorial policies, and an exclusive focus on financial gain. The mass proliferation of such journals reduces the prestige of scholarly publications and complicates distinguishing quality research from questionable work.

Another serious challenge for the scholarly community is the issue of publication funding. The open-access model requires covering publishing costs through author fees.

This raises many debates concerning fairness and equal access to science, since not all researchers can afford high publication charges. Consequently,

4 Gasparyan, A. Y., Yessirkepov, M., Voronov, A. A., Gerasimov, A. N., Kostyukova, E. I., & Kitas, G. D. (2015). Preserving the integrity of citations and references by all stakeholders of science communication. *Journal of Korean Medical Science, 30*(11), 1545–1552. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3346/jkms.2015.30.11.1545

there is a risk of limiting academic freedom and deepening inequality among different research communities[5].

Thus, the activities of scientific online journals are accompanied by a range of ethical challenges that require systematic solutions. Ignoring them leads to declining trust in scholarly communication and the loss of legitimacy of academic journals as institutions intended to ensure the quality and credibility of scientific knowledge.

Current trends in scientific communication show that the development of ethical editorial policy in scientific online journals will move toward strengthening transparency, integrating international standards, and applying new digital technologies.

In the near future, harmonization of national approaches with the requirements defined by leading international organizations such as COPE, DOAJ, and ICMJE will be crucial.

One promising direction is the improvement of the peer review system. Models of open peer review are gaining popularity, involving publication of reviewers' comments alongside articles or disclosing their identities. This approach reduces the risk of bias, fosters a culture of accountability, and stimulates higher-quality academic discourse.

Another important direction is the application of digital tools and artificial intelligence to support editorial processes. Automated systems are increasingly used for plagiarism detection, identifying data manipulation, and verifying references. In the future, this can significantly reduce the workload of editors and reviewers while enhancing the effectiveness of detecting violations of ethical norms.

The issue of knowledge accessibility also remains highly relevant. The further development of ethical editorial policy is associated with balancing commercial interests of publishers with the need to ensure open access to research results.

In this context, increasing attention is paid to alternative funding models, such as institutional support, grant programs, or state financing of scholarly publications.

Therefore, the prospects for the development of ethical editorial policy in scientific online journals lie in combining international standards, innovative technologies, and socially oriented models of scholarly communication.

5 Pysarenko, T. V., Kuranda, T. K., & Kochetkova, O. P. (2020). Financial support of research and development: State, trends. Science, *Technologies, Innovation, 4*(16), 3–13. DOI: https://doi.org/10.35668/2520-6524-2020-4-01

The implementation of these approaches will improve the quality of scholarly publications, ensure trust in research results, and create conditions for more active integration of national science into the global academic space.

Thus, the editorial policy of scientific online journals is an important tool for ensuring academic integrity and trust in research results. Its ethical foundations form the basis for high-quality peer review, objective selection of materials, and transparency of editorial processes. Compliance with international standards enables national journals to integrate into the global scientific space and enhance their authority.

An analysis of the main challenges has shown that the key threats to the ethics of editorial activity remain plagiarism, self-plagiarism, manipulation of research results, conflicts of interest, and the growing number of Predatory journals. Equally significant is the problem of commercialization of scientific publishing, which questions equal access to knowledge within the open-access model.

The prospects for developing editorial policy are linked to implementing new peer review models, active use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence for ethical control, as well as harmonizing national approaches with international standards. In this context, strengthening cooperation among editorial boards, scholarly communities, and international organizations is particularly important.

Therefore, improving the ethical editorial policy of scientific online journals should become a priority in the development of modern science. This will enhance the quality of publications, strengthen trust in research results, and promote more active integration of Ukrainian science into the global academic space.

DOI: 10.51587/9798-9917-51940-2025-024-145-149