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EDITORIAL

Beyond plagiarism to scholarly integrity: Rethinking scientific writing in the postplagiarism era

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Plagiarism and postplagiarism

Plagiarism in research environments is defined as the use of someone else's words or ideas without appropriate attribution [1]. Within this framework, the central concern has been the copying of text without citation or the overly close paraphrasing of existing sources [1]. Academic institutions, journals, and peer review processes have therefore historically emphasized proper citation, quotation, and paraphrasing practices as key safeguards for maintaining scholarly integrity [2].

The development of plagiarism detection technologies has reinforced this understanding. Systems such as "Turnitin"mand "iThenticate" compare submitted write-ups against large databases of published work in order to identify textual similarity and generate similarity reports that highlight overlapping passages [3, 4]. As a result, plagiarism detection in many academic settings has become closely associated with similarity scores that measure the extent to which a manuscript reproduces existing language. Ensuring academic integrity has therefore often been interpreted primarily as ensuring that textual overlap remains properly attributed and that similarity indices fall within institutionally acceptable thresholds. While similarity reports are useful tools, they do not fully capture how knowledge is developed, interpreted, or responsibly communicated.

In recent years, discussions within scholarly communication and research ethics have increasingly suggested that traditional plagiarism frameworks may be too narrow to capture the ethical complexities of contemporary knowledge production. The concept of "post-plagiarism" or "postplagiarism" has appeared in discussions about the changing conditions under which scholarly writing takes place [5]. In this paper, postplagiarism refers to an expanded understanding of scholarly integrity that goes beyond detecting copied text to include transparency, collaboration, and responsibility in how knowledge is produced.

It needs to be kept in mind that the idea of a postplagiarism context does not suggest that plagiarism has disappeared or that standards of attribution are no longer important. Rather, the concept reflects a growing recognition that the conditions under which scholarly writing occurs have changed significantly, and that traditional plagiarism frameworks, focused mainly on detecting copied text, no longer fully capture the ethical complexities of contemporary knowledge production or scholarly writing in a technologically mediated environment.

The shifting paradigm

Several structural developments have contributed to this evolving perspective. The expansion of digital knowledge ecosystems has dramatically increased the availability and accessibility of scholarly literature [6]. At the same time, collaborative forms of research, often described as "team science", have become more common across many fields, including clinical and health research [7]. More recently, the emergence of generative artificial intelligence tools capable of assisting with drafting, summarizing, and

Key messages

Plagiarism, focused on detecting unattributed text reuse, is no longer sufficient to address the ethical complexities of contemporary scholarly writing. A post-plagiarism perspective, shaped by digital ecosystems, collaborative science, and generative artificial intelligence, has transformed conditions of authorship, originality, and intellectual contribution. It highlights an integrity-oriented approach that shifts attention from text copying to responsible knowledge production within distributed research systems.

Table 1 Comparison between the traditional plagiarism model and the emerging postplagiarism integrity model

Dimensions	Traditional plagiarism model	Emerging postplagiarism integrity model
Primary focus	Text copying	Intellectual contribution
Central question	Was this text copied without attribution?	How was this knowledge produced and represented?
Detection mechanisms	Text similarity software	Transparency, documentation, and disclosure
Ethical concern	Unattributed textual reuse	Responsible knowledge production
Authorship assumption	Individual textual ownership	Distributed and collaborative contribution

editing text has introduced additional questions about authorship, responsibility, and transparency in scholarly writing [8]. These developments have broadened the scope of academic integrity discussions. Rather than focusing exclusively on whether a text was copied from an identifiable source, researchers and publishers increasingly ask how knowledge claims are produced, interpreted, and represented within complex research ecosystems. For example, a researcher conducting a systematic review may draw on findings from dozens of prior studies. In such cases, integrity depends not only on avoiding direct copying, but also on accurately representing and synthesising existing evidence. To clarify the conceptual differences between the traditional plagiarism framework and the emerging integrity-oriented perspective, **Table 1** summarizes the key distinctions between these two approaches across several dimensions of scholarly practice.

The emerging integrity perspective expands the scope of scholarly responsibility beyond the detection of copied language. Within the traditional plagiarism model, ethical evaluation is largely limited to determining whether a researcher has reproduced existing text without proper citation. Three structural transformations help explain why this discussion has emerged:

[a] The expansion of digital knowledge ecosystems,

[b] The rise of collaborative research and team science, and

[c] The development of generative AI tools capable of producing scholarly text.

Each of these developments influences not only how research manuscripts are produced, but also how key concepts such as authorship, originality, and intellectual contribution are understood in contemporary academic practice.

The expansion of digital knowledge ecosystem

Researchers today work within ecosystems characterized by unprecedented access to published literature through online databases, digital repositories, and open-access platforms [6]. In many areas of biomedical and clinical research, scholarly writing involves synthesizing large bodies of prior evidence, such as in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. In these contexts, originality often lies not in producing entirely new wording, but in how existing knowledge is interpreted, synthesised, and applied to generate meaningful insights.

The rise of collaborative research and team science

Another factor is the substantial growth of collaborative research practices. Large interdisciplinary teams have become common in many domains of contemporary science [7]. Multi-institutional clinical trials, collaborative data analysis projects, and international research networks frequently involve numerous contributors who participate in different stages of the research process. Manuscript preparation in such settings is typically distributed across multiple authors who contribute to drafting, revising, and refining different sections of the text. As a result, scholarly writing increasingly reflects collective intellectual work rather than the output of a single author and raises questions about how to attribute distributed contributions fairly and transparently.

The development of generative AI tools capable of producing scholarly text

A third factor contributing to the postplagiarism discussion is the rapid development of generative AI tools capable of assisting with academic writing tasks [8]. These can generate summaries, suggest phrasing, and help organize written material. While these technologies can support researchers by improving efficiency and accessibility in writing, they also raise questions about transparency, authorship responsibility, and the boundaries of intellectual contribution in human-AI hybrid writing.

Reshaping of the ethical landscape of scholarly writing

Together, these developments reshape how we think about research responsibility. The postplagiarism discussion therefore reflects not a rejection of plagiarism norms but an expansion of the integrity framework within which those norms operate. Rather than asking only whether text was copied without attribution, scholars increasingly consider how knowledge claims emerge within collaborative, digital, and technologically mediated research environments and how responsibility is shared across human and technological actors.

Understanding this broader framework also requires identifying the ethical responsibilities that accompany contemporary research practices. These responsibilities extend beyond citation and attribution to include transparency about research processes, collaboration, and the use of digital tools

Table 2 Core ethical responsibilities in the postplagiarism context

Responsibility	Description
Attribution	Proper acknowledgement of intellectual sources and influences
Collaboration	Transparent recognition of co-authors and research contributors
Transparency	Disclosure of research methods, analytical tools, and writing assistance
Accountability	Responsibility for the accuracy and interpretation of knowledge claims

in writing and analysis. Table 2 outlines the key domains of ethical responsibility associated with the postplagiarism context.

The contemporary scholarly integrity encompasses a wider set of responsibilities than those traditionally associated with plagiarism prevention alone. Proper attribution remains essential, but it is now accompanied by expectations of transparency regarding research processes, collaboration, and the use of digital tools in knowledge production.

For researchers, this expanded framework implies that academic integrity involves responsible participation in complex systems of knowledge production. Scholars must not only acknowledge prior sources but also ensure that their contributions accurately represent the processes through which research findings are generated and interpreted. In collaborative research environments, this includes clearly recognizing the roles of co-authors and contributors [9]. In digital and AI-supported writing contexts, it may also involve disclosing the use of tools that assist with drafting or analysis and clarifying how such tools influenced the final text [10]. This means that maintaining integrity increasingly involves not only avoiding plagiarism, but also being transparent about how research is conducted, how collaborations are managed, and how tools are used in writing.

The concept of a postplagiarism context therefore signals an important conceptual transition. Rather than focusing exclusively on detecting textual similarity, contemporary discussions of research integrity increasingly emphasize the broader ethical responsibilities associated with producing and communicating knowledge within evolving scholarly ecosystems. In this sense, plagiarism remains an important concern, but it is now understood as one element within a wider framework of scholarly accountability.

Conclusion

For researchers encountering this discussion for the first time, particularly those working in clinical and health sciences, the central message is not that standards of attribution are weakening. On the contrary, the expectations placed on researchers are becoming more comprehensive. Maintaining integrity in contemporary scholarship requires careful attention not only to citation practices but also to transparency, collaboration, and accountability in the processes through which knowledge is produced.

Seen in this light, the postplagiarism discussion represents an effort to align ethical frameworks with the realities of modern research environments. As digital infrastructures, collaborative practices, and technological tools continue to reshape the landscape of scholarly communication, maintaining research integrity increasingly depends on recognising how knowledge is generated, shared, and interpreted within these evolving systems and on preparing researchers and students to navigate human-AI co-authorship responsibly.

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