

# The Role and Path of University Academic Journals in Research Integrity Building

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## ABSTRACT

Research integrity is instrumental in academia and provides a solid foundation for innovation. University academic journals perform key functions in communicating and sharing knowledge, which is critical for fostering academic research integrity. In this work, the role of university academic journals in the construction of scientific research integrity is discussed. Firstly, the study provides an overview of the integrity problems, and then analyzes their causes in current scientific research. Accordingly, this work proposed four specific paths to strengthen the research integrity 1) developing a professional editorial team, 2) standardizing the editing and publishing process, 3) motivating university academic journals to actively participate in integrity crisis management, and 4) jointly establishing the scientific research integrity mechanism of university academic journals. Taken together, we believe this work describes an effective approach to purify the academic environment and shall promote the sustainable development of academic journals.

**Keywords:** university academic journals; research integrity; role; paths

## 1. INTRODUCTION

President Xi Jinping indicated in his "Speech at the Forum on the Work of Philosophy and Social Sciences" that we should oppose fake academic acts that violate academic ethics and the law, focus on integrity, establish good academic ethics, and abide by academic norms. Integrity is the cornerstone of social development and is a kind of social character, informing the ethical norms that citizens must follow when engaging in various social activities. Integrity is reflected in all areas of society, including politics, economics, culture, etc. The construction of an honest society requires the joint efforts of all sectors of society. Integrity in scientific research is the basis of academics, and without a positive environment of scientific research integrity, there will be no incentive for innovation, let alone superior academic achievements. University academic journals, as vessels to promote national policies, exchange scientific research ideas, and disseminate disciplinary knowledge, are the guides of academic development and play an important role in the construction of scientific research integrity.

In recent years, incidents of academic misconduct have occurred in academic circles, and scientific integrity has encountered unprecedented challenges, arousing great attention from all walks of life. Several topics regarding integrity are worthy of in-depth study and discussion, including how to identify academic misconduct scientifically, guide experts and scholars to abide by academic norms, make contributions to scientific research integrity construction, and purify the ecological

environment for the development of university academic journals. The article identifies the existing integrity problems in current scientific research. It analyzes the causes of scientific research integrity problems and the role of university academic journals in scientific research integrity construction. Further research is necessary to understand the perspective of university academic journals, from strengthening the construction of their editorial team, standardizing their editing and publishing work, enhancing the initiative of university academic journals to participate in integrity crisis management, and jointly building the scientific research integrity of these journals. To purify the academic environment and promote the sustainable development of academic journals, four measures have been proposed to strengthen the construction of scientific research integrity, namely, the academic environment and the mechanism.

## 2. RESEARCH INTEGRITY PROBLEMS AND THEIR CAUSES

### 2.1. The Main Problems of Research Integrity

At present, adherence to the integrity of scientific research is a concern for the whole world. For this reason, all countries attach great importance to the construction of scientific research integrity, from the scientific research system, academic norms, moral quality, and other aspects of efforts to prevent the emergence of an integrity crisis. China has carried out explorations on the construction of

scientific research integrity, and university academic journals have played an important role in the construction as well. According to statistics, in 2018, 10,139 types of journals were published in China, among which the number of scientific and technical journals was ranked third in the world. Accordingly, Chinese journals publish a significant number of papers each year and are at the forefront of the world ranking. However, with the increasing prominence of academic misconduct, the quality of academic papers is problematic, and the influence of journals is not strong enough. This restricts the sustainable development of journals and hinders the progress of science and technology and the development of social sciences.

In China, a breach of trust in research mainly has two characteristics. Firstly, research integrity appears in all aspects of academic research and research management. There are many violations of research integrity, which have a significant negative impact on the entire research environment. These violations include academic achievement falsification (in 2019, actor Tianlin Zhai was exposed to the falsification of a doctoral thesis), author signature irregularities, plagiarism of academic papers, research data falsification, the unfairness of various awards and issuance of articles, and the sale of academic papers. Secondly, research integrity is a serious problem. This seriousness is mainly manifested in four ways: (1) many major common cases of academic misconduct are not thoroughly investigated and handled; (2) "one veto" is not implemented for academic misconduct; (3) the buying and selling of articles by thesis intermediaries is not effectively curbed; and (4) some government officials and academic celebrities also have scientific research integrity problems [1] and produce adverse social impacts. These problems are closely related to the lack of ethical standards for journal publishing, relevant laws and regulations, the actions of supervisory bodies, and the inadequate journal evaluation system in China. In the era of new media, the scientific research environment has changed, and the method of journal publishing has been transformed and upgraded. Publishing now functions digitally through paperless offices for manuscript submission, manuscript review, publication, and distribution of journals. This change has severe consequences, including the disruption of academic order, waste of academic resources, and destruction of the credibility of academic research.

While disseminating academic information, university academic journals enhance the research level of authors and promote scientific research through gate-keeping quality and editorial processing. Research integrity is the fundamental tenet of academic management and scientific and technological progress, the key to the construction of learning style, and the basic requirement for the cultivation of innovative talents. The creation of academic integrity is the responsibility of university academic journals and addresses the need to comply with academic ethics. The loss of academic ethics has impacted the development of academic journals and affected the integrity construction of academic journals in universities. Therefore, it is urgent to strengthen the construction of academic honesty in China.

## ***2.2. The Causes of Research Integrity Problems***

### *2.2.1. Low awareness of academic integrity among scientific researchers*

Researchers often have a weak sense of integrity, do not abide by the code of conduct for scientific research, and lack moral awareness and self-discipline. Currently, the title evaluation system of scientific researchers is centered on theses. That is to say, the evaluation standard of the academic level of scientific researchers is the number of published papers. Some opportunistic scientific researchers are eager for quick success and instant benefits and do not pay attention to the improvement of their scientific research level or delve into academic research. In these situations, the quality of theses is worrying, and the level of academic ethics declines. To meet the market demand for dissertation publication, the emergence of intermediaries has caused some researchers to seek them out to write dissertations on their behalf, violating academic integrity. With the expansion of graduate student enrollment and the poor quality of the graduate student population, if these young researchers do not have a good grasp of academic norms, they are prone to misconduct in scientific research.

### *2.2.2. Unscientific methods of paper evaluation*

The existing academic evaluation and awards are often "thesis-only", placing excessive emphasis on the number and impact factor of theses in title evaluation, scientific research awards, and talent selection. Focusing on these factors often leads to neglecting the quality of theses. Some universities also set the number of theses published by postgraduates as a prerequisite for graduation. These phenomena cause some scholars to be too useful, which makes it difficult for them to concentrate on their work and leads to the falsification of theses. As academic research is specialized and frontier, the editors of university academic journals have limited professional ability and are often not familiar with the professional content, making it difficult to discern the academic and integrity problems of theses at first glance. At present, university academic journals mainly adopt the detection systems of misrepresented literature, checkpoints by reviewers, and comparison with published papers. Still, there is no more effective, comprehensive, and direct method to control these from the source.

### *2.2.3. Lack of scientific approaches to the issue of research integrity*

In reality, university academic journals are distributed in various regions and fields of society, and there is no platform for communication between journal editors. This makes it difficult to discover the research integrity problems of authors (such as the problem of "submitting

one manuscript to several journals"). Journal editors have no direct authority to punish authors for academic misconduct, and there is no specific punishment standard, which means that punishment is not a deterrent and cannot fundamentally prevent or eliminate academic misconduct. Also, research integrity management lacks perfect laws and regulations, and systems, universities, and research units often do not instate special institutions to investigate and manage violations of research integrity. They also do not formulate policies and measures to combat and punish violations of research integrity. The problem of scientific research integrity is not dealt with scientifically; penalties are generally imposed after the fact, and there is no mechanism for prevention or monitoring in advance.

#### *2.2.4. Professional ethics of university academic journal editors need to be strengthened*

Editors of academic journals are the processors and quality gatekeepers of papers, and the professional ethics of editors have a great influence on the development of journals and the maintenance of academic integrity. In recent years, incidents of editors violating professional ethics have occurred. Some editors, out of personal interests, exploit their power to engage in monetary transactions and publish articles that do not meet the quality requirements. They even sell the personal information of authors to paper intermediaries for personal benefits. Editors lack academic skills, do not perform strict gatekeeping during the paper review process, do not edit and proofread carefully, and cannot detect academic misconduct in a timely manner, resulting in the low academic quality of papers. Editors are also incompetent in their professional ethics. The selection of manuscripts is not based on academic quality, but on personal relationships, which affects the quality and reputation of the journal.

### **3. THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC JOURNALS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY**

University academic journals are the carriers of scientific research results and the gatekeepers of research integrity. Therefore, the role of university academic journals in integrity building should be given full play.

#### *3.1. University Academic Journals Provide Support for Research Integrity*

Firstly, university academic journals disseminate the idea of academic honesty. Integrity includes political, economic, cultural, and social integrity. The mission of university academic journals is to disseminate information and culture. Therefore, in processing the views of experts and scholars,

they should take the initiative to promote the idea of scientific research integrity, prevent academic misconduct, improve the ideological awareness of scholars, and actively mobilize them to participate in the construction of scientific research integrity, so that the construction of an honest society is deeply rooted in people's hearts. Secondly, university academic journals should make use of their platform to publicize academic achievements and the concept of scientific research integrity; discover existing problems in a timely manner; and propagate corresponding policy suggestions to provide a reference for the decision-making of the government, universities and relevant departments. Through organizing academic conferences and forums, university academic journals can provide research directions for scholars, focus on social and economic issues, find solutions, and present policy suggestions. Finally, university academic journals consider research integrity when selecting topics for planning and provide theoretical support for research integrity construction. Presently, the academic community has researched research integrity theory and formed theoretical results. For example, Fang [2] took the research in 2014 as an example, analyzed the academic texts on integrity construction in the "China Knowledge Network Academic Literature Collection" and established the following conclusion: academic journals of universities pay attention to integrity construction issues in a wide range of rich content with both in-depth research on theoretical foundations and in-depth analysis of the construction path. Furthermore, there is a discussion on the construction of the evaluation indexes and evaluation process, which provides theoretical support and reference for the construction of the social integrity system.

#### *3.2. University Academic Journal Editors Have A guiding Role in the Construction of Research Integrity*

University academic journals are the main platform for displaying scientific research results and the objective expression of scientific research integrity, in which the editors of university academic journals play a leading role in the construction of scientific research integrity. To fill this role, editors first verify the value of the articles. Journal editors are responsible for the initial review and are the first to evaluate the quality of the articles from form to content. They use the academic paper check system and academic misconduct detection software to discern the repetition rate of relevant papers; judge the academic value of the articles based on their value concepts and academic ability; and verify if the articles comply with national guidelines, policies, laws, and regulations. Journal editors also evaluate if articles have the correct value orientation and realistic significance and then accept them based on merit. Secondly, to maintain the academic standards of the articles and to help the authors improve the content of the articles (especially to correct the research methods and typographical norms), editors may send the articles to

experts in the relevant fields of knowledge for anonymous evaluation. Finally, journal editors are constantly exploring new methods of academic communication. In the context of media integration, journals are required to innovate article management processes; investigate new modes of editorial work; improve journal review and editorial efficiency; operate online for external review opinions and author suggestions; improve the transparency of peer review; and strive to achieve positive interactions among experts, authors, readers, and editorial offices to promote academic exchange while fulfilling the responsibilities of scientific research supervision and integrity building [3].

### ***3.3. University Academic Journals can Promote the Construction of the Research Integrity Service System***

For university academic journals to better contribute to the construction of research integrity, it is first necessary to quantify the service mode; determine the specific service content; conduct a comprehensive evaluation in terms of the editorial management system, workflow, quality of academic articles, editorial quality, etc.; establish a journal integrity service system, and form an evaluation agency to implement the service system to provide for the supervision of academic misconduct and the maintenance of research integrity. Safeguards. Secondly, academic journals should modify the working style of integrity evaluation, change the original passive evaluation to active evaluation by clarifying the main body of evaluation and measurement dimension, and implement regular evaluation to create a fair academic environment and promote healthy competition among academic journals of similar universities [4]. Finally, to fulfill their main role in the integrity service system, academic journals must consider that the author is the creator of the paper, and the author's integrity consciousness is reflected in the published article, which is an important guarantee of the paper's quality. Therefore, as the disseminator of academic papers, university academic journals must strictly audit the quality of the papers; prevent plagiarism, fraud and other phenomena; ensure that the papers are scientific, original and standardized; cultivate the author's research integrity consciousness in the process, and create a healthy and fair academic environment.

### ***3.4. University Academic Journals Actively Safeguard Research Integrity through Innovative Publishing Modes***

In modern publishing, the task of university academic journals is not only to edit and publish scholarship, but also to innovate working methods, maintain transparency in the publishing process, enhance the originality of papers, and safeguard research integrity. The Open Science Initiative (OSID) is a new way to serve scientific integrity in publishing proactively. The OSID uses the Scientist at

Your System (SAYS) tool to assign an open science identity (OSID) to each article with a full-media mindset. The Open Science Project provides an academic communication platform for each article, where the editorial board, authors, and reviewers can upload relevant information and exchange ideas at any time. This process motivates the editorial board and scholars to track the academic value and influence of the paper; deepen the discussion of the paper's point of view; ensure the standardization of research; and contribute to the creation of honest, innovative, and rigorous work in the open science community. The academic atmosphere of competition, promoting the implementation of national policies on academic misconduct governance and research style construction, and enhancing the exchange of academic papers while practicing the duty of research supervision and integrity building [3].

## **4. THE PATH OF PROMOTING RESEARCH INTEGRITY IN ACADEMIC JOURNALS OF UNIVERSITIES**

Scientific research integrity plays an important role in scientific research, and scientific research needs the support of scientific research integrity. University academic journals are important carriers of scientific research, and we should not only fully understand their role in scientific research integrity, but also actively consider the methods and paths of university academic journals in the construction of scientific research integrity, so as to achieve the right target.

### ***4.1. Developing A Professional Editorial Team***

Journal editors are processors and disseminators of academic information, and their role in the construction of research integrity cannot be neglected. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the construction of journal editorial teams continuously.

#### ***4.1.1. Strengthening the editors' professional moral cultivation***

Academic research is subject to a series of moral, legal, and professional normative frameworks, which requires editors of university academic journals to adhere to the country's routes, guidelines, and policies in their work. They must also establish an idea of serving the people; prioritize social values; earnestly abide by professional norms; dedicate themselves to their jobs; be honest and trustworthy; emphasize responsibility and dedication; strengthen the sense of innovation; and manage the relationship between editors and authors, editorial board members, manuscript reviewers, and readers. This work requires editors to develop a sense of self-awareness of

their profession and increase their sense of responsibility and commitment.

#### *4.1.2. Improving the learning ability of editors*

To create an honest academic environment, editors should continue to learn publishing laws, regulations, and industry norms, especially the editors' code of conduct, to master the specific violations of research integrity and the legal responsibilities that are continuously advancing [5]. In the era of big data, the information updates quickly, and the cross-fusion of knowledge of various disciplines is deeper. This creates higher requirements for the information capture and perception ability of editors. Editors need to advance their knowledge regularly; expand their academic horizons; accurately grasp academic dynamics; and promptly detect and address academic misconduct such as misconceptions, falsified data, and plagiarism.

#### *4.1.3. Cultivating the communication ability of editors*

To play their role in the construction of research integrity, journal editors must cultivate communication skills and build a bridge between authors and review experts. Editors are required to learn from authors and reviewers in their work openly. When retiring and proofreading manuscripts, they should patiently and respectfully remind authors to abide by academic standards. Editors are encouraged to frequently participate in journal training and academic conferences to learn journal-running experience; improve their academic level; and enhance editorial skills, scientific integrity, and gate-keeping ability through communication and exchange.

#### *4.1.4. Possessing legal knowledge and professional skills*

Journal editors must be familiar with the Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China, as well as related laws and regulations, and understand the specific acts of copyright infringement and the legal responsibilities its actors should bear. They are also required to improve professional skills in publishing, work with rigor and meticulousness, and follow the law with justification. As disseminators and diffusers of information, editors should keep abreast of the relevant disciplinary knowledge and scientific research dynamics of the column for which they are responsible. In processing a manuscript, the quality of the manuscript needs to be evaluated with a "suspicious" eye to quickly perceive plagiarism and supervise the author to complete the reporting and filing of the relevant original experimental data to be traced. It is an editor's responsibility to avoid academic misconduct and create a climate of academic integrity [5].

## ***4.2. Standardizing the Editing and Publishing Process***

Compliance with publication norms is the mission of university academic journals, which requires the state, society, and the journal's editorial board and editors to continuously explore work norms and improve relevant systems and working methods.

### *4.2.1. Improving the editing and publishing system*

Editorial work is the core of publication work, and internal control management must be strengthened. Furthermore, a series of journal management systems must be formulated and implemented, such as the three-review and three-school system, peer review system, editorial confidentiality system, withdrawal mechanism, etc. The editorial and publication process should be standardized, and the selection planning, manuscript organization, and editorial proofreading must be done well. This process also includes a focus on successful topic planning, improving the screening of integrity and ethics violations, and active resistance to continuous academic behavior.

### *4.2.2. Improving the academic misconduct detection system*

The editorial board of a journal should enhance communication and cooperation with major databases; develop and improve the document detection system for academic misconduct; and identify and resolve academic misconduct as early as possible to solve academic integrity problems and ensure the academic quality of articles.

### *4.2.3. Strengthening the supervision and management of journals*

Regulation of academic journals also includes strict evaluation and supervision, establishment and improvement of evaluation systems, and discerning whether the editorial board and authors of the journals are abiding by academic integrity. Penalties for irregularities in journals should be increased, and journals that publish plagiarized and low-quality papers should be punished. Ideally, all sectors of society will be mobilized to detect the illegal activities of journals and authors and expose them to the media.

### ***4.3. Motivating University Academic Journals to Actively Participate in Integrity Crisis Management***

With the rapid development of new media technology, the evolution of university academic journals faces a serious challenge, and the governance of academic misconduct and integrity crisis in university academic journals is imperative.

#### ***4.3.1. Guiding authors to abide by academic ethics***

One of the responsibilities of university academic journals is to cultivate new academics, and the ethical qualities of new academics are equally as important as their academic abilities. Monitoring the ethical qualities of new academics requires journalists to focus on guiding authors to abide by academic norms. At the same time, academic journals should strengthen the supervision and management of papers, establish author integrity files, educate authors who have committed academic misconduct in real-time and punish them accordingly, and implement "one-vote rejection" for late submissions.

#### ***4.3.2. Strengthening the legal and institutional construction of integrity crisis management***

Laws and institutions are crucial means to restrain the staff and scholars of academic journals, and, therefore, it is critical to issue relevant codes of conduct. The publication of academic journals is a complex process, which requires the selection of topics, research, manuscript organization, manuscript review, editing, and processing. During the publication process, integrity issues may occur at any time [6]. Therefore, it is necessary to establish comprehensive laws, regulations, and systems; and utilize the regulatory functions of the government and administrative departments to achieve efficient management of integrity crises.

#### ***4.3.3. Accepting public supervision actively***

Due to new media developments, university academic journals have both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, they can use new media platforms to propagate and popularize knowledge of research integrity, publicize the serious consequences of academic fraud, guarantee the quality of published articles, and purify unhealthy trends in journal publishing. On the other hand, they can strictly manage journals, consciously accept criticism and supervision from public opinion, insist on industry self-regulation, and promote the healthy development of journals [7].

#### ***4.3.4. Strengthening the construction of integrity service through multiple channels***

To maintain honesty in publications, academic journals must abide by copyright agreements and relevant laws and regulations. They should also respect authors and the fruits of their labors and ensure the originality and scientific nature of the information released in all publishing processes. This also means increasing the penalties for academic integrity. For accepted manuscripts that demonstrate misconduct, editors should immediately instruct the relevant database to withdraw the manuscript, allowing the author to bear the corresponding economic loss. For authors who violate academic integrity, the editorial board of the journal can establish an integrity blacklist and use the information network platform to publicize the list. The measures above will help improve the public's awareness of integrity and create a moral atmosphere of social integrity [4].

### ***4.4. Establishing Scientific Integrity Mechanisms for Academic Journals in Universities***

The creation of a healthy academic atmosphere requires not only the promotion of research integrity and the popularization of relevant knowledge in university academic journals but also the joint efforts of all journals.

#### ***4.4.1. Strengthening academic integrity publicity***

University academic journals should take full advantage of their organizational privileges to learn from each other, take concerted action, use their own online media resources (e.g., manuscript submission systems, mailboxes, websites, WeChat public, etc.), strengthen information disclosure and communication, and discover academic misconduct in a timely manner. This requires paying close attention to the screening of academic misconduct in editing and publishing and helping researchers to quickly correct irregularities. In communicating with experts and scholars, journals will disseminate knowledge about research integrity, remind them to enhance their awareness of copyright and academic ethics, advocate for the correct value orientation of academic research, and create a clean and upright academic atmosphere.

#### ***4.4.2. Giving full play to the linkage mechanism of academic journals of universities***

To strengthen exchange and communication between the editorial boards of journals, and based on fully respecting the fruits of researchers' labor, academic journals should prudently prevent and manage academic misconduct to achieve information sharing, mutual assistance in the investigation, and mutual recognition of results. For

example, at the end of 2018, 55 financial university journals issued a joint statement on resisting academic misconduct. They boycotted the phenomenon of multiple manuscript submissions and academic plagiarism to safeguard the academic reputation of individual authors and the academic ecological environment [8]. Under the background of new media, using the linkage mechanism of university academic journals can promote digital transformation and lay a solid foundation for integrity construction.

#### *4.4.3. Strengthening the construction of academic journal community in universities*

The community of university academic journals refers to journals that have common features in academic care, journal-running philosophy, value pursuit, spirituality, industry norms, etc. They supervise each other, have equal dialogues, share resources, serve academics, and promote academic development and academic prosperity [9]. Faced with the current environmental changes, university academic journals should participate in academic management and academic evaluation practices through in-depth cooperation with members of the community. They should also raise their collective voice to emphasize the spirit of scientists and academic integrity construction, as well as to advocate against academic misconduct proactively.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

University academic journals, as a vehicle for displaying the results of scientific research, play an important role in promoting the development of social sciences and the transformation of research results into applications. These journals are the gatekeepers and builders of scientific research integrity and, therefore, must be brave in the construction of research integrity. They must standardize editing and publishing work, strengthen supervision regarding the integrity crisis, build a research integrity mechanism, disseminate relevant legal knowledge, and participate in the construction of academic ethics to create a fair and harmonious research environment. The construction of scientific research integrity is a long-term task, which must be combined with the development strategy of academic journals. Editors of academic journals should not forget their original intention and must keep in mind their mission to contribute wisdom and strength to the construction of scientific research integrity.

With the development of new media, digital journals will become the goal of university academic journal transformation. With this in mind, further discussion is needed regarding how to resist academic misconduct in the big data environment, how to use artificial intelligence technology to build a research integrity system and manage research misconduct, and how university academic journals can fill their role in promoting academic research and

research integrity construction.

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