



Reconstructing Communication Ethics in Academic Knowledge Production: A Phenomenology of Practice Approach

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Abstract. The academic world is currently facing a systemic crisis of integrity, exacerbated by structural pressures and the proliferation of digital tools like Generative AI. Existing discourse on academic ethics often focuses on macro-level regulations or micro-level interpersonal relations, leaving the meso-level—the lived experience of collaborative knowledge production—under-examined. This paper addresses this gap by proposing a new conceptual framework for the communication ethics of knowledge production. Synthesizing Giddens' structuration theory, van Manen's phenomenology of practice, and Floridi's information ethics, this research redefines ethical engagement as a progressive "ethical modality." Using a phenomenology of practice methodology with four Indonesian academics, the study constructs a model based on three heuristic "attitudes": the Natural Attitude (pre-reflective), the Phenomenological Attitude (critical-reflective), and the Ethical Attitude (intersubjective-intentional). The findings reveal a model where ethics is not merely a normative code but an embodied, reflective praxis. This framework offers a heuristic tool for academics to navigate the tensions between institutional pressures and authentic intellectual integrity.

Keywords: communication ethics, knowledge production, phenomenology of practice, ethical modality, academic integrity

1 Introduction

In recent years, the Indonesian academic sphere has been shaken by numerous cases of ethical violations, from plagiarism and predatory publishing to the manipulation of academic authorship (Kompas.id, 2023; Lukman, 2023). These are not isolated incidents but rather symptoms of a systemic weakness in the communication ethics that underpins knowledge production (Putranto, 2025). Empirical evidence shows that academic integrity is increasingly eroded by structural pressures, institutional interests, and the algorithms of indexing machines. This concerning situation, typically termed as research misconduct and scientific fraud (Broad & Wade, 1982; Kohn, 1986; McKie, 2024), is a global phenomenon, complicated further by the rise of digital tools, particularly Generative AI (Sadallah, et al., 2025; Seghier, 2025), which introduces complexities to the landscape of academic integrity, as the speed and ease of information dissemination contribute to practices that may not align with ethical standards (Crous, 2019; Vetter & Schemmann, 2021).

The transition from human-centric to machine-mediated communication in scholarly activities reflects a broader shift that outpaces the development of established ethical norms, complicating the landscape of research integrity (Dhar & Gayan, 2022; Chan, 2023). For example, as institutions grapple with issues raised by rapid technological advancements, they often find themselves challenged in adhering to rigorous ethical standards amid new forms of support or tools that may inadvertently promote misconduct (Fudge et al., 2022; Cutri et al., 2021; Clark et al., 2020).

The central problem this research addresses is the tension experienced by academics between the relentless pressure to “publish or perish” and their commitment to academic integrity (McGrail et al., 2006; Miller, 2011; Grech, 2022). This indicates an unresolved crisis of academic moral values (Rakhmani, 2019; Putranto, 2025). This paper argues for a new approach—one that is not merely normative, but reflective, contextual, and communicative—to understand and address this crisis. To address these challenges, this research advocates for a new conceptual framework that is not purely normative but reflective, contextual, and communicative.

By employing a multi-faceted approach that includes training for faculty, the promotion of academic integrity discussions, and engaging students in understanding the implications of academic dishonesty, institutions can foster a renewed commitment to ethical practice (Stoesz & Eaton, 2022). Such frameworks should be grounded in the recognition of the diverse pressures that academics face, thereby encouraging a culture of integrity that extends beyond mere compliance to embrace a collective responsibility for ethical scholarship. The objective of this research is to develop a robust conceptual framework for the communication ethics of knowledge production that can serve as a heuristic tool for academics navigating a changing and complex academic landscape (Putranto, 2025).

2 Literature Review

Current scholarship on communication ethics (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009; Makau, 2011; Davisson & Booth, 2016; Lipari, 2017; Bowen, 2018) tends to focus on either macro-level structures like professional codes of conduct or micro-level interpersonal ethics. A significant gap exists at the meso-level: the analysis of collaborative academic practices and the lived experience of scholarly writing as an ethical communication process. This study aims to fill this theoretical gap by synthesizing three conceptual strands to form a novel framework.

First, it develops the concept of ethical modality, derived from Anthony Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, Haryatmoko's (2015) public ethics, and Hinck's (2016) approach to digital citizenship. Ethical modality is defined as a communicative way of being that connects norms, reflection, and action.

Second, it elaborates on the three attitudes from Max van Manen's (2014, 2023) phenomenology of practice: the natural attitude (pre-reflective), the phenomenological attitude (reflective-analytic), and the ethical attitude (intersubjective and intentional). This study radically expands on van Manen's work by conceptualizing these attitudes

not merely as cognitive states but as progressive and successive heuristic tools—modalities that are existential and ethical. This reframes the concept of heuristics from a simple mental shortcut toward reflective and encompassing depth.

Third, the framework incorporates insights from information ethics (Floridi, 2013) to provide a macro-level horizon, emphasizing the importance of distributed morality and ethical infrastructure in the digital age. This synthesis forms the foundation for understanding the communication ethics of knowledge production as a practical activity situated between structure, attitude, and epistemic responsibility.

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3 Methodology

This study employed a phenomenology of practice approach as developed by Max van Manen (2014, 2023). This methodology is uniquely suited for exploring the lived experiences of academic writing and the ethical dilemmas embedded within it. Unlike traditional phenomenological approaches that often focus on abstract philosophical debates, this study emphasizes "doing phenomenology," a practical engagement with the concrete, everyday experiences of participants. The goal was not to generate generalizable findings but to construct a meaningful understanding of how academics navigate the ethical dimensions of scholarly writing in the context of contemporary pressures.

3.1 Sampling Procedure

The study involved four Indonesian academics (identified here as SH, FG, DD, and NP) who were selected based on their diverse backgrounds and experiences in scholarly writing. These participants represented various disciplines within the field of communication and media studies, ensuring a rich diversity of perspectives. The selection process prioritized individuals who had extensive experience in academic publishing and were willing to reflect critically on their practices. While the small sample size ($n = 4$) is inherent to the depth-focused nature of phenomenological research, it allowed for a detailed exploration of each participant's lived experiences.

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and reflective dialogues. Each participant was asked to share their experiences with scholarly writing, focusing on moments of ethical tension, decision-making processes, and reflections on integrity. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings in an open-ended manner. Questions were designed to probe their academic writing experiences in descriptive and reflective moments, to uncover deeper layers of meaning in the participants' lived experiences.

3.3 Data Interpretation and Analytical Procedure

The data analysis followed a thematic-reflective process, guided by the three heuristic attitudes. In the Natural Attitude (MSA) phase, the focus was on capturing pre-reflective, taken-for-granted aspects of academic writing. This included implicit values shaped by cultural and institutional contexts. In the Phenomenological Attitude (MSF) phase, participants were encouraged to engage in critical reflection, suspending initial assumptions to uncover deeper meanings. Key themes that emerged during this phase included academic honesty, critiques of knowledge colonization, and the moral compass of education. Finally, in the Ethical Attitude (MSE) phase, the analysis shifted toward intersubjective intentionality, highlighting how participants managed relationships with others (Liyan) in digital, historical, and collaborative contexts.

The analytical procedure followed several iterative steps. First, interview transcripts and reflective dialogue notes were read repeatedly to identify experiential fragments related to ethical tensions in academic writing. Second, significant statements were highlighted and clustered into preliminary meaning units that reflected how participants described their engagement with scholarly practices. Third, these meaning units were interpreted through the lens of the three heuristic attitudes—natural, phenomenological, and ethical—to identify patterns of pre-reflective acceptance, reflective questioning, and intersubjective responsibility. Finally, these patterns were synthesized into broader phenomenological themes that articulated the ethical modality underlying participants' experiences.

The coding process was unique in that it departed from traditional phenomenological coding methods (e.g., textual and structural coding). Instead, interpretive meaning units were derived from participants' descriptions. This approach aligned with Husserl's emphasis on "returning to the things themselves" and capturing the nuances of meaning embedded in social practices. The resulting codes yielded three specific phenomenological themes, namely liminality, ambiguity, and identity, which corresponded to the heuristic attitudes and provided deeper insight into the lived experiences of the participants.

To ensure interpretive credibility, the analysis was conducted through iterative reflection between empirical descriptions and conceptual interpretation. Preliminary themes were revisited against the original interview narratives to maintain fidelity to participants' lived experiences. This reflexive process aimed to balance phenomenological openness with theoretical sensitivity, ensuring that the emerging themes remained grounded in the participants' descriptions rather than imposed by external theoretical categories.

These interpretive steps enabled the identification of three experiential modalities, natural, phenomenological, and ethical, that structure the ethical experience of academic knowledge production.

3.4 Strengths of the Method

One of the key strengths of this phenomenology of practice method lies in its ability to capture concrete ethical dilemmas and map the complexity of experience. By focusing on lived experiences rather than abstract principles, the study constructs patterns of reflection that are ethical-practical rather than purely normative. This approach moves beyond the limitations of traditional deductive methods, which often reduce ethics to a

set of predefined rules or guidelines. Instead, it embraces an inductive process that allows ethical insights to emerge organically from participants' narratives.

3.5 Implications for Methodology

This study contributes to the field of phenomenological research by demonstrating the value of "doing phenomenology" over purely theoretical debates. It also highlights the importance of adapting phenomenological methods to suit the specific needs of social science research. For example, the study introduces a reconstructed methodology where the three heuristic attitudes (MSA, MSF, MSE) are treated as interconnected stages in a logical and continuous process. This innovation provides a robust framework for future research on communication ethics and knowledge production.

The methodology employed in this study offers a novel approach to understanding the ethical dimensions of academic writing. By combining theoretical rigor with practical engagement, it provides a heuristic tool for academics to navigate the tensions between institutional leanings and market-oriented higher education pressures and authentic intellectual pursuit of academic integrity.

4 Results and Discussions

The findings of this study are structured around the three heuristic attitudes—Momen Sikap Alamiah (MSA), Momen Sikap Fenomenologis (MSF), and Momen Sikap Etis (MSE)—which serve as progressive lenses for uncovering deeper layers of meaning in the lived experiences of academic writing. These attitudes not only reflect the participants' engagement with their scholarly practices but also construct a model for understanding communication ethics in knowledge production.

The analysis reveals how academics navigate the tensions between institutional pressures, personal values, and ethical responsibilities in the context of contemporary academia. Below is the elaboration of the findings.

4.1 The Moment of Natural Attitude (MSA): Pre-Reflective Engagement with Academic Writing

At the initial stage of the natural attitude, participants exhibited a pre-reflective approach to academic writing, characterized by an implicit acceptance of norms, values, and practices shaped by cultural and institutional contexts. This stage revealed how values such as sensitivity, sincerity, and prudence are often formed unconsciously through habitual practices and external expectations. For instance, SH described her early experiences with academic writing as "just following what was expected," emphasizing the role of institutional guidelines in shaping her approach. Similarly, FG noted that "deadlines and publication targets became the primary motivators" for his work, reflecting the pervasive influence of structural pressures.

This pre-reflective stage also highlighted the tension between efficiency and criticality. While participants found comfort in adhering to established norms, they occasionally expressed discomfort with the uncritical biases embedded in these practices. For example, DD critiqued the tendency to prioritize quantity over quality, stating, "We

often write to meet institutional requirements rather than contribute meaningfully to knowledge." This sentiment underscores the limitations of the natural attitude, where actions are guided by taken-for-granted assumptions without deeper reflection on their ethical implications.

Despite its limitations, the natural attitude serves as a foundation for subsequent stages of ethical development. It highlights the importance of contextual factors, such as institutional policies and cultural traditions, in shaping the initial framework of academic integrity. However, it also reveals the risk of alienation when academics fail to critically engage with these norms, leading to a mechanistic and instrumental approach to scholarly writing.

4.2 The Moment of Phenomenological Attitude (MSF): Critical Reflection and Uncovering Deeper Meanings

The phenomenological attitude emerged as participants engaged in critical reflection, suspending their initial assumptions to uncover deeper meanings in their experiences. This stage marked a significant shift from the natural attitude, as participants began to question the foundations of their practices and explore alternative perspectives. Key themes that surfaced during this phase included:

Academic Honesty and Integrity: FG emphasized the importance of honesty in research, stating, "Integrity is not just about avoiding plagiarism; it's about being truthful to the data and the process." This theme resonated across all participants, highlighting a shared commitment to ethical principles despite varying levels of institutional support.

Critique of Knowledge Colonization: DD offered a critical perspective on the global dominance of Western epistemologies, arguing that "local knowledge systems are often marginalized in favor of universal frameworks." This critique aligns with broader discussions on decolonizing knowledge and underscores the need for inclusive approaches to academic writing.

Education as a Moral Compass: NP viewed education as a moral endeavor, stating, "Teaching and writing should inspire students to think critically and act ethically." This perspective reflects the transformative potential of education and its role in fostering ethical awareness.

The phenomenological attitude functions as a heuristic gateway, moving participants from assumption to examination. Through epoché and reduction, participants were able to transcend surface-level interpretations and engage with the essence of their experiences. For example, SH reflected on the impact of digital tools, noting, "AI can enhance productivity, but it also raises questions about authorship and originality." This insight demonstrates the complexity of modern academic practices and the need for nuanced ethical frameworks.

4.3 The Moment of Ethical Attitude (MSE): Intersubjective Intentionality and Solidarity

The ethical attitude represents the culmination of the heuristic journey, where participants intentionally manage their relationships with others (Liyan) in digital, historical, and collaborative contexts. This stage gave rise to three major phenomenological themes: liminality, ambiguity, and identity, which collectively highlight the intersubjective dimension of academic writing.

- **Liminality:** Participants described feeling caught between conflicting demands, such as balancing institutional expectations with personal values. FG noted, "We are constantly navigating liminal spaces, trying to reconcile what is expected of us with what we believe is right." This theme underscores the transitional nature of ethical decision-making in academia.
- **Ambiguity:** The ethical attitude revealed the inherent ambiguity of academic practices, particularly in the context of emerging technologies. NP highlighted the challenges of using AI tools, stating, "It's unclear where human responsibility ends and machine agency begins." This ambiguity calls for a flexible and adaptive approach to ethical engagement.
- **Identity:** Participants reflected on how their identities as academics are shaped by their interactions with others. DD emphasized the importance of solidarity, stating, "Our work is not just about individual achievement; it's about contributing to a collective effort." This perspective aligns with Levinas' ethics of alterity, which prioritizes responsibility toward others.

The ethical attitude marks a transition from describing ethical experience (ethical phenomenology) to constructing a more interpretive and practically prescriptive framework (phenomenological ethics). For example, SH proposed a model for ethical collaboration, suggesting, "We need mechanisms for feedback and review that foster trust and accountability." This recommendation highlights the practical implications of the ethical attitude for institutional reform.

4.4 Synthesis of Findings: A Model for Communication Ethics in Knowledge Production

The three-lens model emerged inductively from the phenomenological analysis. Themes related to habitual compliance were clustered under the Natural Attitude, reflective critique under the Phenomenological Attitude, and intersubjective responsibility under the Ethical Attitude. These patterns consistently appeared across participants' narratives.

The findings construct a model where communication ethics in knowledge production is understood as a field for the formation of meaning, ethical modality, and moral relationships that are reflective and collaborative. This model allows us to analyze cases of plagiarism or AI misuse not merely as violations of external rules but through three lenses:

- **Natural Attitude:** The taken-for-granted understanding of academic norms.

- Phenomenological Attitude: Deep individual reflection on the essence of academic practices.
- Ethical Attitude: Intersubjective intentionality, such as feedback and review mechanisms.

Ultimately, this model serves as an internal compass for academics, guiding them beyond "publish or perish" toward authentic and sustainable integrity. As NP aptly summarized, "Ethics is not an additional burden; it's the foundation of meaningful scholarship."

4.5 Implications for Theory and Practice

The findings resonate with existing literature on communication ethics while offering novel insights into the meso-level dynamics of scholarly writing. By synthesizing Giddens' structuration theory, van Manen's phenomenology of practice, and Floridi's information ethics, this study redefines ethical engagement as a progressive modality that bridges moral agency and social structure. Practically, the model provides a heuristic tool for academics to navigate the complexities of modern academia, fostering a culture of reflection, dialogue, and solidarity.

5 Conclusion

This research contributes to the field of communication studies by offering both theoretical and methodological novelty. The theoretical novelty lies in the redefinition of ethical modality as a heuristic bridge between moral agency and social structure. The methodological novelty is the adaptation of van Manen's phenomenology of practice as a robust tool for communication ethics research.

This study shows that ethical challenges in academic knowledge production can be better understood through three experiential modalities, natural, phenomenological, and ethical. Each modality represents different levels of reflexive awareness in scholarly practice.

The proposed model illustrates how ethical awareness evolves from habitual compliance with institutional norms toward reflective and intersubjective responsibility in scholarly communication.

The findings further suggest that scholarly writing should not be seen as an administrative obligation but as an ethical pilgrimage and vocational commitment toward shared responsibility. A primary limitation of this study is its small sample size ($n = 4$), which is inherent to the depth-focused phenomenological approach. Consequently, the findings aim for meaning coherence rather than statistical generalizability. Based on these insights, this paper recommends the development of phenomenological ethics training in academic institutions and the design of ethical infrastructures that are sensitive to local contexts.

Ultimately, this study argues that an ethical approach to knowledge production—particularly in academic writing published in journals—is not an additional burden but a foundational practice that empowers scholars as educators and guardians of the dignity of knowledge.

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