

Perceptions and effectiveness of plagiarism detection mechanisms in Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Social Sciences journals

Percepciones y eficacia de los mecanismos de detección de plagio en revistas científicas de Ciencias Sociales españolas, portuguesas e iberoamericanas

Percepções e eficácia dos mecanismos de deteção de plágio em revistas científicas de Ciências Sociais espanholas, portuguesas e ibero-americanas

西班牙、葡萄牙及伊比利亚美洲社科期刊抄袭检测机制的感知和效率

تصورات وفعالية آليات كشف الانتحال في المجلات العلمية الإسبانية والبرتغالية والأيبيرية الأمريكية للعلوم الاجتماعية

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Abstract

One of the greatest challenges faced by the editorial boards of scientific journals is related to the detection of plagiarism in the manuscripts received. This study addresses this issue based on the perception of the members of editorial committees of 166 journals in the field of Social Sciences in the Ibero-American context indexed in Scopus. The responses were collected through a digital questionnaire, and a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the information provided was conducted. The results show that most of the journals consulted have plagiarism detection software, with numerous reasons for and against its use. Most of the articles discarded in the reception processes include self-plagiarism and covert plagiarism through paraphrasing. In cases of plagiarism, most journals reject manuscripts in the reception process, although it is noteworthy that more than 15% give authors the opportunity to correct the error and resubmit the paper. This study concludes that, despite taking preventive measures, these do not guarantee the eradication of such a problem.

Keywords: editorial boards; ethics; academic integrity; plagiarism.

Resumen

Detectar el plagio es un desafío clave para los comités editoriales de revistas científicas. Este estudio investiga la detección de plagio en 166 revistas de Ciencias Sociales Iberoamericanas indexadas en Scopus, mediante un cuestionario digital que generó datos para un análisis cuantitativo y cualitativo. Se encontró que, aunque la mayoría de las revistas utilizan software de detección de plagio, existen argumentos divididos sobre su eficacia. El autoplagio y el uso inadecuado de la paráfrasis son las principales razones para el rechazo de manuscritos, y mientras que la mayoría de las revistas descalifica inmediatamente los manuscritos plagiados, un 15% permite a los/las autores/as corregir y reenviar sus trabajos. El estudio concluye que las medidas preventivas actuales son insuficientes para erradicar el plagio, sugiriendo la necesidad de estrategias más efectivas para combatir esta práctica en el ámbito académico.

Palabras clave: Comité editorial; ética; integridad académica; plagio.

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Resumo

Um dos maiores desafios enfrentados pelas comissões editoriais das revistas científicas está relacionado com a detecção de plágio nos manuscritos recebidos. Este estudo aborda esta questão com base na percepção dos membros das comissões editoriais de 166 revistas da área das Ciências Sociais no contexto ibero-americano indexadas no Scopus. As respostas foram recolhidas através de um questionário digital, tendo sido realizada uma análise quantitativa e qualitativa das informações fornecidas. Os resultados constataam que a maioria das revistas consultadas dispõe de software de detecção de plágio, havendo muitas razões a favor e contra a sua utilização. A maior parte dos artigos rejeitados nos processos de receção recorre ao autoplágio e ao plágio encoberto através de paráfrases. Nos casos de plágio, a maioria das revistas rejeita os manuscritos no processo de receção, embora seja de notar que mais de 15% dão aos autores a oportunidade de corrigir o erro e voltar a submeter o artigo. De um modo geral, conclui-se com base neste estudo que, apesar de tomar medidas preventivas, estas não garantem a erradicação do problema.

Palavras-chave: Comissão editorial; ética; integridade académica; plágio

摘要

对收到的文稿进行抄袭检测是科学期刊编辑委员会需要面对的艰巨挑战之一。因此该研究试图对来自 Scopus 索引的 166 部伊比利亚美洲社科领域期刊的编委会成员进行感知收集, 并在此基础上进行分析。我们对通过数字问卷收集到的回复信息进行定量与定性分析。结果显示研究涉及的大部分期刊都有抄袭检测软件, 其中我们也发现并收集了很多赞同或反对使用该软件的理由。在收稿过程中被淘汰的大部分文章都是通过改写形式进行的抄袭或者一稿多投情况。如果被发现抄袭, 大部分期刊会在收稿过程中拒稿, 但是也有 15% 的情况是期刊会给作者改正错误重新投稿的机会。总的来说, 在该研究的基础上我们发现虽然相关机构会采取预防措施, 但是这并没有保证问题的彻底根除。

关键词: 编辑委员会、道德、学术诚信、抄袭

ملخص

حد أكبر التحديات التي تواجهها هيئات تحرير المجلات العلمية يتعلق باكتشاف السرقة الأدبية في المخطوطات المستلمة. تتناول هذه الدراسة هذه القضية بناءً على تصور أعضاء لجان التحرير في 166 مجلة في مجال العلوم الاجتماعية في السياق الأيبيري الأمريكي المفهرس في سكوبوس. وتم جمع الإجابات من خلال استبيان رقمي، وإجراء تحليل كمي ونوعي للمعلومات المقدمة. تؤكد النتائج أن غالبية المجلات التي تمت استشارتها لديها برامج للكشف عن الانتحال، كما تقدم أيضاً أسباباً عديدة مؤيدة ومعارضة لاستخدامها. معظم المقالات التي يتم إهمالها في عمليات الاستقبال تنطوي على سرقة أدبية ذاتية وانتحال خفي من خلال إعادة الصياغة. في حالات الانتحال، ترفض معظم المجلات المخطوطات في عملية الاستقبال، على الرغم من أنه من الجدير بالذكر أن أكثر من 15% تمنح المؤلفين الفرصة لتصحيح الخطأ وإعادة إرسال المقال بشكل عام، نستنتج بناءً على هذه الدراسة أنه على الرغم من اتخاذ التدابير الوقائية، إلا أنها لا تضمن القضاء على المشكلة المذكورة.

الكلمات الدالة: هيئة التحرير، الأخلاقيات، النزاهة الأكاديمية، الانتحال

Introduction

The results obtained in scientific research generate knowledge that is the basis for other studies; in a sort of pyramidal construction, the research (which takes the form of a scientific paper) becomes a reference for other studies, so that these can be replicated or criticised and make it possible to generate advances in scientific knowledge (Monzón-Pérez et al.,

2020; Muñoz-Cantero, 2017). The editorial boards of scientific journals play an essential role in the dissemination of scientific knowledge and, at the same time, in the detection and control of potential misconduct, as one of their main responsibilities is to ensure that the work published complies with the highest ethical and scientific standards, as indicated by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), and other bodies and

associations such as the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), the Office of Research Integrity (ORI), and the Council of Science Editors (CSE).

One of the most serious and widespread violations of scientific ethics that journal committees and editors usually face is plagiarism in its different forms (Pastor, 2018). On this issue, it should be noted that there are several types of plagiarism, each with different levels of seriousness and characteristics ranging from the literal reproduction without citation of small fragments, with a predominance of theoretical structures (Monzón-Pérez et al., 2020), to the copying of complete articles —exemplified by cases of self-plagiarism or the explicit duplication of a publication (Bretag & Carapiet, 2007).

Plagiarism is part of the set of faults that can be committed in the publication process and includes, among others, malpractices such as fictitious authorship, fragmented publication or salami slicing, inflation or invention of references, etc. (Baiget, 2010; Fernández-Cano, 2022; Zúñiga-Vargas, 2020). Focusing on plagiarism, authors are usually more likely to reproduce their own work (self-plagiarism) than that of third parties (Yu-Chih, 2013), and to copy, to a greater extent, specific sections of articles such as the section dedicated to explaining methodology (Jia et al., 2014) or, as indicated by Bruton and Rachal (2015), tables, figures, and images.

Unethical behaviour among researchers is related, in many cases, as Giménez-Toledo (2015) and Muñoz-Borja et al. (2016) point out, to factors such as the prestige and reputation of publishing for authors and the pressure to which researchers are subjected ('publish or perish') as a result of the increasing quantification of the processes of measuring and evaluating the quality and impact of their publications (Becker & Lukka, 2022).

Plagiarism, in any case, is the most widespread dishonest behaviour in the

publication of scientific results, as shown in the meta-analysis conducted by Pupovac and Fanelli (2015), who concluded that the prevalence of this malpractice is higher than that of others such as falsification and fabrication of results. Thus, we are faced with a situation in which the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the quality and scientific integrity of the papers received is left in the hands of reviewers and journal editors (Higgins et al., 2016). To this end, editorial committees analyse the documents they receive to detect deviant behaviour, usually related to plagiarism, as the detection of other malpractices such as fabrication and falsification of data is an extremely complicated task (White, 2005). According to Reyes (2009, p. 9): "one of the most ungrateful functions that editors of scientific publications can assume is that of suspecting plagiarism and, after investigating it, verifying that it was attempted or, even worse, occurred despite their intention to prevent it". Wen-Yau (2020) shows that, for scientific journals, there are two main points of concern in the process of receiving and accepting manuscript review: the first refers to issues related to the software used for plagiarism detection and the second to the detection of the different types of plagiarism. In this regard, nowadays, there are a good number of software programmes and applications, both free and paid, that allow the detection of similarities in textual content between an analysed document and content accessible on the Web and in databases of these programmes (Muñoz-Cantero, 2018), even though their effectiveness and potential has been questioned on numerous occasions (Foltýnek et al., 2020).

However, other authors emphasise, not the use of plagiarism detection systems as one of the concerns of editorial teams, but rather the existence of a high level of regulatory dispersion, making it necessary to design a uniform code of ethics for, e.g., journals in the Social Sciences (Muñoz-Borja et al., 2016). Following this idea, Debnath and Cariappa (2018) stress the need to establish well-defined editorial policies that have preventive and

dissuasive functions. The reality is that within their policies, journals can take actions ranging from retracting plagiarised articles or publishing notices in the journal, to simply inaction (Debnath, 2016, Wager & Wiffen, 2011; Williams & Wager, 2013). Among the proactive actions, those highlighted in the studies by Solís-Sánchez et al. (2018), who propose making the list of plagiarising scientists public, stand out. Schroter et al. (2018) advocate strategies aimed at establishing training actions to address the lack of awareness of ethical standards among researchers.

Finally, it should be noted that, when trying to estimate the magnitude of plagiarism in scientific communication and dissemination, most of the research analyses post-publication cases or incidence, highlighting studies on retractions or works focused on analysing published articles using plagiarism detection programmes, as is the case of the contributions by Baskaran et al. (2019), Bretag and Carapiet (2007), Jia et al. (2014), Krokosz (2021), Monzón-Pérez et al. (2020), Thomas (2019), Taylor (2017) and Zhang (2010). In this regard, very few studies consider plagiarism in pre-publication (Smart & Gaston, 2019), an issue that addresses the present proposal and gives it differential value.

The study presented here attempts to explore the issue of plagiarism in the processes of receiving articles in Spanish-language (Spain and Latin America) and Portuguese-language (Brazil and Portugal) significant journals in the field of Social Sciences and Law, from the point of view of the editors and/or publishers of these journals. Thus, the aim is to determine the systems and procedures for detecting plagiarism in the review processes of manuscripts by these journals, to analyse the incidence of cases of plagiarism in the manuscripts received and the possible lines of action.

Method

To address the object of study, a research strategy is defined that focuses on the use of

qualitative and quantitative approaches in what is known as a third research paradigm (Gorard & Taylor, 2004) or third research community (Teddlie & Tashkkori, 2009); it is therefore a mixed methodology approach.

Participants

The study population consists of 584 journals from Spain, Latin America, Brazil, and Portugal indexed in Scopus in the Social Sciences category (being the reference year 2020). The sample, which is reflected in the number of responses obtained, was made up of 166 journals that represents 28.4% of the 584 journals initially considered, 78.9% of which correspond to journals located in the Spanish-speaking context (85 journals published in Spain and 46 in Spanish-speaking Latin American countries) and 21% in the Portuguese-speaking area (36 journals published in Portugal and 72 in Brazil). The distribution of the journals analysed, according to the position they occupy in Scopus in their category, is as follows: Q1 (15.1%), Q2 (21.1%), Q3 (33.7%) and Q4 (30.1%).

Individuals who voluntarily decided to participate in the study were requested to furnish their personal identifiers such as names and contact information for potential subsequent inquiries. However, the accessibility to any personally identifiable information was exclusively limited to the research team. All such data was meticulously purged prior to the analysis phase to ensure confidentiality of the responses.

Information collection procedure

To carry out the study, the digital questionnaire *EVALPLA.rev* was designed using the Google Forms platform. To verify the tool, a content analysis was carried out, considering the procedures followed in similar studies (Reyes, 2009; Solís-Sánchez et al., 2018). Likewise, and with the aim of contrasting its conditions of use, it was reviewed by three experts specialising in the subject of plagiarism and academic integrity with extensive research experience. Based on this, a new version of the questionnaire was

designed and answered by 40 editors and/or publishers of scientific journals. Based on their responses, the final version of the questionnaire, comprising 35 items with categorised variables that collected qualitative and quantitative information related to: identification data of the journal; plagiarism detection strategies and systems used by the journals; treatment of plagiarism in the manuscripts received by the journal; profile of the author who plagiarises; potential lines of action. A version of the questionnaire was carried out in Spanish and another in Portuguese.

Data collection took place during the first quarter of 2022, using two strategies:

- sending an email to the contact email address of the journals listed on the websites of each publication; and
- sending a personalised email to each editor (this involved searching for the email address of each editor/editor).

Three e-mails were sent, with a delay of 15 days between each one, reminding them of the request to complete the questionnaire.

Information analysis procedure

To analyse the information obtained, a descriptive quantitative analysis was carried out, calculating frequencies, percentages and correlation and comparison coefficients, using the non-parametric Chi-Square test, with the IBM SPSS Statistics version 27.0 statistical programme. A qualitative analysis was also carried out using the MAXQDA programme, applying interpretative techniques to the discursive responses of the participants.

Results

Strategies and mechanisms for detecting plagiarism in manuscript submissions

Most of the journals in the sample have automatic plagiarism detection mechanisms or systems (table 1) in the process of reviewing the manuscripts received (77.1%), and it was found that the higher the position in the SJR impact ranking, the greater the implementation of similarity detection systems. The journals that do not have these tools (n=38, representing 22.9%), apply other internal mechanisms to guarantee the quality of the manuscripts, such as manual review by the editorial board or committee (54.3%), trusting the reviewers (21.7%), or having the plagiarism detection programme applied by the reviewers if they have one (8.7%).

Table 1. Plagiarism detection programmes and journal impact indexes.

Position of the journal	They have plagiarism detection programmes	They do not have plagiarism detection programmes in place
Q1	17,9%	5,2%
Q2	21,8%	18,4%
Q3	34,3%	31,5%
Q4	25,7%	44,3%
Total	77,1%	22,9%

Among the programmes most used by the journals, Turnitin (33.1%) and Urkund (13.3%) stand out. Other programmes used to a lesser extent are Crosscheck Ithenticate, Similitatity Check, etc. It should be noted that there are journals, especially those in Q1, (which use several textual similarity detection programmes), and also that some journals choose to combine the use of plagiarism detection programmes with contrast analysis on the Internet using a search engine (4.9%).

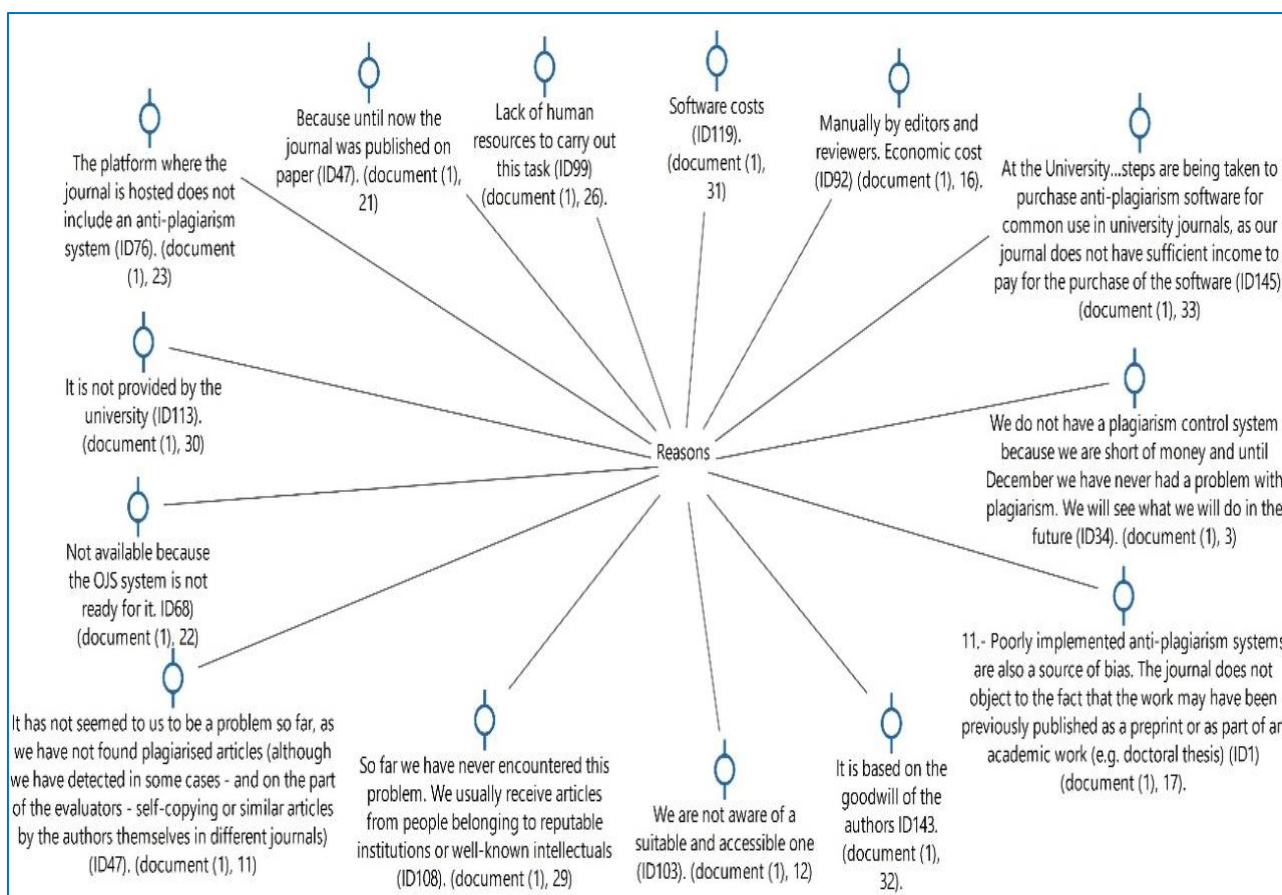
If we focus our attention on the existence of a threshold percentage of similarity established by the journals when analysing the results generated by the plagiarism detection programmes, we find that 38.2% of the sample does not have it established and an individual assessment is made depending on each case, and that 18.1% of the journals analyse all the cases individually, whatever the percentage of textual similarity found by the detection programme. 43.7% of the journals with

plagiarism detection programmes have established thresholds at which they decide to check manuscripts for plagiarism: 10% do so in cases where the programme has detected a similarity of between 1% and 15%, 18.1% do so when the percentage is between 16% and 25%, and 15.4% do so in cases where the percentage of similarity is higher than 25%.

When asked about the reasons why 38 journals do not have plagiarism checking mechanisms for texts received, the qualitative

analysis reveals that there are several reasons (figure 1): because they consider it unnecessary (7), because the university where the journal is hosted or the publisher does not provide it (3), because they are unaware of its existence or because they distrust the biases that such programmes can produce (3), or because of their high costs (5). However, some journals (5) consider the possibility of using a plagiarism detection programme in the future, while others reject it outright and rely on the ‘goodwill’ and ‘reputation’ of the authors (2).

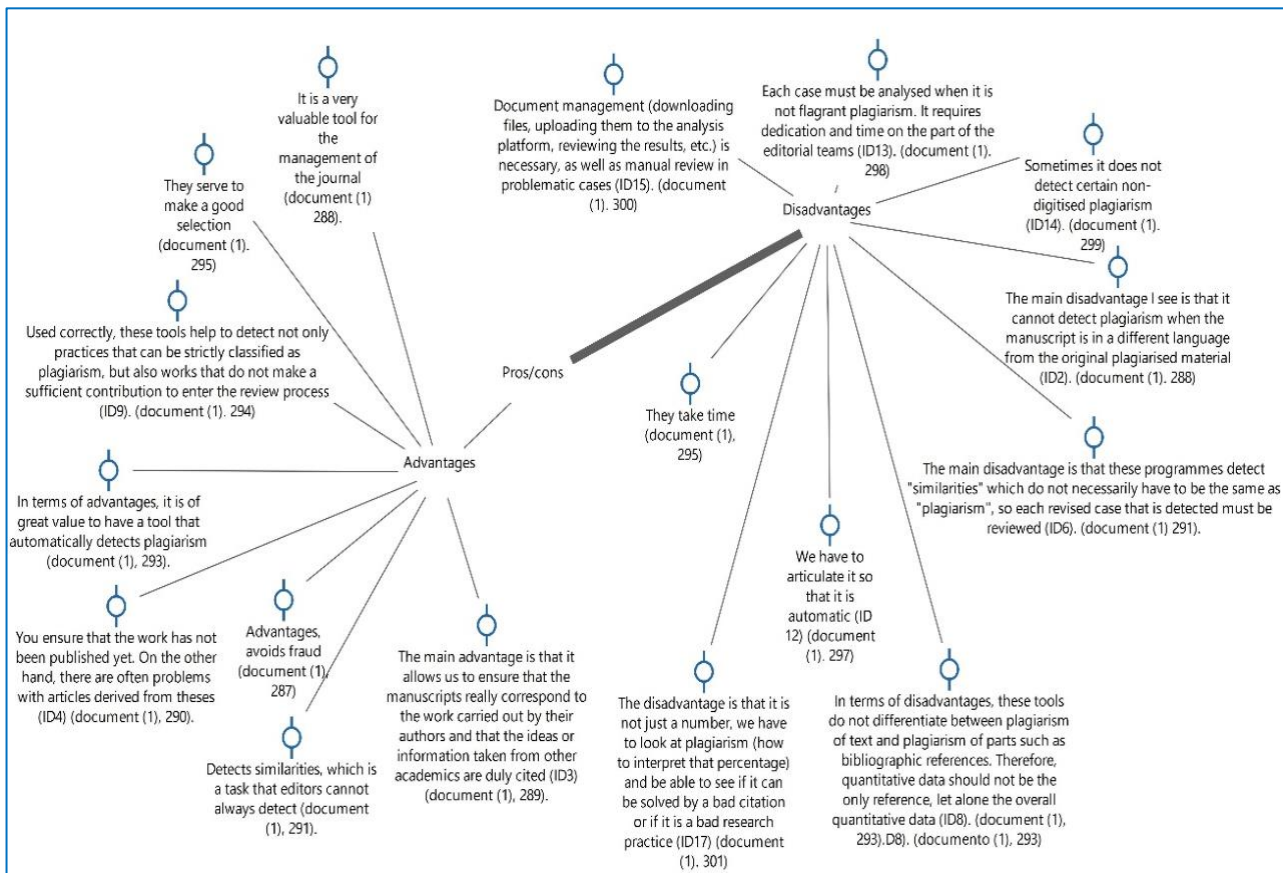
Figure 1. Reasons for non-use of plagiarism detection programmes



Another of the open-ended questions asked addresses the pros and cons of using plagiarism detection software. Figure 2 shows that many journals have highlighted the valuable aspects of plagiarism detection tools in relation to the process of managing them, above all for being able to almost automatically carry out a good selection of the articles they receive in terms of their originality and the use of bibliographic sources. However, they have also pointed out numerous disadvantages of these tools, the

main ones being that the process is not completely automatic, so that a large investment of time is required to subsequently carry out a qualitative analysis of the reports generated by the software. In addition, they add to this the high cost of such programmes and the shortcomings in relation to the failure to detect similarities in texts translated from other languages or texts that plagiarise works in paper format.

Figure 2. Pros/cons of using plagiarism detection tools in manuscript intake processes



Typology and prevalence of articles discarded for plagiarism in the reception process

Firstly, it should be noted that the types of plagiarism most frequently detected by the journals are: self-plagiarism (46.4%), covert plagiarism through paraphrasing (12.2%) and textual plagiarism (5.8%). Other journals detect combinations of copying, such as self-plagiarism with cover plagiarism (11.6%), self-plagiarism and textual plagiarism (6.4%) and self-plagiarism combined with reverse plagiarism or plagiarism derived from translations (3.2%).

In most journals, the percentage of articles discarded for plagiarism in the reception processes is relatively low. Thus, 79.1% of journals reject between 1% and 5% of articles before the peer review process starts; 7.3% reject between 6% and 10%; 2.8% of journals reject between 11% and 15% of articles for plagiarism; and 1.1% reject more than 15% of

articles for plagiarism. 9.7% of the journals state that they have no data on this issue.

To establish and compare the rate of rejection for plagiarism and the impact of the journal, an indicator has been generated based on the assignment of a score to each rejection range (1 point between 1% and 5%; 2 points between 6% and 10%; 3 points between 11% and 15%; 4 points over 15%). The result of the calculation of the averages obtained shows that the journals in Q1 have a substantially higher rejection rate than the rest (1.44), followed by the journals in Q4 with a rejection rate of 1.14 and, finally, those in Q3 and Q2 have a rejection rate of 1.06 and 1.05 respectively.

If we analyse the rejection rate for plagiarism in the reception processes by geographical context, journals published in Latin American countries have the highest rejection rate (1.41), followed by Spanish journals (1.14), Brazilian journals (1.07) and, finally, Portuguese journals (1).

Actions taken in cases of articles with high percentages of similarity

The main action taken by the editorial boards or editors of the journals participating in the study when detecting articles with a high degree of similarity is to check them manually and if plagiarism is found, the manuscript is rejected before being sent to the reviewers.

Secondly, almost three out of ten journals (28.9%) reject the article outright without even checking it. Some 12.8% analyse the manuscript and if plagiarism is detected, they ask the authors to correct the error and resubmit the paper. Finally, 3.4% give the paper a second chance to be get it reviewed and resubmitted (see table 2).

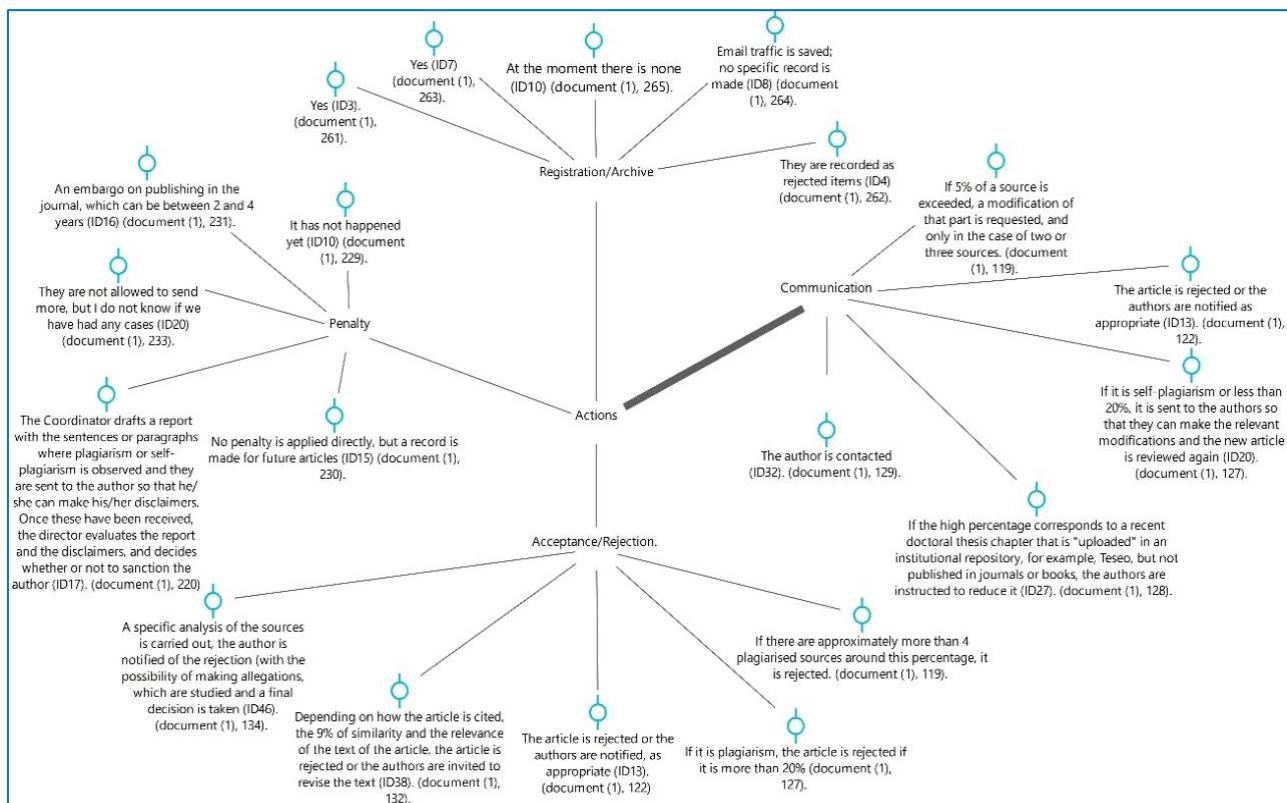
Table 2. Actions taken in case of high text similarity rates

How to act?	Percentage
A manual check is carried out by the journal (consulting the original sources, using search engines to detect potential copies, etc) and if plagiarism is found, it is rejected.	32.9%
Authors are notified and invited to revise and resubmit their work.	3.4%
Authors are notified and the article is rejected.	28.9%
A manual check is made and the authors are instructed to reduce the percentage of similarity and if they fail to do so, the article is rejected.	12.,8%
Other possibilities	4.0%

Figure 3 shows how most journals choose to establish a communication process with authors (the width of the line reflects a greater number of responses). Depending on the case, they choose to accept (allow changes) or reject

the article under analysis, and even establish various models of penalties (embargoes, not allowing publication, drafting of reports to that effect, etc).

Figure 3. Actions when plagiarism is detected



Potential strategies and lines of action to deal with plagiarism in the reception of manuscripts

According to Table 3, the strategies most highly rated by the editorial managers are related to actions aimed at training both editors in plagiarism detection processes and researchers in aspects of integrity and ethics in research. The lowest rated strategy is to publicise cases of plagiarism on the journal's website (mean of 2.13 on a scale of 1 to 5

where 1 means 'Strongly disagree' and 5 means 'Strongly agree'). The possibility of notifying the university evaluation and accreditation agencies of detected cases of plagiarism receives greater approval, as this strategy reaches an average of 3.22. Other lines of action with positive ratings are those related to coordination between journals, the establishment of shared systems and procedures and common detection mechanisms.

Table 3. Lines of action.

Lines of action	N	Media	Standard deviation
Case registration	163	3.51	1.330
Flagging system	163	3.26	1.294
Notification agencies	162	3.18	1.355
Publicise cases on the magazine's website	162	2.13	1.262
Unify control systems	162	3.76	1.337
Shared procedures	162	3.90	1.262
Penalty recognition	99	3.21	1.136
Training courses for editors	97	4.28	.965
Establish a common similarity ceiling percentage	96	3.60	1.349
Training courses for junior researchers	96	4.33	.890
Training courses for researchers	96	4.18	.951
Common strategies for action	100	3.79	1.241

Discussion and conclusions

The results of this work allow us, firstly, to address the magnitude and frequency of cases of plagiarism detected in the process of receiving articles from high impact journals in the area of social sciences in the Ibero-American context. Despite this, we are aware that it is very difficult to give definite figures on the frequency of cases of plagiarism in the submission of manuscripts, as is generally the case, for various reasons, in studies on academic integrity and ethics in research (Comas et al., 2023). Most of the journals consulted are in the low range (between 1% and 5% of articles received are rejected for plagiarism), and this invites us to reflect on this data in relation to the results of a recent meta-analysis on the detection of plagiarism in the receipt of articles by scientific journals (which puts the total number of manuscripts rejected for this reason at 18%) (Pupovac, 2021). Considering this difference, several questions

arise, for instance: Are there many cases of plagiarism undetected in the journals participating in the study? Are authors who submit their work to Ibero-American journals in the social sciences more ethical and upright? These and other questions will be analysed in future studies.

Most of the journals consulted have automatic plagiarism detection programmes and control of the originality of the texts through specific software, something frequently recommended by the existing literature (Muñoz-Cantero, 2018). It has also been found that, among the journals that claim not to have plagiarism detection systems, mainly for economic reasons, some manual procedure is established to assess the originality of the manuscripts. On this issue, we share the opinion of Baskaran et al. (2019) who argue that it is advisable to analyse the originality of texts as a prerequisite for accepting an article for review.

This study shows that the most frequently detected types of plagiarism are self-plagiarism, covert plagiarism through paraphrasing and textual plagiarism. These results are in line with those found by works such as Horbach and Halffman (2019), Krokosz (2021) and Wen-Yau (2020), classifying self-plagiarism as the most widespread type of fraud. Most of the journals participating in the study do not set a threshold of textual similarity that warns of suspected plagiarised manuscripts; in fact, many of them tend to assess each case individually. The journals that set a level establish margins ranging between 15% and 30%, higher than those found in the study by Yu-Chih (2013), setting a cut-off score of 15%. It is noteworthy, and an aspect on which existing knowledge should be improved, the time and resources that can be required by an editorial team to carry out an initial filtering of the articles received, especially if tasks such as the manual review and checking of the results of the originality assessment of the texts generated by the programmes and software used in each case are added. This generates large volumes of work that are difficult for publications that do not have the resources and possibilities of large editorial teams and causes some of the main complaints from authors about the submission and review processes of scientific articles (Sarabipour et al., 2019).

Authors are struck by the high percentage of journals that, when faced with high percentages of textual similarity contrasts, reject manuscripts without making a manual and individual assessment in each case. This is a danger that we would like to warn against since, as numerous studies (Foltýnek et al. 2020) have shown, the reliability of plagiarism detection programmes is not complete and false positives and false negatives can occur - in fact, they do occur frequently. This is why we consider it necessary for journals to establish some kind of control or verification system after the originality control software has been applied in each case, despite the time and resources needed to carry out the filtering processes in the article reception phase by the

editorial team of the journal. Along these lines, authors such as Matías-Guiu and García-Ramos (2010, p.1) point out that “editorial review and the provision of evaluation tools for reviewers are formulas for prevention, but not infallible”.

With regard to the lines of action, the worst rated is to publicise the cases on the journal's website in accordance with the results obtained by Solís-Sánchez et al. (2018). It seems clear that if this were done, it would be an attack - among others- against the right to data protection, although we understand that the anonymised dissemination of cases could be a strategy to be explored. Thus, in the same way that journals publish their article rejection and acceptance rates, potential authors and readers could be provided with the number of manuscripts rejected annually for infringing or contravening ethical standards in some way; this could act as a warning signal to future authors, giving a clear message about the seriousness and rigour of the journal with regard to issues related to integrity in the dissemination of scientific knowledge. These data could be provided individually on the journals' websites and, in addition, a prestigious organisation, such as the COPE, could supervise and manage an open database with all the cases reported by the journals that adhere to this transparency strategy, in order to be able to have up-to-date evidence.

Another strategy valued by the participants is to notify the evaluation and/or accreditation agencies of the cases detected (Debnath, 2016), but again this can be a measure that can generate ethical and legal conflicts. On the other hand, the most highly valued lines of action have to do with training both editors in plagiarism detection processes and researchers, whether they are new or not. Establishing training courses for junior researchers is a possibility in line with what has been stated by numerous authors such as Domínguez-Aroca (2012) and Schroter et al (2018), as is the case with the training of editors and of teachers in general, in the form of teacher professional development plans (Pamies-Berenguer et al., 2022).

Limitations

The study focuses on a sample of journals from the Ibero-American area of Social Sciences indexed in SCOPUS (which affects the sample representation by not considering other databases and reduces the potential generalisation of results, especially by not having samples from other disciplines and environments that may be relevant to our research). Despite this, we understand that this is an exploratory work that serves to highlight the situation in the specific context under analysis and covers the lack of studies on the issue in social sciences that has been highlighted by experts such as Jordan and Hill (2012) or Resnik et al. (2010). Furthermore, the response rate achieved (28% of the total number of journals initially considered), despite being a significant percentage when compared with the reference rates of Kittleson (1997) and Sheehan and Hoy (1997), could be improved and a second round could be developed in the future to capture a greater volume of responses that would enable greater generalisations of the results and conclusions. Furthermore, the use of the questionnaire, in general, presents biases in studies such as the present one and others that have been carried out using the same methodology; e.g., we may encounter biases due to social desirability and some responses from the participating editors may be tinged or influenced by this issue. This is why we advocate and insist on the idea of encouraging journals to implement transparency policies to make visible and publicise the cases of malpractice incurred by authors in the submission of manuscripts in order to be able to measure the magnitude of the phenomenon more accurately, always respecting the authors' rights to personal data protection and privacy.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Enhanced plagiarism detection: given the frequency of plagiarism cases in the Ibero-American context, it is suggested that journals intensify their plagiarism

detection efforts. This could be achieved using more advanced plagiarism detection software and through rigorous manual checking procedures.

2. Individual assessment: journals should consider evaluating each case of suspected plagiarism individually rather than relying solely on automatic detection software. This is because automatic software can often produce false positives or negatives.
3. Clear threshold for plagiarism: to ensure consistency in decision-making, it may be beneficial for journals to establish a clear threshold for textual similarity that triggers a plagiarism investigation. This threshold should be informed by best practices in the field and could be adjusted over time.
4. Transparency measures: the study recommends the anonymised dissemination of plagiarism cases as a potential strategy to deter future misconduct. Journals could publish their article rejection rates due to plagiarism on their websites, sending a clear message about their commitment to academic integrity.
5. Collaboration with ethical organizations: to further promote transparency, journals could collaborate with prestigious ethical organizations like COPE to manage an open database of reported plagiarism cases.
6. Training for editors and researchers: the study reveals a need for better training for both editors and researchers. Training courses could be established to help junior researchers understand the importance of academic integrity and to equip editors with better skills to detect plagiarism.
7. Alerting evaluation and accreditation agencies: although fraught with potential ethical and legal conflicts, it

may be worth considering notifying evaluation and accreditation agencies about confirmed plagiarism cases. This could help uphold the integrity of academic publishing and discourage unethical behaviour.

These recommendations aim to uphold the integrity of academic publishing, discourage plagiarism, and ensure fairness in the evaluation and publication process. Nevertheless, the authors of this paper recognize that this is a nuanced matter requiring ongoing attention and research.

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