Rise of Unethical Practices in Technical Writing

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Abstract: Now-a-days, there has been an increase in the number of unethical technical papers in the research community. This may be due to the stress to publish huge papers, career prospectus, unawareness of ethics etc. The unethical practices like falsification, fabrication, plagiarism demoralizes the future researchers to cultivate new ideas. This report briefs about the types of unethical behaviors, ethics to write a technical paper and the avoidance strategies to stop this practice.

1. Introduction:
The word ‘Ethics’ literary means a set of moral principles of right conduct. In the research community, ethics have been provided to increase the quality of the output of the scientific work that may contribute in the growth of society. Unethical behaviors include falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, research misconduct. These unethical practices arise in the research community due the carelessness, restraint of fund/time, career prospectus etc. The consequences incorporate works published in least publishable units, works published in low accepted standards, duplication of the similar research in various publications. Other than these, one major consequence is the future of those researchers who are newly involved in the research community. The unethical practices mislead them which are easy to adapt but never last long. In the next section, types of unethical practices have been discussed.

2. Unethical Practices:
The unethical communications consist of fabrication of data, falsification of data, plagiarism, duplication, least publishable units [1]. Fabrication of data refers to the production of report or published data which are not obtained in the research. This process is often carried out when observations cannot be explained properly. Falsification is the attempt to make changes on research materials, equipment, operations, research records, and data in a manner leading to different results. It is mainly due to the errors and negligence in science. Plagiarism is the illegal use of the language and views of another author. Plagiarism is the representation of another author’s work as one's own original work without giving due credit like acknowledgement, permission, reference. Plagiarism is a serious offense in academic curriculum. Duplication refers to the submission of one research work in more than one journal. The consequence of falsification and fabrication of data is internal and external to the scientific community. Internal future researches will not be so productive and can be harmful to the public if used in medicine. Sometimes authorship creates an issue of unethical practices. Sometimes, superiors receive authorship status for work carried out completely by their subordinates. There are some historical evidences of research misconduct which are summarized in the table 1 [2].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Type of Unethical Practices</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Wiliam Summerlin</td>
<td>Falsification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>John R. Darsee</td>
<td>Authorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>John R. Darsee</td>
<td>Fabrication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Robert A. Slutsky</td>
<td>Duplication of Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Thereza Imanishi-Kiri</td>
<td>Fabrication</td>
</tr>
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Table 1: Summary of unethical practices made by different authors

3. Ethical Principles for Technical Communication:
According to the Society of Technical Communications Annual Report 1993-1994, the following ethical behaviors have been taken [3]:
- Use language and visuals with precision.
- Prefer simple, direct expression of ideas.
- Satisfy the audience’s need for information, not author’s own need for self-expression.
- Hold author’s responsible for how well audience understands his message.
- Respect the work of colleagues, knowing that a communication problem may have more than one solution.
• Strive continually to improve professional competence.
• Promote a climate that encourages the exercise of professional judgment and that attracts talented individuals to careers in technical communication.

4. Avoidance Strategies to Stop Unethical Practices:
• All organizations should have own ethical committee and publications issues should be taken care by them. Researchers should be aware about the ethical guidelines because it will influence their future prospectus.
• According to Houk and Thacker [4], individuals who satisfy one or more of the following criteria should be considered as a primary author: Originality of contribution, Major intellectual input, major feature of the manuscript, greatest overall contribution.
• Researchers should not perform duplicate publication of the same article in two different places without very good reason to do so, unless appropriate citation is made in the later publication to the earlier one, and unless the editor is explicitly informed.
• An investigator leading the research groups must arrange for the assembly of an adequate financial and administrative structure to support the research. It is the ultimate responsibility of the investigator to check the details of experimental procedures and the validity of the data or observations reported by members of the group, including periodic reviews of primary data in addition to summary tables, graphs, and oral reports prepared by members of the group.
• In the case of any intentional or unintentional error or plagiarism, the investigator has to submit a corrected version or withdrawal specified by the editor or publisher or in a form specified by the University and a sponsoring federal agency.

5. Conclusion:
Ethical research behavior always leads to better results because it directs to more awareness for qualitative and quantitative analysis among investigators. An investigator, who obeys ethical conducts, can guide and motivate young researchers to follow the ethical manners during research. Unethical cannot help in the growth of society and will never last long.

References: