

Editorial

Scientific rigor is currently a hot topic. Three scholars – James Lindsay, Helen Pluckrose, and Peter Boghossian (2018) – wrote twenty fake papers about a diverse range of issues, including canine rape culture in a Portland dog park. They submitted them to gender studies journals and seven were accepted for publication. Following publication, they exposed the true nature of their research and their experiences of the academic peer review process. This, of course, raises a number of significant questions about the academic quality of these journals and the rigor and trustworthiness of established scientific peer review processes.

One question raised by the activities of these three authors is whether these ‘grievance studies’ fulfilled academic standards for scientific publication. They presumably presented compelling scholarship and convincing analysis and evidence. Their action has been applauded by those who appreciate the exposure of the ‘pseudo-scientific nature’ of some journals and the limitations of scientific peer review. Yet others have been very critical of their actions due to the unethical nature of an intervention based on empirically incorrect and intellectually dishonest content. Mounk (2018) offers up an insightful in-depth discussion of the affaire in the Atlantic.

As Editors-in-Chief of Information Polity we follow these debates with great interest, as they raise all kinds of questions about academic integrity, the quality of scientific peer review and the relevance and legitimacy of scientific research and publication. In our view, the intervention by Lindsay, Pluckrose, and Boghossian raises two important issues for Information Polity: (1) how can we guarantee the academic quality of published output? and, (2) how do we ensure the academic relevance of the articles to be published?

The issue about the academic integrity of published output is of great importance and for this reason at Information Polity we work with a number of established Associate Editors and experienced reviewers to check the academic quality of the contributions to our journal. We admit that on occasion we receive fake contributions, but we have managed to identify these by carefully checking the legitimacy of the authors, papers and the associated research. We check the authenticity of author affiliations, the line of argument and may ask for the underlying data to check the empirical research that has been conducted.

The issue about academic relevance is also of great importance. As Editors-in-Chief we carefully read publications before we send them out for review to ensure that they contribute to our academic understanding of the information polity. We are a ‘broad church’ and encourage a wide variety of topics and approaches, but reject papers that, for example, exclusively focus on technological issues or on issues that are not related to the public sphere.

Does that mean we are invulnerable to fake papers? We would like to think so and we do our very best to continuously improve our assessment of all papers submitted. At the same time, we also use our review procedures to improve the quality of papers submitted and to strengthen their line of argumentation. These procedures contribute to the high-quality articles that can be found in Information Polity and ensure they make a contribution to knowledge. This means that through our scientific peer review process we add value to strong publications – and we encourage you, just like the authors in this issue, to send us your high-quality contributions and we will do our best to bring them to an even higher level, so as to strengthen the awareness and impact of your work.

Editors-in-Chief Information Polity

Professor Albert Meijer, Utrecht University
Professor William Webster, University of Stirling

References

- Lindsay, J., Pluckrose, H. & Boghossian, P. (2018). Dog rape and Mein Kampf as a feminist text: why we hoaxed journals with terrible papers. *New Statesman*, 8 October 2018. Available at: <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/feminism/2018/10/dog-rape-and-mein-kampf-feminist-text-why-we-hoaxed-journals-terrible>.
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