



Navigating Plagiarism in Social Science Research: Epistemic Re-framing or Unethical Redundancy?

Rishikesh Pandey¹, *Man Bahadur Khattri², Madhusudan Subedi³, Kanchan Mani Dixit⁴, Edwin van Teijlingen⁵

¹ School of Development and Social Engineering Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Pokhara University, Pokhara, Nepal

² Central Department of Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

³ Patan Academy of Health Sciences, Lalitpur, Nepal

⁴ Institute for Social and Environmental Transition-Nepal Lalitpur, Nepal

⁵ Faculty of Health Social Sciences at Bournemouth University, UK

*Corresponding: djsa.baglung@dmc.tu.edu.np

Article Info

Received: May 19, 2026

Received revised: June 18, 2026

Accepted: June 22, 2026

Available online: June 30, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/djsa.v20i1.96461>

Abstract

Social science research is an intricate culmination of knowledge construction. Because the research fields of the social sciences are human, their relations, behaviors, and methodologies are notably unique compared to those of the natural sciences, and so are ethical issues. Publishing novel ideas or information is a primary focus of any academic institution and publisher. However, social scientists often face the dilemma of ethical conduct in research. Therefore, guidelines from both the academic and publisher perspectives are necessary. Considering the importance of knowledge about plagiarism, this editorial aims to sensitize prospective scientific contributors and early-career researchers, reviewers, editors, and publishers. To craft this paper, a review of pertinent literature is made, followed by a sharing of the issues that Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology (DJSA), and its contributors, including the editorial board, encountered regarding an issue of plagiarism and ethical integrity in research practice. This editorial also serves as the Plagiarism Policy Guideline for the DJSA. The major findings There are new evolving challenges of plagiarism with the increasing use of AI in research and publication. This editorial elaborates on the types of plagiarism and their consequences for publication outcomes, as well as on variation in plagiarism-coping strategies. The ultimate aim is to promote and maintain ethical standards, so we conclude that it is primarily the authors' responsibility, followed by reviewers and the editorial board, to uphold the highest standards of research ethics by being familiar with the issue of plagiarism in scientific publications.

Keywords: academic integrity, plagiarism, research ethics, salami slicing, transparency of research process

Introduction

Plagiarism is a much-debated issue in academia. Plagiarism, as defined by the US Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) (2000), is an act of appropriation of others' ideas, works, results, or words without an appropriate level of acknowledgment. It is an ethical and moral issue, but also

a legal one regarding the protection of creators' intellectual property rights. Unethical replication harms the reputation of both the replicator and the original creator, who suffers (non-)financial losses (The Copyright Act 2059 (2002) section 25). Considering the importance of plagiarism detection, different online platforms are developed ([HMG/Nepal, 2002](#)) such as Turnitin (<https://www.turnitin.com>), or iThenti-



cate (<https://www.ithenticate.com>), which detect some form of numerical similarity index, and many academic institutions and publishers directly or indirectly adopt these platforms to check the level of plagiarism before making the decision over acceptance or rejection of a scientific contribution.

In this editorial, we highlight plagiarism as an intention rather than a context behind the text recycling. Therefore, researchers need to distinguish between intention and context when writing manuscripts, and reviewers and evaluators (editors) should consider these factors before declaring any work as plagiarized. Since the top academic institutions and giant publishers reject a score-based threshold of plagiarism and accept context-based evaluation (see below), the DJSA also follows the same rule, to which all the researchers and contributors must be aware and follow these sorts of rules and guidelines, and maintain the highest standard of academic integrity and research ethics. The primary thing in research is making the process as transparent as possible because doing research is about seeing things from different lenses, identifying different results, and reaching different conclusions. During the process, the theme's depth needs to be adequately explored in relation to the context. Whenever the researchers fail to demonstrate such novelty, the work risks being flagged as unethical conduct and may be labeled as plagiarism, an act of intellectual misconduct.

The debate has intensified due to growing pressure on academics to publish and the recent development of artificial intelligence (AI). AI has muddled the notion of plagiarism and academic integrity. AI has also changed the nature of plagiarism, shifting it from simple borrowing of texts from pre-published papers, unscrupulous reviewers stealing from manuscripts they have been asked to review, or leaked unpublished manuscripts to a much more sophisticated replication through paraphrasing. For example, nearly two decades ago, one of us found that a paper published in the *Journal of Sexual Medicine* written by Regmi (2009) appeared to be copied from our paper (Regmi et al. 2008). [“Regmi P, Simkhada P and Van Teijlingen (2008), originally, the part of the PhD research at the University of Aberdeen. This paper was copied in over 90 percent, and after a thorough investigation by the ethics committee, the journal published an ‘Expression of Concern’ (REF) in the *Journal of Sexual Medicine*. Was it retracted or not? Similarly, one of the MPhil-PhD researchers at the Central Department of Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, Nepal, was intending to publish a paper in *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*; however, while preparing the manuscript, she found that her thesis chapter had already been published by her supervisor, and she was not listed even as a co-author. As the culprit had already been awarded a PhD scholarship in the USA, the researcher is in a dilemma because of authorship plagiarism (Satija & Martínez-Ávila, 2019). If it were the case of present-day sophisticated use of AI, the paper could easily be rewritten without any similarity issues by asking AI to rephrase each and every paragraph, changing the text and thus making detection of plagiarism much more difficult. This form of plagiarism is increasing because present-day academics and researchers face constant pressure to optimize their productivity and risk committing plagiarism, knowingly or unknowingly. Early-career researchers and others use software such as iThenticate for auto-detection of plagiarism and feel confident that their work falls within the numeri-

cal threshold of the similarity check. However, it is a blunder for research ethics and integrity. In such a situation, reviewers, editors, publishers, and academic institutions have the responsibility to control what constitutes plagiarism. In this context, the aim of this paper is to shed light on the issues, raise awareness of plagiarism, and encourage adherence to research ethics and academic integrity. In the course, the paper briefly discusses the conceptual boundaries and types of plagiarism, followed by the acceptable similarity threshold and DJSA's plagiarism policy.

Concepts and typology of plagiarism

Concept

Plagiarism is considered as an intellectual deception that is far from just copying the text or not being able to cite the source appropriately. The issue of plagiarism has become more serious in recent decades because both the violators of research ethics and those evaluating research can access the details of works more easily than ever before (Roig, 2015). It is a multifaceted phenomenon attached to the philosophy of ethics and integrity (Satija & Martínez-Ávila, 2019). The American Association of University Professors, in September/October, 1989 (as cited in (Roig, 2015), defined plagiarism as: "Taking over the ideas, methods, or written words of another, without acknowledgment and with the intention that they be taken as the work of the deceiver." (Juyal et al., 2015), on the other hand, defined plagiarism in its etymological sense, meaning "kidnapper" or "abductor" in Latin. By its name, it is a serious intellectual theft.

Plagiarism Typology

There are different types of plagiarism, and they can be categorized by the method used, the nature of the action, and the use of data; some of them are introduced here.

Types of Plagiarism based on the Method adopted

Verbatim or text recycling: This type of plagiarism heavily entertains synonyms of the words. Researchers adopt word-for-word text recycling and show differences. However, the core meaning remains the same. This sort of plagiarism also lacks quotation marks or attribution of data (Moskovitz, 2017; Taylor & Francis, n.d.).

Paraphrasing Plagiarism

Paraphrasing plagiarism is a way of restructuring sentences by substituting synonyms, but the core logic and argument sequence do not change, and the original author is not acknowledged or lacks citation (Office of Research Integrity [ORI], n.d. Taylor & Francis, n.d.).

Mosaic Plagiarism

If an author borrows ideas from multiple sources but avoids the same text or language and does not cite any of those sources, it is known as Mosaic plagiarism (Lalwani, 2025). The software may not detect this type of plagiarism; however, it is unethical.

Structural Plagiarism

This form of plagiarism happens when one copies various structures – table of contents; conceptual framework; models and formulas; structured or semi-structured questionnaires; but does not adequately acknowledge the original sources (Roig, 2015).

Bibliographic Plagiarism or Citation Manipulation

Bibliographic plagiarism refers to the act of directly borrowing the idea, citation, and reference from other literature without reviewing original or primary sources. This also includes inappropriate citation or reference. This form of plagiarism is probably the most practiced and least detected, neither by software nor by reviewers or editors (Taylor & Francis, n.d. Turnitin, 2012).

Types of Plagiarism by its Nature of Action

Self-Plagiarism

Self-plagiarism is sometimes called text recycling or manuscript recycling. Self-plagiarism is one of the most prevalent forms of plagiarism globally, occurring in up to 60 percent of cases, mostly among amateur researchers (Arumugam Aldhariri, 2016). However, self-plagiarism is defined not as 'intellectual or philosophical theft', considering the fact that no one can steal oneself (Roig, 2015). This form of plagiarism often occurs when authors publish multiple papers using the same data. This form of action is not considered plagiarism until the data are analyzed through different philosophical lenses and specific issues are more prominent in previously published papers. In this form of plagiarism, researchers often fail to adequately contextualize the current manuscript to justify its need and acknowledge the previously published work. This sort of plagiarism sometimes involves excessive self-citation, which is often considered neither good nor ethical practice.

There exists variation in the level of acceptance of self-plagiarism. In general, if the author acknowledges the source through appropriate citation from where the information or data were borrowed, it is valid from a scientific perspective. However, there remains a question of how clearly the borrowed information and data have been used and interpreted using a different philosophical lens to justify that it is not just a verbatim or paraphrased version, nor is salami slicing adopted to show higher productivity. In this context, it is the authors' responsibility to convince the editorial board and peer reviewers that the manuscript principally differs from the other works since it analyzes the same data and information from different perspectives (themes, classes, method of analysis) and finds different results and reaches different conclusions.

Looking at the same thing (data) from different lenses (philosophical and theoretical perspectives) is the way of generating new knowledge; therefore, doing so is always a welcoming action. This phenomenon is most evident in the social sciences since different contexts differentiate the interpretation of the same data. In some sense, it is a kind of skill of using hermeneutic philosophy, so it is widely accepted. Therefore, numeric indices of similarity checks rarely demonstrate actual plagiarism.

Data Reuse Plagiarism

The data re-use is another form of self-plagiarism and is an issue of concern of the U.S. Office of Research Integrity (ORI, 1994) standard check. In quantitative research, it often violates empirical truth and is considered unethical, or an act of salami slicing, adopted to show higher productivity. Since such research often rests on just a shallow analysis, it is considered unethical. In social science research, however, each theme can be observed from multiple angles, and only when adequate data

are analyzed to reach a valid conclusion of the theme and the theme sufficiently differs from the previously published paper or another manuscript in the queue. However, careless reuse of data risks being labeled as salami slicing.

Reuse of qualitative data is well accepted. For example, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF) encourage reusing data over time, so researchers can gain different insights (NIH, 2020). The International Committee for Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) also unquestionably accepts reuse of data when there is a new perspective, a new analytical methodology, and the results are notably different from previous publications. Nevertheless, reuse of data previously used in other publications must be declared or acknowledged.

The issues in qualitative data differ from those in quantitative data because of the nature of data, such as the quotes of the respondents /research participants. When the new manuscript quotes a respondent, it definitely matches the previous one, which an automatic similarity-detection software shows as a high similarity index, thus increasing the risk of rejection. However, it does not automatically constitute self-plagiarism, since the quotes themselves constitute data. In such re-use of qualitative quotes, there must be different interpretations - see the same data from different perspectives or lenses and find some new insight that was not previously articulated. Whenever the quote exactly matches, the citation to the previous work is mandatory, and the quote must also be kept within quotation marks. Some argue that in such cases, the interview verbatim can also be re-structured or re-contextualized, using the principle of the emic approach (Mann, 2016; Oliver, et al. 2005). On the other hand, the quotes inside the quotation mark generally are not the subject of similarity check (Lahiry Sinha, 2019; Meo Talha, 2019; Nuhurat, 2025). In this way, even having a higher similarity index can also be an ethical conduct.

Salami Slicing Plagiarism

When a researcher engages in unethical research practices to inflate performance to appear better to others and produces multiple fragmented publications lacking significant novelty, this form of plagiarism is defined as salami slicing (Office of Research Integrity [ORI], 1994). In general, this form of plagiarism often escapes similarity checks because it has different text, content, analysis, and findings, making it appear to be genuine work. However, since this form of publication makes it difficult to reach consensus in research and the products are ill-intended, it becomes an unethical practice. In general, ORI does not permit salami slicing, but it can be accepted if the manuscript did not violate empirical truths and the authors declared data reuse and justified its novelty (Office of Research Integrity [ORI], 1994). However, it is complicated to draw a line between use of secondary data and salami slicing. If a clearly different approach of novelty has not been shown, the new manuscript may cross the line or threshold of self-plagiarism or become a re-publication, which is an unethical act, or is an act of practicing salami slicing.

Stakeholders Perspective on Plagiarism Since plagiarism is a multifaceted issue, various guidelines have been developed to address it, including defining thresholds for acceptable similarity, particularly in cases of self-plagiarism.

There are internationally accepted research practices that may consist of plagiarism under its general definition. There are platforms such as Turnitin (<https://www.turnitin.com>), or iThenticate (<https://www.ithenticate.com>) to check levels of plagiarism. These platforms provide a numerical similarity index. However, their outputs are based on how they are trained, and not all programmers are trained in research ethics. Also, research ethics are dynamic and consist of discipline-specific parameters. For example, Geraldini (2021) and Zhang et al. (2013) stated that even a less than 10 percent similarity would be rejected if it consisted of a single- or multi-paragraph block of theory lifted verbatim without appropriate citation, while over 25 percent of similarity could be accepted if there consisted of highly specialised technical jargon of the discipline of legal studies and research but ethically contextualised and appropriately cited. This refers to the fact that while looking at the same data and information through different lenses, it is very difficult to differentiate some of the parts of methodology sections, particularly the sampling procedure, source and nature of data, study site and social-demographic and economic profiles of research participants. In such a context, text recycling is permitted, but on the condition that the authors declare such recycling/reuse of data, primarily to editors during the review process and in the final manuscript after its acceptance and before publication. These examples clarify that adopting only the numerical index of similarity to detect plagiarism would be a blunder. Considering the limitations of auto-plagiarism detection software, elite universities and publishers globally do not fully rely only on these numeric indicators of similarity index checks (Meo & Talha, 2019; Nuhrat, 2025). Instead, they use contextual interpretation of plagiarism and self-plagiarism, although almost all of them use these plagiarism-detecting software, to detect initial patterns, and check the specificity of different cases, which the auto-detecting software flagged as plagiarised. This makes the issue of plagiarism rest mostly on the editorial board, ethical review, or research evaluation committee.

Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

According to COPE Guideline (Taylor & Francis, n.d.), looking at the same thing from different lenses is acceptable, but it must be visible throughout the manuscript so there would not be any text-recycling. That means the new manuscript must introduce a clearly new theme and perspective, the research gap is well defined, the rationale is adequately justified, and different results are obtained using different methods of analysis. Ultimately, such research reaches new conclusions (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), 2023). The COPE partly accepts self-plagiarism in the introduction, and a bit more in the method section. However, the author must declare and cite any repetition, and the research theme must be convincingly distinct, as must the method of analysis and the corresponding results and conclusions. As the COPE has section-specific permission policy, if the research uses qualitative methods, it gets the highest level of text-recycling permission, followed by fixed econometric models and legal jargon (COPE 2021). Therefore, in the context of COPE, the issue of self-plagiarism is concerned with repeated publication or salami slicing to show higher productivity, which is against the performance morale and professional ethics, rather than an issue of

plagiarism (the theft).

The publishers

Different publishers and academic institutions have defined context-specific permission levels so that researchers are not flagged as unethical professionals. In this sense, self-plagiarism is an issue that requires transparency in the research process from the authors and a level of editorial tolerance to the level of similarity and authors' declaration (Elsevier, n.d.; Springer Nature, n.d.; ...). Some publishers such as (Taylor & Francis, n.d.) Follows COPE Guidelines but do not define the similarity scale, allow text recycling from pre-print (thesis/reports/working papers), but not from published sources; while Routledge (n.d.) allows 10-15 percent similarities in book chapters but not in scientific articles. Emerald Publishing (n.d.) makes case-specific decisions and reviews the way how the manuscript differs from the published source.

Academia

The Oxford Academic Good Practice (University of Oxford, n.d.); Harvard University (Harvard University, 2026) publishing does not define the acceptable scale of similarity, but handles case by case before making any editorial and the researchers' must declare the level of text recycling in method section with adequate justification and acknowledgment (Harvard University, 2026). University of Cambridge (n.d.) permits limited overlaps without defining the threshold.

The discussion above shows the lack of consensus on the threshold of an acceptable level of similarity to be cleared from plagiarism; however, they mostly agree on the researchers' intention, whether it is ethical or ill-fated, behind the publication. In general, as high as 30 percent of overlaps may be cleared from self-plagiarism in technical parts such as methodology, while even less than 5 percent of similarity may be flagged as plagiarised if that appears in core findings, or in conclusions, without citing the sources. Below, we present a general guideline on DJSA against plagiarism to support researchers in conducting their research work ethically and in accordance with academic integrity.

DJSA's Policy on Plagiarism Threshold

The Editorial Board of the Dhawalagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology (DJSA) adopts the following policy benchmark regarding plagiarism and self-plagiarism.

- Zero tolerance for text that is a direct copy or paraphrase of specific text that is not the part of the language structure, but the concept or idea, however, lacks citation, and fails to acknowledge the original source;
- Zero tolerance to the method of analysis, results/findings/results /findings, tables or figures of the same results, not of the data source; and a similar form of discussion and conclusions;
- Less than 30 percent text matching in specific sub-sections of methodology such as sampling process and size, data sources and generation methods, profile of study site and population, but with the declaration of repetition (show the transparency) to the editor (cover letter)

at the initial submission and in the footnote of the respective section after acceptance of the manuscript. This 30 percent similarity does not apply to the whole methodology section, however.

- Since the DJSA does not consider dissertations, SSRN, papers in unpublished conference proceedings, research reports ... as formal scientific publications, copying the texts from such grey literature is not considered an issue of self-plagiarism if the principal investigator is one of the authors of the manuscript. Whenever the principal investigator lacks time to work on the manuscript and allows one of the team members to conceptualize or draft the manuscript from such grey literature, the person qualifies to be a first author. However, if the overall conceptualization was not changed, the principal investigator should be the first author. If other members become the first authors in a collaborative research project, written consent from the principal investigator must be obtained/declared, and the principal investigator must be one of the co-authors in such a case.

Conclusion

We have presented a brief discussion of plagiarism to support researchers, reviewers, and editors in acting maintaining academic integrity and research ethics. It is clear from the above discussion that there is no consensus on the threshold of an acceptable similarity index to be considered not plagiarised; however, in general, everyone agrees on the essential definition and nature of plagiarism. In general, it is the unattributed use of others or claiming ownership over others creation or failing to acknowledge the creators. Some researchers, such as Satija and Martinez-Avila (2019) consider implicit or explicit claims of authorship as plagiarism. In this context, there is a clear agreement among the researchers that any act that is not a creation of one's own or of the team but adapted without acknowledging the creator is plagiarism. However, in the context of self-plagiarism, many focus on the transparency of the work and the rigor of the work to establish the thesis of the research. In the present age of Artificial Intelligence and cybernetics, defining plagiarism has become ever more important since the idea of evaluating it has already been taken far away from checking simplistic text copying or text recycling of the past practice to a more complex way that has deeper meaning, so it investigates the intellectual transparency and integrity. Controlling any form or nature of plagiarism hence becomes a challenging responsibility for academic institutions and publishers. While predatory publishers do not care for this, and are not considered scientific publications, ethical publishers have clear guidelines and mechanisms for evaluating plagiarism. However, the task of assessing plagiarism is not as simple as it was once thought, even after the development of plagiarism checking softwares or/ platforms, since even the automated plagiarism checkers have limitations, so none of the elite academic institutions and publishers fully rely on them. As automated plagiarism checkers cannot undermine humanistic editorial judgment, it is the responsibility of publishers and academic institutions to inform researchers in advance so that researchers' efforts and time do not go to waste.

Declaration

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Harvard University. (2026). Plagiarism? [Accessed: 2026-05-25].
- HMG/Nepal. (2002). *The copyright act, 2059(2002)* [Date of Royal Assent and Publication 2059.4.30 (15 August 2002)]. The HMG Nepal.
- International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE). (2023). Recommendations for the conduct, reporting, editing, and publication of scholarly work in medical journals [Accessed: 2026-05-25].
- Juyal, D., Thawani, V., & Thaledi, S. (2015). Plagiarism: An egregious form of misconduct [PMID: 25789254; PMCID: PMC4358054]. *North American Journal of Medical Sciences*, 7(2), 77–80. <https://doi.org/10.4103/1947-2714.152084>
- Lalwani, N. (2025). Plagiarism in publications: All about being fair! *Indian Journal of Radiology and Imaging*, 35(Suppl 1), S36–S45. <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0044-1791745>
- Meo, S. A., & Talha, M. (2019). Turnitin: Is it a text matching or plagiarism detection tool? *Saudi Journal of Anaesthesia*, 13(1), 48–51. https://doi.org/10.4103/sja.sja_772_18
- Moskovitz, C. (2017). Text recycling in health sciences research literature: A rhetorical perspective. *Research Integrity and Peer Review*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41073-017-0025-z>
- Nuhrat, Y. (2025). Quantifying academic integrity: Turnitin and negotiated ethics in higher education in Turkey. *Critical Studies in Education*, 67(2), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2025.2461480>
- Office of Research Integrity [ORI]. (1994). ORI newsletter. 3(1).
- Office of Research Integrity [ORI]. (n.d.). Avoiding plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and other questionable writing practices: A guide to ethical writing.
- Roig, M. (2015). *Avoiding plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and other questionable writing practices: A guide to ethical writing* (tech. rep.). U.S. Office of Research Integrity.
- Satija, M. P., & Martínez-Ávila, D. (2019). Plagiarism: An essay in terminology. *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology*, 39(2), 87–93. <https://doi.org/10.14429/djlit.39.2.13937>
- Taylor & Francis. (n.d.). Editorial policies and code of conduct [Accessed: 2026-05-25].

Turnitin. (2012). *The plagiarism spectrum: Instructor insights into the 10 types of plagiarism* (White paper) (Accessed: 2026-05-25).

University of Cambridge. (n.d.). University plagiarism policy [Accessed: 2026-05-25].

University of Oxford. (n.d.). Academic guidance: Plagiarism [Accessed: 2026-05-25].

About the Authors

Rishikesh Pandey, PhD  is an Associate Professor at Pokhara University, Nepal. He is an Environment and Development Geographer with immense interest in social and environmental justice. He holds a PhD from the University of Adelaide, Australia - The International Postgraduate Research Scholarship (IPRS) and Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) Fellow, specializing in climate change and social-ecological vulnerability. He also served as the Director - Quality Assurance and Accreditation, the University Grants Commission, Nepal (2019–2022). Dr. Pandey has published around 50 research papers, book chapters, books and policy documents.
Email: rishikesh.pandey@pu.edu.np / itsmehimalaya@gmail.com

Man Bahadur Khattri, PhD  is an Associate Professor at the Central Department of Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. He is also Editor-in-Chief of Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology.
Email: man.khattri@cda.tu.edu.np

Madhusudan Subedi  is a Medical Sociologist/Anthropologist and a Professor at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences, Nepal. He is also the editor of Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology.
Email: madhusubedi@pahs.edu.np

Kanchan Mani Dixit  is the Executive Director at the Institute for Social and Environmental Transition-Nepal, Jwagal, Lalitpur.
Email: kanchanmanidixit@gmail.com

Edwin van Teijlingen, PhD  is a Professor at the Faculty of Health & Social Sciences at Bournemouth University, UK.
Email: evteijlingen@bournemouth.ac.uk