Editorial - The challenge of authenticity in scholarly publishing

Scholarly literature has traditionally been the bread and butter of researchers as they build upon existing research with their inquiries. As researchers searching databases, we trust that the literature we explore meets academic standards of research rigour and ethics. However, not all research meets the high standards researchers take for granted.

The issue of authenticity continues to challenge these expectations assumed in academic research. Recent examples of problematic approaches include providing non-existent co-authors and email addresses that cannot be contacted. Since only one author usually assumes the role of corresponding author for a manuscript, it is possible for a piece with problematic author and email information to slip through to review undetected. Now, journal staff and reviewers not only find themselves double-checking submissions for plagiarism and generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), but also may find themselves considering the authenticity of named authors of a given piece.

Fake scholarship undermines the model of research as cumulative building blocks to better understanding phenomena. McIntosh (2021), the founder and CEO of the company Ripeta (now part of Digital Science), which looks for ways to ensure research meets scholarly standards, states what we think we know about the nature of authorship has been brought into question by 'paper mills, fake peer-reviewers, and non-existent authors in published papers.' Within open science publications, she has observed that fake authorship has found its way into preprints, with imposters potentially damaging scholarly reputations. While preprints would traditionally provide authors with a fast track to publication in advance of the formal publication of a journal issue, fake preprints provide a means of accelerating the dissemination of false scholarship.

The damage to scholarly literature and reputations may happen quickly, but then take time to correct, if possible to fully recuperate. Retraction Watch, a digital review of retraction activity in scholarly work, examines problems that threaten scholarship, including hidden AI prompts in review systems that encourage reviewers to provide positive reviews, retractions by Nobel Peace Prize winners, and disgraced and retracted authors and their works. In May 2025, Retraction Watch produced a top ten list of the most highly cited retracted papers, including pieces published in the *Lancet*, *Nature*, and the *New England Journal of Medicine*. It is clear that problems of scholarly authenticity affect journals across the board, including well-known and respected titles. Because researchers believe they can trust scholarly literature, they, too, may contribute to the dissemination of fake scholarship by citing these works in their own research outputs.

Information Research, like other journals, must find ways to overcome the problems fake scholarship initiates, as well as consider how to manage additional workloads and time requirements to perform checks on manuscripts. Our open access model depends upon our community of volunteers, including editors, regional editors, and peer reviewers to maintain the quality of our publication and contribution to scholarly knowledge. Our open access system can trigger repeated evaluations of pieces to help us pick up fake authorship. We also review our journal policies periodically to ensure that we remain current and viable in our practices to support

authentic publication. Ultimately, we are dedicated to authentic scholarship, which preserves reader and author trust in *Information Research* and its outputs.

News: Upcoming special issue of *Information Research*

We have received considerable interest from authors and researchers in AI. As a result, we are organising a special issue on AI for the spring 2026, for which Professor Tom Wilson will serve as Guest Editor. If you are working on an AI topic that is relevant to information science, we hope you will consider a submission. The full call is available here:

https://publicera.kb.se/ir/announcement/view/363

Professor Crystal Fulton
Editor in Chief

References

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Retraction Watch. (2025, May). *Top 10 most highly cited retracted papers.* (Archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20250801155312/https://retractionwatch.com/the-retraction-watch-leaderboard/top-10-most-highly-cited-retracted-papers/)