Similarity Index Analysis of the Manuscript: A Viewpoint

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Fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism have been considered the major academic/scientific misconduct in writing the research.[1] In recent decades, plagiarism detection has become relatively easy with the evolution of newer software.[2,3] Undoubtedly, many scientific journals evaluate the received manuscripts for plagiarism/similarity index and strictly refuse to consider manuscripts with higher similarity index for further publication process. In addition, if plagiarism is reported in the published articles, authors may pose various academic, professional, and legal consequences. This is definitely fruitful in producing originality of the articles with newer ideas/concepts in research design:

We herewith would like to put forward a few points to consider in similarity index evaluation.

- Materials and methods writing: It is observed that methodology remains the same for certain types of studies, e.g., immunohistochemistry, biochemical investigations, epidemiological surveys, and bibliometric studies, etc. Thus, the materials and methods section is the most commonly detected section in the similarity index. To avoid plagiarism related issues, authors tend to reframe the sentences for this section. But, it is humanly impossible to frame unique sentences for writing materials and methods for each new study. This leads to unnecessary rejection of articles by the journals even though the conceptually, the study is novel. It also holds true while writing the "Statistical analysis" aspect of the materials and method section.
- Secondly, most of the authors prefer to write relevant quotations in their manuscripts. The wording of these quotations cannot be changed many times and thus contributes to increasing the similarity index unintentionally. For example, any particular definition proposed by widely accepted organizations likes World Health Organization or well-known authors. Even if we put such aspects under quotation marks, it still gets reflected as similarity in all the leading plagiarism software available.
- Despite so much of awareness about plagiarism and similarity index, there is no dearth of authors who do not care about it. Unfortunately, there are still published papers in the literature with a high similarity index and are reflecting across all the major databases. In such scenario, genuine authors (who really care about the similarity index) might find in a similarity report that some other authors plagiarize his previous papers, and it now reflects in his similarity report. Genuine authors usually get shocked to see their own text gets reflected in the similarity index, sourced from other authors' papers. This is very tricky situation, and currently, there is no provision in the available plagiarism software for the detection of such practices. Only authors can recognize it after careful analysis of the similarity index report.

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Considering the above-mentioned issues, we feel that many authors write their scientific manuscripts honestly, but depending on the number of words from the material and methods section and quotations contribute significantly to the similarity index and increasing the overall similarity index. This ultimately results in the rejection of their articles from the scientific journals of their choice. Many at times, this leads to frustration and demotivation for writing manuscripts for the projects. Therefore, we strongly believe that wherever applicable, the materials and methods section and certain relevant quotations accepted by the scientific community should be omitted from considering the similarity index in future. We further hope that scientific journals, universities, and governing authorities should take these issues into consideration to form newer strategies for future publications. Novelty and uniqueness of the research question should be considered while evaluating the similarity index of any paper.

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