CASE REPORT

The Experience of Detecting a Case of Plagiarism in Hepatitis Monthly

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Plagiarism is substantially duplicating another article without acknowledgement. Academic scientists, commercial or political motivations are the main probable reasons for this detrimental problem. We introduce a case of plagiarism in Hepatitis Monthly and present some valuable ways to tackle this complicated problem since we believe that prevention of duplicate publication can be achieved through increasing editors' awareness and reviewers' knowledge.
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Plagiarism is the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work [1]. The National Library of Medicine (NLM) defines a duplicate publication as one that 'substantially duplicates another article without acknowledgement' [2]. Scientific misconduct may take place simply out of reasons of reputation - academic scientists are under pressure to produce publications in peer-reviewed journals. Alternatively, there may be commercial or political motivations where the financial or political success of a project depends on publishing evidence of efficacy [1, 3]. While plagiarism in scholarship and journalism has a centuries-old history, the development of the Internet, where articles appear as electronic text, has made the physical act of copying the work of others much easier, simply by copying and pasting text from one web page to another [1, 2]. The ease with which electronic text can be reproduced from online sources has lured a number of reporters into acts of plagiarism: Journalists have been caught "copying-and-pasting" articles and text from a number of websites [1, 4, 5]. Although detecting the cases of plagiarism is very complex and challenging, we have to consider plagiarism as the first part of the manuscript review process [6]. In Iran, we have neither an online tool for detecting suspicious and doubtful articles, nor a national database for including cases of plagiarism. So what can we do? We introduce a case of plagiarism in Hepatitis Monthly and present some valuable ways to tackle this complicated problem since we believe that prevention of duplicate publication can be achieved through increasing editors' awareness and reviewers' knowledge.

Case Report

Firstly, one registered author in our site submitted a manuscript which was received by the editor-in-chief of Hepatitis Monthly. Consequently, the editor-in-chief sent this manuscript to one of our associated editors. Afterwards, two reviewers were invited to comment on the manuscript. According to our journal's regulations, our reviewer searched the Google, as the simplest and most accessible search engine, to evaluate duplicate publication and

incredibly, she found that this is a plagiarized article. Therefore, she reported it to the editorial board of Hepatitis Monthly and an expert team began its investigation. All investigations and their documents are mentioned below, respectively.

What happened in our site since the first time of registration?

1) The team searched all activities made by the corresponding author of the manuscript in our site and found out that for the first time he registered and signed in to our site using an Internet Protocol (IP) address (for example 1.2.3.4) and a username (for example y@windowslive.com) at

10:56:34 on 04/30/08 Tehran Local Time (Fig. 1).

2) Under this account, he submitted two manuscripts as follows:

I. He started to submit an article with Identification number (ID) of 470 titled "Viral and cellular determinants involved in hepatitis B" using IP: 1.2.3.4 at 10:56:34 on 04/30/08.

II. Also, he started to create another article "Hepatitis TT virus: a summary" with ID: 471 and IP: 1.2.3.4 at 11:12:28 on the same date (Fig. 2).

How can we find Plagiarism?

As we know, although there are many variable ways and methods for detecting plagiarism, we

Figure 1. Details of registration process performed by corresponding author of the plagiarized manuscript in the Hepatitis Monthly.

Figure 2. Details of the two submitted plagiarized manuscripts in the Hepatitis Monthly.

only used the simplest way. These sources and search engines are published by many universities and related organizations and each person can examine a number of them thorough web. Using the Google, our reviewer found out that both submitted manuscripts were plagiarized.

I. Manuscript ID 470 is duplicated from a published article in the "World Journal of Gastroenterology" [webpage: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17206752]

II. Manuscript ID 471 is duplicated from a published article in the "Indian Journal of Medical Research" [webpage: http://www.icmr.nic.in/ijmr/2005/july/Commentary2.pdf]

In this step, plagiarism was approved by the HepMon expert team. The next step was to communicate with the corresponding author and ask him to reply to the main question.

How can we find the real Prof. Y?

We sent two official letters to the corresponding author's email (y@windowslive.com), which were left unanswered. Consequently, the security department of our university used the IP address (1.2.3.4) to search for Prof. Y and found his name in the official website of the University of XX. Therefore, we sent an email to his official email address in his department. One day after that correspondence, the real Prof. Y replied us and clearly denied any activity regarding the submission of the manuscripts or any connection with them. Furthermore, we received an official letter from the Dean of the University of XX in order to confirm the scientific status of Prof. Y through our fax number which opened a new chapter in our investigation: Who is behind this case?

How can we detect the person behind this Plagiarism?

1) The HepMon team searched all entrances and users' activities who surfed our site using IP address of (1.2.*.*) in the system logarithm of Journal's site. We found out that in addition to the previous corresponding author (y@windowslive.com), another user (hereafter named as Dr. V for privacy reasons) with the username of (w@yahoo.com) was registered in our system and had many activities in terms of manuscript submission. From eight articles in his name (y@windowslive.com), we had accepted three and declined five in Hepatitis Monthly. We precisely studied all eight dates, IP addresses, actions and computer specifications for those eight manuscripts (Fig. 3). The team found that between (11/28/07, 10:46:57) and (05/29/08, 08:58:31) this user had logged into our site through these IP addresses:

Date	Time	IP
05/29/08	08:57:59	1.2.6.7
04/30/08	10:51:54	1.2.3.4
02/27/08	09:14:43	12.3.8
11/28/07	10:46:57	1.2.3.4

2) With the exact inspections and using IP filtration methods in our logarithm, the team detected that on 04/30/08, Dr V changed his account from (w@yahoo.com) into (y@windowslive.com) in less than three minutes. The definite reasons for proving this theory were similarity of the two accounts both in the registration time and accession. Both were created through the same IP (1.2.3.4) and also uniform agents and equal computer
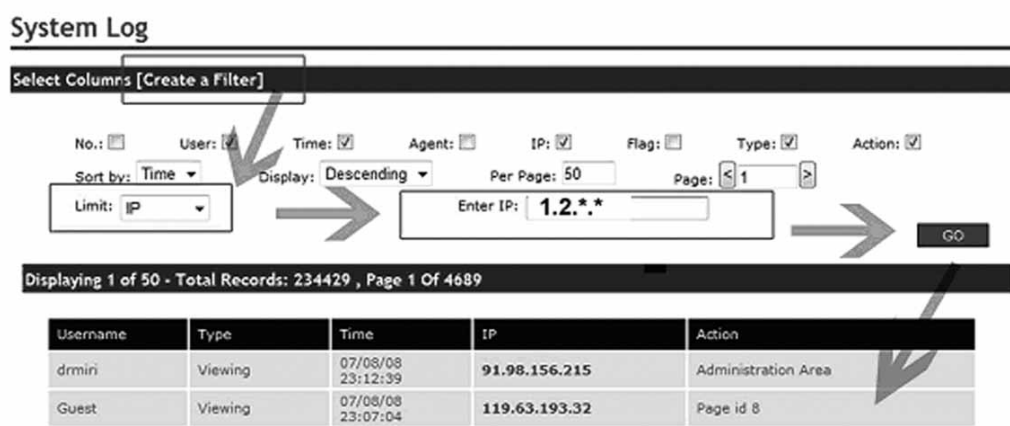

Figure 3. Searching all users and activities by a specific IP address in the Hepatitis Monthly.

specifications including: [Mozilla/4.0 (compatible; MSIE 7.0; Windows NT 6.0; SLCC1; .NET CLR 2.0.50727; .NET CLR 3.0.04506; InfoPath.2]. These documents stated that the session was not discontinued during those three minutes and was followed by a single user. Additionally we could guess that the 2-minute interval was related to registration period and making a new account (for example y@windowslive.com) in our site (Fig. 4).

3) Another important finding was detected using the advance of the word files submitted to our system by the author. We found that one the word files of Dr V's submission was written by author (hereafter named as CU for privacy reasons) and that the author of article ID 470 was CU as well. Using the same computer for both actions was an additional reason.

4) Beside all mentioned reasons, there was an interesting point in the style of username. Surprisingly, both usernames contained a kind of email format, while others consider only their last name or first name as username in scientific journals.

5) Since the first successful connection with the real Prof. Y, he let the dean of XX University know of the story. They organized a specific group to find the truth. Our Team was in close relation and cooperation with the team in XX University, Prof. Y, and IT police of that country.

6) Finally, we could prepare and record more than 17 pages as original documents. All of those documents were sent to XX University by email, fax and postal address. After documents were reviewed, they arrested Dr. V and he admitted and confessed everything in the presence of the documents and accepted all plagiarized articles behind the name of Prof. Y.

Conclusions

To sum up, we can demonstrate that it is of utmost importance for each journal to have a perfect online system for its journal.

What do we need in a web-based system?

1) A logarithm system in order to record and save all events in our sites including: date, time, IP addresses agent, computer specifications, country name, net speed, and actions separately for each session. A technical programmer should consider gathering this information from each visitor and save them in the form of data [7].

2) An IP to location detection system which makes a connection between a visitor's IP address and website administrator. This can be achieved through a free online detection for finding IPs at www.ip2location.com.

3) Reviewers must pay more attentions to

Figure 4. Detecting the similarity between two users according to their IP addresses and computer agents or specificity in records of the logarithm system of Hepatitis Monthly.

plagiarism. In the first step, they can search one or two doubtful sentences in the available search engines for possible plagiarism. Google is one of the best and most reliable free online search engines that can serve this purpose. Reviewers are encouraged to search one or two doubtful lines selected from the introduction or the discussion part of the manuscript in this detection tool [8].

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