

Primed and ready?

Ethical guidelines and the adoption of AI tools in research and library work

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Background and RQ

- AI promises to automate and facilitate a range of research tasks and increase scientific productivity.
 - New questions and dilemmas that might challenge the systems of accountability currently in place to safeguard academic integrity.

RQ: to what extent do current ethical guidelines support researchers and librarians in dealing with ethical questions brought about by the proliferation of new AI tools?

- Addressing this question is a step in the direction of understanding what implications the adoption of AI tools may bring to the scientific endeavor.

Sample

Guidelines for research:

- ICMJE (2023). The Uniform Requirements [The Vancouver Recommendations];
- ALLEA (2017). The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity;
- The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees: NENT (2016) and NESH (2022).

Guidelines for libraries:

- IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and Other Information Workers (2012);
- ALA (2017). Professional Ethics. Tools, Publications & Resources;
- Bibliotekarforbundet (2008). Yrkesetik.

Methods

- Content analysis of selected ethical guidelines for researchers and librarians.
- A priori codebook as a basis (checked for validity with a computer science professional, a library professional, and a researcher), complemented by finer-grained emergent codes.
 - Coding protocol - first round: Code for AI and research tools (Status: complete).
 - Does the text mention AI explicitly?
 - Does the text mention automation in any way?
 - Does the text mention tools (regardless of AI) in the scientific process?
 - Coding protocol - second round: Code for research values, practices, roles, and responsibilities (Status: to be done).

Findings

- Research values and principles are "affected by social, political or technological developments and by changes in the research environment" (ALLEA, 2017, p.3).
- Only the Vancouver protocol (updated in May 2023) provides explicit recommendations on AI; it essentially prescribes that authors/reviewers disclose if and how they used AI tools.
- The other documents, ranging from 2008 to 2022, mention neither AI nor the possibility of automation technologies in academic/library work.
- Still, some guidelines mention other tools:
 - ALA (2017) on social media and the Norwegian Union of Librarians (2008) on free software and open source codes;
- Similar needs for new competencies and responsibilities can be expected from AI.

Conclusion

- Ethical guidelines are general --> commitment to certain values; not prescription of how to employ concrete tools.
- The current ethical guidelines do offer a sound basis of values upon which new ethical questions can be assessed. Nonetheless:
 - Unlike other types of tools employed in research and library work, AI poses challenges to things that are taken for granted.
 - New possibilities afforded by AI might put pressure on certain values, such as reproducibility and academic craftsmanship.
- Revising ethical guidelines might be beneficial:
 - less so because AI requires concrete recommendations;
 - because AI challenges substantive assumptions upon which guidelines rely, and the significance of certain values in a changing landscape.



Got feedback?