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A STUDY ON INVESTIGATING ETHICAL REASONING AND IPR LITERACY IN DIGITAL ACADEMIC PRACTICES

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Abstract

In the evolving digital landscape of higher education, the boundaries between intellectual ownership, digital reuse, and ethical inspiration are increasingly blurred. This study investigates how students perceive digital plagiarism, interpret copyright norms, and distinguish between ethical and unethical academic practices. Leveraging scenario-based ethical dilemmas and quantitative methods, the research explores students' cognitive frameworks surrounding content creation, reuse, and citation in academic settings.

The study analyses generational and disciplinary variances in moral reasoning using non-parametric tests including Kruskal-Wallis and Friedman, revealing nuanced insights into ethical ambiguity within academic ecosystems. The study examines the relationship between students' IPR awareness levels and their ethical reasoning responses across plagiarism scenarios involving AI-generated content. Using the Kruskal-Wallis test, we explore variations in scores based on generational identity, academic discipline, and exposure to formal IPR education. The primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire from 122 academic stakeholders including students, PhD Scholars and Faculties from different disciplines in Bengaluru city. Results highlight gaps in IPR literacy and underscore the influence of institutional policies, peer norms, and pedagogical practices on student behaviour. The findings propose an integrative model to enhance ethical awareness, encouraging a shift from punitive measures to proactive ethics education through immersive and gamified approaches.

This research contributes to the discourse on academic integrity, offering practical implications for curriculum design, copyright sensitization, and the development of equitable assessment frameworks that foster responsible inspiration without penalizing creativity.

Keywords: IPR, Ethical Reasoning, Copyrights, Digital Academic practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of digital education, ethical reasoning and intellectual property rights (IPR) literacy have emerged as critical competencies for academic integrity. The proliferation of AI-generated content, open educational resources, and collaborative platforms has blurred traditional boundaries of authorship, ownership, and ethical responsibility. As digital academic practices become more decentralized and data-driven, educators and learners must navigate complex legal frameworks and moral dilemmas. This study investigates the intersection of ethical reasoning, IPR literacy, and compliance behaviour in digital academic environments, with a focus on awareness of copyright law changes and responsible use of AI tools. *Mehrfar, S., Alizadeh, M., & Ghasemi, M. (2023)* synthesizes literature on academic integrity violations, privacy concerns in learning management systems, and the ethical obligations of instructors in virtual classrooms. The authors argue for the integration of comprehensive ethical frameworks into instructional design, emphasizing scenario-based training and policy alignment. Whereas *Suryavanshi, A. (2024)* examined copyright compliance challenges in digital learning environments, including fair use, licensing, and ownership disputes. It proposes actionable strategies such as policy harmonization, open access support, and digital

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literacy enhancement. Choubey, G., & Rashkar, S. (2024) explores the ethical dilemmas surrounding IPR violations in academia, including plagiarism, improper citation, and pressure-driven publication practices. It emphasizes the need for institutional reforms and ethical training to foster integrity and responsible innovation. But there is a lack of integrated frameworks that assess how ethical reasoning, IPR awareness, and AI-related copyright understanding co-evolve in academic behaviour. Additionally, few studies employ validated instruments or non-parametric statistical methods (e.g., Kruskal-Wallis, Friedman test) to compare ethical and legal awareness across roles, disciplines, or intervention stages.

Despite increased access to digital tools and content, there remains a significant gap in ethical reasoning and IPR literacy among academic stakeholders. Many educators and students unknowingly engage in practices that violate copyright norms or ethical standards, such as improper citation, unauthorized reuse, or overreliance on AI-generated material. Institutional policies often lack clarity, and training programs are either absent or ineffective. This gap undermines academic integrity, exposes institutions to legal risks, and compromises the quality of scholarly output. The problem is compounded by rapid changes in copyright law and the integration of generative AI, which demand continuous ethical and legal recalibration.

2.OBJECTIVES
1. To assess the Ethical Reasoning ability across academic stakeholders in Digital Academic Contexts.
2. To understand the level of IPR Literacy across academic disciplines.
3. To examine participants' perceptions of the relative severity of various academic misconduct actions.

3. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY
H1: There is no significant difference in the ethical reasoning ability across academic stakeholders.
H2: There is no significant difference in IPR literacy across disciplines.
H3: There is no significant difference in the perception of participants towards academic misconduct.

4. METHODOLOGY
Research Design
The study used descriptive and analytical research design to assess the ethical reasoning ability and IPR literacy in digital academic practices.
Population and Sample Size
For the purpose of study, academic stakeholders in Bengaluru city were considered as the population for the study. The academic stakeholders used in the current study are students & faculties in Bengaluru city.
The samples for the study are collected through non probability purposive sampling method and in the category of students, undergraduate, post graduate and PhD scholars were considered from different disciplines like law, commerce, technology and management. The size of the total sample is 122.
Data Collection Method
Primary Data: Collected through well- structured survey questionnaire distributed to academic stakeholders in Bengaluru.
Statistical Tool used
Kruskal Wallis test is used to analyse the significant difference in the ethical reasoning ability across academic stakeholders and to understand the level of IPR Literacy across disciplines whereas Friedman Test to examine participants' perceptions of the relative severity of various academic misconduct actions.
Primary data collected using well-structured questionnaire is analysed using the tools such as Likert scale analysis. Hypotheses testing is done with the help of SPSS 20 by applying relevant statistical tools such as Kruskal Wallis test and Friedman test.

5. RESULTS & DISCUSSION
Table 1: Reliability analysis

Scale	No.of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Ethical reasoning ability	5	0.845
IPR Literacy	5	0.870

N=122
All constructs exhibited fair internal consistency reliability (α =.845 &.870), well exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. While performing normality test using Shapiro-wilk and K-S test the value obtained is less than

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0.05 and hence non-parametric tests like Kruskal-wallis test and friedman test were used for analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: There is no significant difference in the ethical reasoning ability across academic stakeholders.

Table 2: Mean rank based on academic level

Variable	Academic level	Mean Rank
Ethical Reasoning Ability	UG	41.6
	PG	47.6
	PHD	70.64
	FACULTY	**86.17***

N-122

Table 2a Test statistics

Variable	Chi-square	df	Sig.
Ethical Reasoning Ability	28.093	3	**0.000***

a. Kruskal Wallis test b. Grouping variable: Academic level

Table 2 & 2 a indicates the ethical reasoning ability across academic holders. As per the mean score of the respondents about the ethical reasoning ability shows significant difference across academic stakeholders. Faculty members rank highest (Mean = 86.17, P< 0.05), indicating they are perceived (or perceive themselves) as having the strongest ethical reasoning and Undergraduates rank lowest (mean=41.6), which may reflect less exposure to ethical frameworks or decision-making scenarios. The mean rank increases with academic level, suggesting that individuals with more advanced academic backgrounds tend to score higher on ethical reasoning ability.

This means that investors' academic level significantly influences their ethical reasoning ability in digital academic practises (P value = 0.000, Chi-square=28.093). Hence null hypothesis is rejected.

H2: There is no significant difference in IPR literacy across disciplines.

Table 3: Mean rank based on discipline

Variable	Discipline	Mean Rank
	Law	**82.20***
IPR Literacy	Commerce	56.30
	Technology	29.95
	Management	74.54

N=122

Table 3a Test statistics

Variable	Chi-square	df	Sig.
IPR Literacy	31.75	4	**0.000***

a. Kruskal Wallis test b. Grouping variable: Academic discipline

Table 3& 3a highlights the IPR literacy across academic disciplines. As per the mean score of the respondents about the IPR literacy shows significant difference across academic disciplines. Law and Management disciplines show the highest mean ranks, suggesting that students or professionals in these fields are more aware about intellectual property rights (Mean =82.20,74.54). The lowest mean rank belongs to technology indicates less exposure to practical IPR applications in the context of this study.

This means that investors' academic discipline significantly influences their IPR literacy in digital academic practises (P value = 0.000, Chi-square=31.75). Hence null hypothesis is rejected.

H3: There is no significant difference in the perception of participants towards academic misconduct

Table 3: Mean rank based on Academic Misconduct

Academic Misconduct	Mean Rank
Copying from a peer without citation	4.03
Using AI-generated content without attribution	2.89
Reusing your own work without disclosure	3.23
Paraphrasing without proper referencing	3.38
Fabricating data in a research project	1.48

Table 3a: Test statistics

N	122
Chi-square	178.56
df	4

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Sig.	0.000

a. *Friedman Test*

Tables 3 and 3a shows that in the opinion of respondents, fabricating data is viewed as the most significant violation with a mean rank of 1.48 followed by usage of AI-generated content without attribution (2.89). This mean rank variation is statistically significant at 5 per cent level of significance. (Value of Chi-Square is 178.56 with p 0.000< 0.05). Hence the null hypothesis stands rejected. Therefore, there is significant difference in the perceived severity rankings assigned to various types of academic misconduct among participants.

6. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that ethical reasoning ability, IPR literacy, and perceptions of academic misconduct vary significantly across academic levels and disciplines in digital academic contexts. Faculty members demonstrated the highest ethical reasoning ability, suggesting that academic maturity and professional exposure contribute to stronger ethical judgment, while undergraduates showed the lowest, likely due to limited experience with ethical frameworks. Similarly, IPR literacy was found to differ across disciplines, with law and management students showing greater awareness, whereas technology students ranked lowest, indicating a need for more targeted education in intellectual property rights within technical curricula. Furthermore, participants expressed clear distinctions in the severity of academic misconduct, with fabricating data viewed as the most serious offense, followed by the use of AI-generated content without attribution. These differences were statistically significant, reinforcing the importance of ethical training and policy clarity in academic environments. Overall, the findings highlight the influence of academic background on ethical and legal awareness in digital practices and underscore the need for tailored interventions to foster integrity and literacy across diverse educational contexts.

7. STATEMENTS & DECLARATIONS:

AI Statement: The authors declare that they have not used generative artificial intelligence, specifically ChatGPT, in the writing of this manuscript and/or in the creation of images, graphics, tables, or their corresponding captions.

Authorship Contribution: Sreelakshmi Sreekumar: Carrying out the data collection, data curation, and writing the original manuscript and original draft. Dr.K. R. Jalaja: Supervision and guided the overall direction of the paper.

Ethical Standards: All the ethical Research standards were followed while writing this research paper.

Conflict of Interest: The authors state that they do not have any conflict of interest.

Informed Consent / Ethical Compliance: All participants provided informed consent prior to participation. They were informed of the study's purpose and procedures before data collection. Confidentiality of responses was maintained throughout.

Human or animal involvement in the article: Nil

Data Availability: Both primary and secondary data are used in the paper and references is attached for the secondary data.

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