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Reduce reuse ... and don't recycle!

On text reuse in academic articles

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Many years ago, we all used to publish fully refereed conference papers. We leveraged audience feedback to submit improved manuscripts to journals. Once, an eagle-eyed reviewer spotted reused text in my journal submission. I cited the conference paper correctly, but being accused of self-plagiarism shook me to the bones. I never published a conference paper again.

Serving as co-editor-in-chief of *Annals of Tourism Research* gave me a new perspective on text reuse. Elsevier checks every submitted manuscript – excluding references – for plagiarism. Before we – the editors-in-chief – even read the abstract, we see text reuse statistics. Full reports look like the real (Fig.1a) and hypothetical examples (Fig.1b) in Figure 1: they highlight duplicate sections, and cite the original source. Unless the overall reuse percentage is tiny (<5%), and reuse from specific sources negligible (<1%), we inspect all highlighted sections.

18 such netnography is particularly suitable for the study of constructs existing primarily online
19 or existing because of the availability of an online platform which creates an online
20 community, such as peer-to-peer accommodation network platforms. While the actual tourist
21 and accommodation experience occurs offline, all information and communication before and
22 after the stay is exclusively online. Here, netnography can provide "additional insights into
23 tourism providers' experiences and challenges, which in turn could help tourism scholars to
24 have a better understanding of both demand and supply" (Tavakoli & Mura, 2018, p.191).
25
26 Our study context is online fora specifically related to peer-to-peer accommodation and
27 disability. Such fora are used by both hosts and guests to exchange experiences and
28 recommendations for improvement, thus offering a rich source of insights relating to our
29 research questions. We use the social model of disability as a theoretical framework to
30 identify the barriers that currently disable people with impairments from accessing tourist
31 accommodations through Airbnb. Specifically, the framework calls for the identification of
32 existing attitudinal, physical and informational/communication barriers, and the exploration
33 of ways to overcome them, enabling people with impairments to fully participate on the
34 Airbnb platform.
35
36 The forum we study is the Airbnb community forum on hosting (Airbnb Community
37 Center, 2018) which includes a large number of conversations relating to disabled access,
38 each of them typically including a number of posts and replies. We studied posts and replies
39 using the following search terms, which were determined following a review of relevant
40 literature: 'disabled', 'disability', 'impairment', 'impaired', 'access', 'accessibility', 'deaf',
41 'hearing', 'blind', 'visual', 'physical', 'mobility', 'intellectual', 'cognitive', 'sensory'.
42 Approval for data collection was obtained from the university's Human Research Ethics
43 Committee prior to data collection commencing (approval number 2018/340).
44

Fig.1a real example

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14 accommodation experience occurs offline, all information and communication before and
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27 Airbnb platform.
28
29 We also conducted a survey where respondents ranked eight domains according to
30 perceived importance for quality of life: health, money, family, leisure, people, vacations,
31 work and spiritual life. Respondents also answered questions about challenges they faced in
32 the past 12 months, including challenges related to health (having a disability, having a major
33 health issue that does/does not affect quality of life), caring responsibilities (caring for a child
34 or someone else with a disability, caring for someone with a major health issue that does/does
35 not affect quality of life), family (having relationship problems, challenging times with
36 family), financial difficulties (difficulty making ends meet, limited buying power), work
37 (being unemployed, employed and concerned/not concerned about losing a job, feeling
38 stressed about work) and leisure time (insufficient time for leisure activities).
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40
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42
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Fig.1b hypothetical example
(paragraph from previously published work included)

Fig.1. iThenticate reports (taken/modified from: Randle & Dolnicar, 2019; Randle, Zhang & Dolnicar, 2019)

Fig.1a highlights individual words in red. That's OK, unless they are specific terms coined by someone else. The pink section on top is also OK: a correctly cited direct quote. The short sentence about human ethics approval at the bottom – also in pink – could be reworded, but it is short. We can live with that. At least the

authors obtained ethics approval! Fig. 1b contains a complete paragraph highlighted in purple, suggesting extensive verbatim text reuse. This breaches copyright law (Roig, 2019), unless the text is from the author's thesis, abstract or preprint (Elsevier, 2019).

"But these are my own words," some authors argue. They may be. But in terms of copyright law and rules on research integrity: reuse is reuse. Some authors feel they can *"only express certain things in a limited number of ways."* As a consequence, text reuse frequently occurs in methodology sections (Roig, 2005). Rewriting the explanation of a method may seem like a waste of time. But it is better to be safe than sorry. If authors feel strongly about reusing what they believe is a perfect description of a method, they can include it as a direct quote.

The "reuse of one's own words, ideas, or artistic expression ... from preexisting material especially without acknowledgment of their earlier use" is called self-plagiarism (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2019). While "relatively simple to define in a qualitative sense, it can be extremely difficult to rule on in practice" (Giles, 2005, p. 258). Not surprisingly, therefore, many disciplines have identified (self-)plagiarism as a major issue (e.g. O'Hair & Neff, 2013). Rightfully so: more than two-thirds of authors copy-paste text from their earlier papers (Bretag & Mahmud, 2009).

Tourism researchers are pioneers. Just think of value co-creation! Let's also lead the way in reducing text reuse, and refusing text recycling. As the examples above illustrate, text reuse is not a simple, binary problem, with a simple, binary solution. Much to my dismay. Our positions on how much (and what type of) text reuse is acceptable will differ. We will disagree on whether text reuse is "an issue of academic integrity, or one of intellectual laziness" (Bretag & Mahmud, 2009, p. 196). We will never achieve consensus on these matters. But we can (1) consciously choose not to reuse text; (2) clearly communicate to our students and co-authors that – as teams – we commit to not reusing text, and (3) run our manuscripts through plagiarism software before submitting them to a journal.

As times change, we must adapt. I stopped publishing conference papers many years ago. As of May 2019, I routinely check my own pre-submission manuscripts using plagiarism detection software. Why? Because I am human. I make mistakes. But I do not want to. I do not want to reuse and recycle text. I am proud of my research. It deserves to be presented as an original article.

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