Presentation of Web portal – Support for the victims of academic misconduct

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Introduction

Academic misconduct is a problem that not only degrades academic credibility but also strongly affects all involved subjects (Singh, Remenyi, 2016; Newton, 2018; Bouter L. M., et al., 2016).

For instance, in 2015 Susannah Dickinson, the professor at the University of Arizona [7], was accused of plagiarism when university checked her work for originality and found out, that the work contained 20 % of similarity with her students' thesis. Another "famous" occurrence of plagiarism happened at the University of Missouri, where former professor Ashim Mitra made a profit circa 1.5 million dollars from selling a project based on work of Kishore Cholkar, who developed a more efficient way to deliver drugs through the eye [8]. It is estimated that this work could earn Mitra a further 10 million dollars over the next five years. In these two cases, students were victims of academic misconduct. It can be assumed that victims are often disadvantaged and afraid to point out misconduct of supervisor.

However, there are also cases of false accusations. Ruth McCorkle had shared her work results with one of her students who had later published the results before McCorkle did. This led to the accusation of plagiarism which was followed by a trial where McCorkle successfully defended herself [9].

A similar problem is the so-called 'ghost authoring' when a senior colleague forces the junior researcher to give him credit, even though he did not participate in the research [10].

Besides the cases that can be found in regular media like newspapers or magazines, there are also cases of academic misconduct that are published in academic journals. Hawkes, in his work, mentions researchers from The University of Liverpool (Hawkes, 2018), who pointed out academic dishonesty during the research. However, these types of articles are quite rare. Most of them come from developed countries where copyright law is a thing. On the other hand, to solve the authorship problem in less developed countries is often considered as the Sisyphean task. Another possible reason is that the university institution does not want to public these cases because it creates a bad image of the institution. To conclude, gaining

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[7] https://unicheck.com/blog/professor-who-plagiarized
[8] https://www.chronicle.com/article/Lawsuit-Alleges-Professor/245807
[9] https://journals.lww.com/cancernursingonline/Fulltext/2017/09000/Can_Mentoring_and_Collabora-tion_Lead_to_a_Charge.12.aspx
[10] https://newintrigue.com/2018/03/10/ghost-authoring-how-professors-steal-the-work-of-their-students/

and collecting information about cases of academic misconduct is not an easy task because there are not many external resources. It is even harder to understand all involved subjects because the situation might not be clear and therefore, it is not easy to determine who is the victim and who is the delinquent.

Presentation goal

The goal of this presentation is to introduce a new web portal that aims to support the victims of academic misconduct. This portal was developed in cooperation of Mendel University, Brno and University of Nicosia, Cyprus and is supposed to gather and present various information about academic misbehaviour to the broader public as well as to students and researches, help victims to seek for individual help and in the future partially automatize the process of helping.

Methodology

To build the web portal, content management system called WordPress is used. WordPress offers various plugins written in PHP, so it is easy to use, and it is relatively fast to build a web page. These plugins are provided by community of developers, and most of them are available for free and are free to alter. It means that they are not specialised in specific tasks which may be necessary to successfully tackle the problem of helping the victims of misconduct. To solve this problem, some plugins had to be modified.

Another problem that had to be solved was the collection of information. In order to successfully solve this problem and be able to publish reliable information at the portal, it was necessary to collect data about various academic misconduct cases. This information was acquired from credible articles as well as from newspapers and magazines. Another opportunity to broaden the database was to examine the journals and academic literature.

The portal was finished and deployed in February 2020. It is necessary to mention that the portal is not only used to present basic information, but it is also used to emphasise the unacceptability of all types of academic misbehaviour. It is also the place where the broader public, victims, and even the researchers can find lot of information about edge cases of misconduct since it is not always possible to draw a clear line between the victim and the culprit. These cases are presented in a playful and educative way so everyone, from high school student to professor can enrich his or her knowledge about the problem. And last but not least, the portal is utilised as a middleman between the victim and community of professionals with an academic background that can provide to the victim useful information about the particular problem he or she is facing to. This creates a possibility to approach every case individually based on the limits of the regional, legal and moral standards of the victim.

It is expected that the collection of data will be a never-ending process that helps in the

the future to tackle more effectively the problem of academic misconduct. Based on the output of the data collection and data processing it will be possible to create a "first aid" toolkit. Such a toolkit might consist of automatic responses to some general questions about academic misbehaviour, patterns that empower and embrace the victims to share the story or chatbot that extracts necessary information about the case from the victim so the case might be assigned automatically to a specific member of the community that is willing to help. After collecting enough data, it will be even possible to use machine learning techniques and find possibly some hidden patterns and connections.

References

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