

Digital disruption of Academic Integrity : how Information Technology mediates the relationship between plagiarism awareness, practice, and Academic Integrity among postgraduate students

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ABSTRACT

Academic integrity forms the basis for research being treated as trustworthy and reliable. Postgraduate research in this regard should therefore exhibit high standards of academic integrity. Digital disruption has significantly reshaped ethical scholarship, creating new challenges while opening new opportunities to protect and preserve academic integrity. Plagiarism, an aspect of academic integrity, has become a challenge due to digital disruption. The basis of this study was to understand the correlation between plagiarism awareness and practice among postgraduate students and academic integrity. Additionally, establish how information technology in the form of digital content and Artificial intelligence mediates this relationship. Comprehension and maintenance of academic integrity by postgraduate students is essential at this level, where postgraduate students are expected to be producers of evidence-based scholarly research. Despite evidence from the literature indicating an increase in plagiarism among postgraduate students, limited research has examined the behaviour and disruptive nature of information technology. Study participants were therefore derived from 496 students within 3 public universities in Kenya. At the time, the students (PhD/Master's) must have been undertaking their thesis/dissertation. The research used a correlational research design. A standardized questionnaire was administered to participants. Analysis of the data was conducted using SPSS software by means of regression and correlation. Findings indicate that while IT can provide instructional materials and plagiarism-detection mechanisms, it has also created several loopholes in traditional guidelines on academic integrity, and advances in technology have facilitated more sophisticated forms of plagiarism through AI-assisted content changes. A multi-faceted, orientation-based curriculum is proposed to address the complex technological landscape of contemporary academic work and current academic integrity policies.

(Key words: *academic integrity; Information Technology; plagiarism awareness; postgraduate students; academic conduct; Artificial Intelligence.*)

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern postgraduate education operates at a vital intersection where technological progress undermines basic tenets of academic integrity. Academic integrity, as defined in TEQSA (2021), refers to a code of conduct inclusive of the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility that underpin academic work, it is critical to any form of quality academic work. Among various forms of academic misconduct, plagiarism violates academic integrity and includes a continuum of failure to give sufficient credit to another source of information, from a failure to acknowledge a source, to full copying of another source and not acknowledging it, for example, a full substantive written in the exact words will full acknowledgement (Das, 2018).

Digital disruption has significantly changed the academic landscape, and the ability to locate information quickly online increasingly contributes to both intentional and unintentional plagiarism (Bell, 2018). Digital transformation has, in considerable ways, modified the nature of plagiarism, adding complexity to identifying it in all its forms. Moreover, the development of sophisticated artificial intelligence tools and large language models, which have enhanced accessibility through tools such as ChatGPT and Bard, has further complicated the definition and scope of plagiarism, as they have enhanced text generation across all disciplines. Traditional forms of detection are challenged or possible for many and vulnerable to being classified as authorship.

In the African context, postgraduate students have a special responsibility given their future academic

leadership roles and the expected accountability to integrity standards (Johnson et al. 2020). Nonetheless, even though concerns exist regarding global trends of growing rates of plagiarism due to a lack of awareness and institutional education (Cheers et al. 2021; Ndebele, 2020; Ali, 2021), postgraduate students were only recently part of an editorial discussion in the literature (Du, 2020). A study conducted in South Africa by Ogundipe and Akinlabi, (2021) revealed contradictory situations, where students, on the one hand, acknowledged the significance of integrity, but on the other hand, opted for various plagiarism approaches because of time poverty, poor citation knowledge, and the difficulty of the assignment represented. In contrast, research in Kenya documented multiple ways to plagiarize; for instance, non-original replication, the insinuation that linking new content to originality, and self-plagiarism (Kukali, 2022; Chepkong'a and Mutua, 2022).

Significantly, information technology is one of the key intervening variables, as it can contribute to the escalation of academic integrity issues, or, conversely, provide sophisticated measures to prevent or detect them. This study addresses important gaps in the existing body of knowledge about the specific link between information technology, including digital content and artificial intelligence, and academic integrity among postgraduate students, with an additional focus on the role of technology as a mediator between student academic behaviour and academic outcomes.

The objective of this study was to examine how information technology mediates the relationship between plagiarism awareness, practice, and postgraduate academic integrity. Specifically, the study sought to understand the correlation between plagiarism awareness and practice among postgraduate students and academic integrity.

Plagiarism awareness within digital disruption

Several studies have highlighted the importance of awareness of plagiarism in achieving academic integrity amongst postgraduate students. The reasons for plagiarism include an inadequate understanding of what constitutes plagiarism (Ho 2021). According to Nabee et al. (2020), plagiarism entails proper referencing, effective plagiarism identification tools, and proper conceptual understanding of the subject. Nguyen (2021) also contends that postgraduate students have a diverse understanding of plagiarism. Some students intentionally plagiarize with the idea of gaining benefits, while some students unintentionally plagiarize simply because they

do not know (Nguyen and Buckingham 2019; Tran 2021; Ho 2021).

However, the digital disruption has fundamentally complicated plagiarism awareness, with Information Technology, especially access to digital content and artificial intelligence tools, interfering in how students perceive, understand, and relate to the concept of plagiarism. New challenges have arisen in distinguishing between legitimate research practice and plagiarism because of the proliferation of digital content, while AI-powered writing assistants and paraphrasing tools have blurred traditional boundaries of original work (Eaton, 2021). Awareness of plagiarism by students is increasingly mediated through their use of digital platforms, search engines, and AI technologies capable of facilitating as well as detecting academic misconduct.

Consequently, postgraduate students are especially important because it is assumed that they will be independent researchers with profoundly high knowledge in their field (Tran, 2021). Their chance of success depends on original research; hence, plagiarism may hinder them from receiving a higher degree (Tran, 2021). Yet, their research capabilities are now inextricably linked to digital literacy and understanding of how digital disruption influences academic integrity standards.

Several studies (Sankar, 2020; Ndebele, 2020; Raj et al., 2021; Cheers et al., 2021; Ali, 2021) globally lament about a concerning increase in plagiarism in higher education. According to Cheers et al. (2021), part of this stems from students' lack of awareness and inadequate plagiarism education by institutions. This concern is amplified by the rapid adoption of digital tools and AI technologies that outpace institutional policies and student training programs. Accessing large digital databases and sophisticated AI writing generators does involve new forms of plagiarism that traditional campaigns may not address in a comprehensive context.

Research on student awareness of plagiarism is increasing, but research on postgraduate students is limited (Du, 2020; Ndebele, 2020). Tran et al. (2022) elaborate that the body of literature in the US and in Europe that has addressed this awareness indicates that there are potential differences in public attitudes to, and understandings of, plagiarism in postgraduate students around the world. It is posited that these geographical differences are affected by access to and familiarity with digital disruptive technologies and AI tools, potentially creating new inequalities in from the perspective of plagiarism practice and knowledge.

Unlike research regarding awareness of plagiarism in postgraduate students in some other continents, which presents divergent perspectives, in some regions there is not a consistent approach. Compared to Iran (Babaii and Nejadghanbar 2017) and China (Du 2020), where plagiarism was perceived as less serious, Malawian (Selemani et al., 2018) and foreign students (Tran et al., 2022) perceived plagiarism as more serious. There was more consensus about plagiarism awareness with Australian students (Ndebele, 2020) demonstrating a high level of plagiarism awareness. These cultural differences mirror differences in the levels of digital infrastructure and the adoption of artificial intelligence tools that present differential realities with intangible yet real influences from technology access, cultural norms and plagiarism awareness.

There is simply a lack of research into the perception of postgraduate student awareness in studies in Kenya. The scholarship so far presents the complexion to conduct further studies on the perception of postgraduate students. Previous research has identified possible gaps in Kenyan students' plagiarism awareness. Mutua and Indoshi (2018) noted that undergraduates lack awareness, while Kibiwott et al., (2019) focused mainly on the need for more skill-based orientation programs. Diki and Gibendi (2022) contend that there is a need to raise awareness in particular areas of plagiarism, especially within a culturally based context. However, these studies preceded the widespread adoption of AI tools in academic settings, suggesting that current awareness levels may be further complicated by students' varying exposure to and understanding of digital content and artificial intelligence technologies. Research data on postgraduate students within the Kenyan context continues to be limited, especially on how Information Technology informs their plagiarism awareness, along with their academic integrity responses.

Plagiarism practice within digital disruption

According to Memon (2020), in low- and middle-income countries, postgraduate students exhibit a high prevalence of plagiarism. There also exists a plagiarism severity variation, with some blatantly plagiarizing, some directly copying, while others commit verbatim plagiarism. Various studies from an international perspective (Selemani et al., 2018; Smith and Johnson, 2018; Mohamed, 2022; Ei Mon et al., 2022; Tran, 2022) have noted extreme youth plagiarism among postgraduate students. For example, both Mohamed (2022) and Phyto et al. (2022) observed students who copied from the internet, and Tran (2022) found that students lacked some skill in proper paraphrasing. The digital disruption has altered the

context for digitization. Information Technology is now an important intervening variable or factor on the context because it creates ease but could complicate these behaviours. The influx of digital content develops your access to a large pool of content and knowledge at one's disposal and is a distinct factor for directly copying sources (i.e. copy-and-paste plagiarism). Mobiles and computer software designed to check content for plagiarized behaviours contributes to some of the ease of use and complexity factors for students in solving or creatively intending to paraphrase, and AI-based text paraphrasing software could lend to or prove to be a cause of the demise of decent paraphrasing to help augment instead of inhibit the research development writing process (e.g., Tran, 2022).

In Europe, Smith and Johnson (2018) point out that this raises the question of whether students do not recognize Internet sources as a primary source to cite specifically, since authorship has become fuzzier due to the Internet's availability, and students have internet resources that seem available at will. The ubiquity of digital disruptive material may lie behind students' misunderstandings of intellectual property rights as well as citation requirements for online materials. A specific study by Ei Mon et al. (2022) in Myanmar analysed plagiarism among medical and allied postgraduate students. Their findings align with concerns in Kenya, where about 20% of students admitted to engaging in plagiarism. Plagiarism in this context involved simply copying and pasting material without proper attribution (15%) and copying sentences from others' work –

Numerous studies, such as Chen and Yang (2023) and Ali (2021), have documented plagiarism among postgraduate students, including paraphrasing. With the advent of AI paraphrasing and rewording tools, defining plagiarism paraphrasing has become more difficult. According to standard definitions, students are now rewriting specific text using AI to maintain the original meaning and are not intentionally citing the source. A research study from South Africa, Selemani et al., (2018), surveyed postgraduate students on plagiarism and documented a series of common occurrences in what they defined as plagiarism. These were paraphrasing without credit (69.8%), summarizing without credit (64.1%), and quoting without quotations (56.6%). The study also found students copying and pasting work from various online sources without proper credit, reflecting a concerning trend of failing to credit online sources, driven by the sheer volume of material available online.

In Kenya, studies by Nakitare & Otike, (2022); Kukali, (2022) and Diki & Gibendi, (2022) focused on the

different ways students plagiarized. The most common are copying, paraphrasing without citation, and utilizing a ghostwriter. Kukali's (2022) recent study even raised self-plagiarism and citing fake sources. However, research on this topic has gaps, particularly in the digital and AI-powered age. To start, additional studies across a range of disciplines and types of courses will provide insight into how Information Technology might influence trends in plagiarism. Secondly, there has been little research into the reasons for plagiarism, and decisions to engage or not engage in plagiarism behaviours, particularly in terms of whether or not the access to digital academic content and resources, or specific AI tools, might influence these decisions. Thirdly, valuable insights may come from examination of both potential roles of AI technology, but also in terms of detection, in improving student thinking and deciding to plagiarize. Lastly, more research exploring the impact of digitized plagiarism on academic and eventually, professional careers is warranted. This is in addition to understanding how digital literacy will influence a student's understanding of the term plagiarism, and whether or not a student decides to engage in plagiarism. This will enable a full understanding of the role Information Technology has had in undermining academic integrity.

Academic integrity

Academic integrity is the pillar of trustworthiness scholarship (Smith & Johnson, 2018). According to Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency [TEQSA] (2021), academic integrity is a set of values and practices that expect us to act with honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. This covers ethical behaviours such as providing the correct citation and avoiding plagiarism (Johnson & Davies, 2020). Plagiarism is one of the most commonly occurring misconducts, which is the use of another person's work without the proper credit (Dawson & Sutherland-Smith, 2019). This misconduct affects academic integrity as well as students' development of proper citation and use of language (Das, 2018). Although a direct causal link has not been established, readily available information online creates opportunities for both plagiarism and deception (Singh, 2017; Das, 2018; Bell, 2018).

Plagiarism practice, awareness and Theory of Planned Behaviour

This study utilizes the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as stipulated by Ajzen (1991) to understand plagiarism behaviour, as Information Technology is a key intervening variable that changes the traditional behaviour processes. The TPB model recognizes the role

of attitudes, social norms, and behavioural control on intention to plagiarize and behaviour to plagiarize (Maryam and Ahmet, 2023; Anupama et al., 2023), and the digital revolution also calls for re-exploration of what are otherwise established links. In this way, Information Technology, which currently includes the availability of digital content and the functionality of artificial intelligence, works as a mediating variable that then changes the TPB components in distinct manners. The availability of digital content affects the behaviour associated with plagiarism because it normalizes copy-and-paste conventions and blurs the lines around what constitutes academic dishonesty (Gullifer and Tyson, 2014). AI technologies will have a wide-ranging, mixed effect on perceptions of control over behaviour: detection technology will pose a threat to beliefs in effective plagiarism practices and writing within AI environments. The online world is also generating new social norms of information sharing and may impact students' perceptions of the appropriateness of plagiarism (Curtis and Tremayne, 2021).

Despite extensive plagiarism determinants studies (Maryam & Ahmet, 2023), attitudinal factors remain under-researched (Tindall and Curtis, 2020), particularly in technology-driven settings. This study bridges this gap by investigating how Information Technology destabilizes TPB relationships of plagiarism behaviour, acknowledging that models of behaviour must be reconsidered in our digital world. Rather than directly influencing plagiarism, IT mediates in-place TPB relationships, establishing new and modifying existing ones by translating attitudes, social norms, and perceived control over behaviour into plagiarism intentions and actions.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study applied a pragmatic approach. This approach focused on interpreting the realities of quantitative data related to plagiarism. The research applied a correlational research design. This study aims to specifically assess the role of Information Technology (AI and digital information) as a moderating variable in the relationship between plagiarism and academic integrity among postgraduate students. The study used a structured questionnaire to measure plagiarism behaviour and the ways it may be influenced by IT. A total of 708 questionnaires were distributed. The study evaluated 496 questionnaires returned (70% response rate) by the postgraduate students (both PhD and Master's) from three public universities in Kenya namely the University of Nairobi, Moi University and, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. The postgraduate

students were randomly sampled through the institution's mailing list. The findings were described using descriptive statistics and visualizations. Later, Spearman rank correlation, Regression analysis and two-way ANOVA analysis were done using SPSS.

III. STUDY RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The study achieved a 70% response rate, making it valid and acceptable as per recommendations made by

Mugenda and Mugenda (2012). Demographic information is captured in Table 1, showing that the study captured responses from Master's and PhD students from the three targeted universities.

This section presents findings and discussion on plagiarism awareness, plagiarism practice and the way the two variables are influenced through by IT.

Table 1: Demographic information of the respondents (N=496)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>University Attended</i>	<i>JKUAT</i>	74	15%
	<i>MOI</i>	55	11%
	<i>UON</i>	367	74%
	Total	496	100%
<i>Academic Level</i>	<i>Phd</i>	213	43%
	<i>Master's</i>	283	57%
	Total	496	100%

Plagiarism Awareness

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of variables¹

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Variance</i>
<i>Plagiarism awareness</i>	496	75.5161	11.95918	143.022
<i>Plagiarism practice</i>	496	44.4274	6.80840	46.354

As shown in Table 2 above, plagiarism awareness for the 496 sampled postgraduate students had a mean score of 75.52 (SD = 11.96, Variance = 143.02). To measure plagiarism awareness, respondents were asked questions on the types of plagiarism, the use of citations, the consequences, and attitudes towards plagiarism, as outlined in Table 3. This relatively high mean score shows that postgraduate students at the selected Kenyan

public universities have moderate to high levels of awareness regarding plagiarism. The standard deviation of 11.96 indicates moderate variability in plagiarism awareness among students, suggesting that while most students cluster around the mean awareness level, there are notable differences in how well-informed individual students are about plagiarism. The variance of 143.02 further confirms this spread in awareness levels across the sample population. This is outlined in Table 2 above.

¹ *Source: Field Data, 2025*

Table 3: Plagiarism Awareness descriptive

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Variance</i>
1. <i>What constitutes plagiarism</i>	496	4.30	.881	.775
2. <i>Different forms of plagiarism</i>	496	3.98	1.005	1.010
3. <i>When necessary to cite sources</i>	496	4.14	.911	.830
4. <i>Know how to properly cite sources</i>	496	4.03	.907	.823
5. <i>Understand the consequences of plagiarism</i>	496	4.40	.832	.692
6. <i>Understanding consequences of plagiarism motivates to avoid it</i>	496	4.25	.998	.996
7. <i>My attitude towards plagiarism has become more negative as my knowledge of it has increased</i>	496	3.64	1.241	1.541

The research found that students who are more aware of plagiarism are less likely to commit plagiarism. This supports the role of curriculum-based supports aimed at increasing awareness of plagiarism as a deterrent (Gullifer and Tyson, 2014). The strength of the relationship indicates that awareness is a strong determinant of plagiarism behaviour, although not the only one. This finding coincides with an earlier study by Curtis and Tremayne (2021) that found that students' level of knowledge about the consequences of plagiarism significantly influenced the level of academic integrity misconduct. In short, this supports the first aim of the study, which involved examining the impact of plagiarism awareness on academic integrity, and suggests that passively educating students about plagiarism can have a positive influence on their broader ethical study behaviours. This finding also reinforces studies conducted by Selemani et al., (2018) where students who were more aware of the definition of plagiarism and the related university policies demonstrated less academic misconduct.

Plagiarism Practice

Plagiarism practice was measured using descriptive statistics, which yielded a mean score of 44.43 (SD = 6.81, Variance = 46.35), as outlined in Table 2 on the preceding page. The questions asked bordered on copying, misrepresentation, omission of citation, and improper or insufficient paraphrasing as outlined in Table 4 on the following page. This is indicative of a moderate practice towards plagiarism among the postgraduate students. The mean score suggests that the student body does not have a permissive or restrictive attitude towards plagiarism. The scores also had a standard deviation of 6.81, which was lower than the awareness scores, suggesting less variation in students' practice regarding plagiarism. This suggests that the group studied has more similarities in their plagiarism practices, indicating that most students are likely to share a similar opinion on whether the behaviours captured in the study are acceptable. The variance of 46.35 also supports this assertion of consistency about plagiarism practice.

Table 4: Plagiarism Practice Descriptive

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Variance</i>
1. <i>I directly copy text from sources for use in my research without quotation marks</i>	496	1.87	.934	.872
2. <i>I present someone else's ideas or data as my own without acknowledging the original source</i>	496	1.67	.878	.771
3. <i>My research contains paraphrased information from sources without citation</i>	496	2.07	1.065	1.134
4. <i>I have used AI generated information in my study</i>	496	2.54	1.215	1.477
5. <i>I have included citations in my work that do not correspond to an actual source</i>	496	2.15	1.144	1.310
6. <i>I have included in my research, parts of my previously submitted work</i>	496	2.28	1.169	1.367
7. <i>Using ideas from uncited sources undermines the fairness of academic evaluation</i>	496	3.70	1.137	1.293
8. <i>Omitting citations, even unintentionally, reduces the honesty of academic work</i>	496	3.93	.953	.908

The findings on Plagiarism Practice presented above provide evidence for investigating the relationship between plagiarism practice and academic integrity. The findings demonstrate that plagiarism denotes a substantial reduction in overall academic integrity and that students involved in plagiarism will engage in other forms of academic misconduct, indicating a pattern of ethical failure. This indicates a clear negative correlation of plagiarism practice with academic integrity. It follows that the more the students engage in plagiarism practice, the lower their associated levels of academic integrity. This is supported by McIntire, Calvert, and Ashcraft (2024) who established that students' academic misconduct acts that include plagiarism are not acts of isolation but are embedded in their broader ethical climate.

Plagiarism awareness-practice gap

A substantial difference exists between awareness (Mean = 75.52) and practice (Mean = 44.43) towards plagiarism as outlined in Table 2. Students show a fairly high awareness level of what plagiarism is, but their practice about plagiarism is only adequate suggesting an awareness-practice gap. This makes sense considering the Theory of Planned Behaviour which implies that knowledge alone does not result in corresponding attitudes, or behavioural intentions. The apparent larger

variability in awareness (SD = 11.961) versus practice (SD = 6.817) demonstrates that students do have knowledge gaps with respect to plagiarism based upon a variety of factors, while the practice has more consistency.

These relationships support the Theory of Planned Behaviour framework that is utilized in this study. Awareness is an aspect of knowledge that determines attitudes and perceived behavioural control as described in the TPB (Ajzen, 1991). The negative relationship with practices indicates that knowledge can shape action and behavioural intention, and the positive relationship with academic integrity indicates that awareness can influence normative beliefs and moral attitudes. The relationships among these three constructs show the transition from cognitive information to behavioural outcomes and broad ethical dispositions. Maryam and Ahmet (2023) evidenced the applicability of the TPB framework in a context with plagiarism and indicated that the interplay or interactions of knowledge, attitudes, and control of perceived behaviour have the ability to predict intention to plagiarize and behaviour. Anupama et al. (2023) confirmed that TPB variables, in this case awareness and attitudes, explained meaningful variability in academic integrity decisions by students, thus supporting the use of this theoretical framework to explain complex relations demonstrated in this study

*Academic integrity**Table 5: Correlation matrix²*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Awareness of plagiarism</i>	<i>Plagiarism practices</i>	<i>Academic integrity</i>
1. <i>Awareness of Plagiarism</i>	1.000	-0.612**	0.710**
2. <i>Plagiarism Practices</i>	-0.612**	1.000	-0.687**
3. <i>Academic Integrity</i>	0.710**	-0.687**	1.000

The correlation matrix in Table 5 shows that each of the three variables - awareness of plagiarism, plagiarism practices, and academic integrity - have statistically significant ties to one another. Questions on academic integrity bordered on honesty, fairness, respect and trust as outlined in Table 6. Each of the correlations is significant at $p < 0.01$, which indicates a strong and reliable relationship among these variables. The general pattern shows a connected triangular relation that reflects a strong alignment to the theoretical rationale driving the study.

The relationship between awareness of plagiarism and plagiarism practices shows a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.612$, $p < 0.01$) - suggesting that as postgraduate students become more aware of plagiarism the likelihood

of them practicing it decreases significantly. The relationship between awareness of plagiarism and academic integrity provided the strongest correlation out of the matrix ($r = 0.710$, $p < 0.01$). This shows that plagiarism aware students possess very high levels of academic integrity. Awareness of plagiarism is a great foundation for academic integrity overall as awareness of plagiarism was responsible for almost 50% of the variation in the data regarding academic integrity as a whole. The relationship between practices of plagiarism and academic integrity displayed a strong negative relationship ($r = -0.687$, $p < 0.01$). This relationship suggests that those who engage in practices of plagiarism possess significantly lower levels of academic integrity as a whole, illustrating an overall difference of for almost 47% of the variation.

² *Source: Field Survey, 2025*

Table 6: Academic integrity

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Plagiarism Practice and Academic Integrity				
1. <i>The more I engage in copying without citation, the less honest I consider my academic work to be</i>	496	4.02	1.001	1.002
2. <i>The frequency with which I properly cite sources directly relates to the fairness of my academic conduct</i>	496	4.03	.916	.839
3. <i>My effort in proper paraphrasing correlates with the respect I show for academic integrity</i>	496	4.10	.888	.789
4. <i>The extent to which I avoid plagiarism practices relates directly to the trust I maintain in the academic community</i>	496	4.19	.840	.706
Plagiarism Awareness and Academic Integrity				
1. <i>My awareness of the plagiarism policy motivates me to compete fairly with my peers</i>	496	4.02	.885	.783
2. <i>The university's plagiarism policy promotes respect for intellectual property</i>	496	4.20	.843	.711
3. <i>My knowledge of the plagiarism policy makes me feel more responsible for the integrity of my academic work</i>	496	4.18	.844	.712
4. <i>I feel a greater sense of responsibility to report instances of plagiarism because I am aware of the policy</i>	496	3.73	.988	.975
5. <i>There is a strong relationship between students' awareness of plagiarism policies and their academic integrity</i>	496	3.94	.897	.804

Mediating effect of IT on plagiarism awareness and practice

Regression analysis was done to ascertain the mediating effect of information technology on plagiarism awareness and plagiarism practices. This is captured in Table 7.

Table 7: Mediating effect of IT on plagiarism awareness³

Variable Relationship	<i>r</i>	<i>R</i>²	Variance (%)
<i>Direct effect on Academic Integrity</i>	0.71	0.5041	50.41%
<i>Effect through IT intervention</i>	0.65*	0.4225	42.25%
<i>Combined effect</i>	-	0.4633**	46.33%

³ Source: Field Survey, 2025

The analysis in Table 7 shows that Information Technology (IT) has a substantial partial mediation role in the link between plagiarism awareness and academic integrity, utilizing three independent pathways each with unique levels of association. The direct effect exhibited a strong association with academic integrity ($r = 0.71$, $R^2 = 0.5041$), while explaining 50.41% of the variance in academic integrity. This was accomplished using sequential regression analysis.

The IT mediated pathway scores a correlation of $r = 0.65$ ($R^2 = 0.4225$) and contributes 42.25% of variances in academic integrity. Though subsequently weaker than the

direct effect, this maintained a strong and significant association and points toward digital access and artificial intelligence as influential alternative pathways that plagiarism awareness shaped academic integrity.

The total combined effect shows an R^2 of 0.4633, or equivocal to 46.33%. Not surprisingly the total effect being positioned between the two pathways and below entirely isolated direct effect, is potentially supportive of a partial mediation model instead of complete mediation. This suggests that IT does not replace the direct effect entirely but rather works in conjunction with direct effect as one of the several determining factors.

Table 8: Mediating effects of IT on plagiarism practice⁴

<i>Variable Relationship</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>Variance (%)</i>
<i>Direct effect on Academic Integrity</i>	-0.67	0.4489	44.89%
<i>Effect through IT intervention</i>	-0.58*	0.3364	33.64%
<i>Combined effect</i>	-	0.3927**	39.27%

The direct effect shows a very strong negative correlation ($r = -0.67$, $R^2 = 0.4489$) which explained of 44.89% of the variance in academic integrity as shown in Table 8. The IT facilitated path shows lower negative correlation of $r = -0.58$ ($R^2 = 0.3364$) and accounted for of 33.64% of the variance in academic integrity. While it is lower than the direct effect by about 11 percentage points, it is still a strong relationship, providing evidence that availability of online content and AI tools provide alternative avenues for plagiarism practice to impact academic integrity.

Information technology was established to have partial mediation on both plagiarism awareness and practice. Technology rearranges the plagiarism-integrity dynamic by both facilitating plagiarism through AI paraphrasing tools and essay mills, and potentially thwarting it through detection software and monitoring intensification (Newton & Lang, 2016; Weber-Wulff et al., 2023). Lines (2016) explained that technology establishes a double dynamic whereby digital tools both enable new forms of plagiarism and provide enhanced detection, thereby mediating the traditional plagiarism-integrity dynamic through competing mechanisms.

IV. CONCLUSION

The research unequivocally demonstrates that Information Technology serves as a significant partial mediator in the relationship between plagiarism awareness, practice, and academic integrity among postgraduate students at public universities in Kenya. The findings indicated that traditional constructs, or variables such as practices of plagiarism and awareness of plagiarism, are significantly directly related to academic integrity, but mediated mechanisms via Information Technology (IT) have significant independent impact. While the partial mediation provides good explanatory value, it demonstrates the positive relationships between awareness of plagiarism, practices of plagiarism, and academic integrity. It also indicates that technology does not eliminate, but enhances, the traditional routes that document plagiarism behaviour has on scholarly behaviour. Additionally, the gap between awareness and practice illustrated by the descriptive statistics is indicative of the challenge of reconciling knowledge and ethics behaviour within digital rich scholarship environments. Structuring the findings to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, in terms of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control demonstrates

⁴ Source: Field Survey, 2025

the model that underpins this study and demonstrates IT mediates academic integrity throughout different routes of in relation to attitudes and influences academic integrity through routes to. The considerable amount of unexplained variance implies that there are other questions, variables, or factors at play with academic integrity, outside of awareness of practice, practice itself, and the interplay between the two when situated in IT. Future research would need to consider these additional factors in the relation to institutional culture of academic dishonesty, moral cognition of workload, workload, and discipline.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Universities must not engage in an only technology focused approach in their decision to utilize plagiarism detection software and forsake fundamental operating ethical principles, as if technology is a powerful independent influence on student behaviour. A combination of traditional and technology-based interventions will be required in unison, knowing that the availability of digital material and computer assisted tools

has necessarily changed the landscape of academic integrity forever. Institutions will need a well thought out approach that prioritizes technology awareness in the policies and learning programs, using IT to influence behaviours that facilitate and obstruct plagiarism, but continuing to prioritize fundamental operating ethical principles and academic skills development independent of technological change.

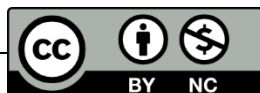
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