http://dx.doi.org/10.18623/rvd.v23.n1.3988

TOWARD A PUBLICATION ETHICS STANDARDS SYSTEM FOR VIETNAMESE SCHOLARLY JOURNALS: A STAKEHOLDER–ARTIFACT INTERACTION FRAMEWORK, MODULAR TAXONOMY, AND VALIDATION PROTOCOL

RUMO A UM SISTEMA DE NORMAS ÉTICAS DE PUBLICAÇÃO PARA REVISTAS ACADÊMICAS VIETNAMITAS: UMA ESTRUTURA DE INTERAÇÃO ENTRE PARTES INTERESSADAS E ARTEFATOS, TAXONOMIA MODULAR E PROTOCOLO DE VALIDAÇÃO

Article received on: 8/29/2025
Article accepted on: 11/28/2025

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

Abstract
Publication ethics has become a practical infrastructure requirement for journals rather than a purely normative aspiration. Yet many scholarly journal ecosystems—particularly those dominated by university- and institute-based titles with lean editorial staffing—face an implementation gap: international guidance is widely available, while locally operational policy architectures are uneven and difficult to maintain under rapid digitalization and AI- assisted writing and reviewing. This paper proposes VPESS (Vietnam Publication Ethics Standards System), a modular standards blueprint designed for Vietnamese scholarly journals but transferable to similar contexts. The study adopts a design-science orientation and develops VPESS through: (i) a stakeholder–artifact interaction model that locates ethical risks at concrete workflow events, (ii) a normative synthesis of internationally used ethics benchmarks and publisher policies, and (iii) an operational "element engineering" step that translates principles into auditable requirements linked to evidence artifacts and escalation pathways. VPESS v1.0 comprises three modules

Resumo
A ética editorial tornou-se um requisito prático de infraestrutura para revistas científicas, em vez de uma aspiração puramente normativa.
No entanto, muitos ecossistemas de revistas acadêmicas — particularmente aqueles dominados por títulos baseados em universidades e institutos com equipes editoriais reduzidas — enfrentam uma lacuna de implementação: orientações internacionais estão amplamente disponíveis, enquanto as arquiteturas de políticas operacionais locais são desiguais e difíceis de manter sob a rápida digitalização e a redação e revisão assistidas por IA. Este artigo propõe o VPESS (Sistema de Padrões de Ética em Publicações do Vietnã), um projeto de padrões modulares projetado para revistas acadêmicas vietnamitas, mas transferível para contextos semelhantes. O estudo adota uma orientação de ciência do design e desenvolve o VPESS por meio de: (i) um modelo de interação entre partes interessadas e artefatos que localiza riscos éticos em eventos concretos do fluxo de trabalho, (ii) uma síntese normativa de referências éticas e políticas de editoras utilizadas internacionalmente e (iii)

(Authors, Editors, Reviewers), 27 themes, and 81 implementable elements, each tagged as core or advanced to support capacity-sensitive adoption. Beyond the taxonomy, we contribute an evaluation layer— two lightweight indices for policy coverage and workflow readiness—and a Delphi-based validation protocol for consensus calibration and iterative updating. The framework is positioned as a versioned community resource that can remain extensible as norms evolve (e.g., around AI tools and bilingual/translation publication practices), while improving interoperability with global publishing expectations.

Keywords: Publication Ethics. Journal Policy. Research Integrity. Scientometrics. Publishing Studies. AI Governance.

uma etapa operacional de "engenharia de elementos" que traduz princípios em requisitos auditáveis vinculados a artefatos de evidência e caminhos de escalonamento. O VPESS v1.0 compreende três módulos (Autores, Editores, Revisores), 27 temas e 81 elementos implementáveis, cada um marcado como básico ou avançado para apoiar a adoção sensível à capacidade. Além da taxonomia, contribuímos com uma camada de avaliação — dois índices leves para cobertura de políticas e prontidão do fluxo de trabalho — e um protocolo de validação baseado em Delphi para calibração de consenso e atualização iterativa. A estrutura está posicionada como um recurso comunitário versionado que pode permanecer extensível à medida que as normas evoluem (por exemplo, em torno de ferramentas de IA e práticas de publicação bilíngues/tradução), ao mesmo tempo em que melhora a interoperabilidade com as expectativas globais de publicação.

Palavras-chave: *Ética de Publicação. Política de Revista. Integridade da Pesquisa. Cientometria. Estudos de Publicação. Governança de IA.*

1 INTRODUCTION

The credibility of the scholarly record rests on a fragile set of social and technical arrangements: authorship norms, disclosure practices, editorial independence, peer review, and transparent post-publication correction. When these arrangements work, journals serve as both gatekeepers and custodians of the record. When they fail, the consequences propagate far beyond any single article, affecting downstream meta-analyses, policy decisions, and public trust. Over the last two decades, the scale and speed of scholarly communication have expanded alongside increasingly heterogeneous publishing business models. This growth has improved access and visibility in many domains, but it has also amplified long-standing vulnerabilities—including questionable research practices, conflicts of interest, authorship disputes, and weaknesses in editorial oversight—that are now documented in large empirical literatures on research integrity and publication ethics (Fanelli, 2009; Bekelman et al., 2003; Flanagin et al., 1998).

A major signal of these vulnerabilities is the rising visibility of retractions and re- lated corrective actions. Systematic evidence suggests that misconduct accounts

for a substantial fraction of retractions, while honest error explains a smaller share (Fang et al., 2012). Retractions, in principle, operationalize the norm of self-correction; in practice, their effectiveness depends on whether notices communicate reasons, responsibility, and procedural context clearly enough for readers and indexers to interpret them appropriately. Yet multiple studies show that retraction notices often omit critical information, thereby weakening the corrective function they are supposed to perform and creating ambiguity about accountability (Vuong, 2020; Xu et al., 2023). Such opacity is not merely a tech- nical problem of metadata completeness: it shapes reputational consequences, enables misinformation to persist through inadvertent citation, and complicates institutional learning about how editorial systems can prevent recurrence. At a policy level, the need for coherent retraction guidance has motivated sustained efforts by publication-ethics organizations (Wager, 2012), but the translation of high-level guidance into consistent journal workflows remains uneven across fields and regions.

These concerns intersect with the well-known limitations of traditional peer review. Peer review remains central to journal legitimacy, yet it is widely characterized as variable in reliability and susceptible to biases, incentives, and resource constraints (Smith, 2006; Lee et al., 2013). Recent years have therefore seen growing experimentation with alternative models and process innovations—including open peer review configurations, reviewer recognition systems, and platform-mediated review—that seek to strengthen transparency and accountability (Ross-Hellauer, 2017; Tennant et al., 2017). However, innovation in review mechanisms also increases the need for explicit ethical standards: more process diversity implies more potential failure modes (e.g., identity exposure risks in open review, conflicts in platform governance, or manipulation of reviewer identities). In other words, the modernization of editorial workflows does not reduce the need for publication ethics standards; it typically intensifies it by widening the design space of editorial practices.

Open access publishing illustrates the same tension between growth and governance. Large-scale analyses of journal publishing document rapid expansion in open access venues (Laakso et al., 2011), which has improved discoverability and reduced barriers to readership. At the same time, the literature on predatory publishing demonstrates how low-integrity actors can exploit author-facing fee models, weak screening, and evaluation pressures (Shen and Björk, 2015; Shamseer et al., 2017).

Importantly, even defining "predatory journals" has required consensus-oriented work because the phenomenon includes a spectrum of deceptive and substandard practices rather than a single, easily operationalized criterion (Cukier et al., 2020). For journal systems in emerging research environments, this creates a dual risk: reputable local journals may be penalized by inconsistent standards or limited capacity, while opportunistic venues may gain legitimacy through superficial compliance signals. A practical ethics standards system must therefore be both principled and implementable, supporting journals in building capacity while enabling stakeholders to identify and respond to clear breaches.

A parallel governance challenge arises from the broader open science movement. Calls for transparency in methods, data, and reporting have been motivated by evidence that openness improves reproducibility, reuse, and cumulative knowledge building (Piwowar and Vision, 2013; Nosek et al., 2015; Munafò et al., 2017). For journals, these norms translate into concrete policy decisions: what to require at submission (data availability statements, code sharing, preregistration disclosures), what to verify during review, and how to handle exceptions (privacy, proprietary data, community harm). Ethics standards that stop at abstract principles are not sufficient; editors need workflow-level criteria that can be operationalized in editorial management systems, audited, and iteratively improved.

More recently, generative artificial intelligence tools have added a new layer of ambiguity to authorship and accountability. Editorial policies increasingly emphasize that AI tools cannot satisfy authorship criteria and that their use should be disclosed transparently when they contribute to manuscript preparation or analysis (Flanagin et al., 2023). This shift illustrates a broader point: publication ethics is not a static checklist but a living governance system that must adapt to new capabilities, new incentives, and new forms of misconduct. Standards systems must therefore be designed for revision, supported by monitoring signals, and anchored in community consensus rather than one-time policy statements.

These global dynamics matter acutely for Vietnam. Bibliometric analyses show substantial growth in Vietnam's internationally visible research output over recent decades, with distinctive patterns of collaboration and field distribution (Manh, 2015; Pham-Duc et al., 2022; Vuong et al., 2018). In parallel, assessments of Vietnamese journals against regional and international indexing requirements

highlight persistent gaps in editorial policies, publishing workflows, and publication ethics procedures (Tran et al., 2019). The implication is not that Vietnam lacks capable editors or strong disciplinary communities; rather, the journal ecosystem is heterogeneous, with varying institutional support, language practices, and levels of infrastructural maturity. Under such conditions, publication ethics guidance that assumes high-resourced editorial offices and standardized platform tooling can be difficult to implement consistently. Conversely, purely local or ad hoc norms can struggle to align with international expectations for transparency, due process, and accountability. This creates a policy-design problem: how to build a standards system that both reflects international best practices and realistically supports Vietnamese journals as they professionalize and internationalize.

Prior work in other national contexts provides a useful methodological precedent. For example, a recent effort to systematize publication-ethics standards for scientific journals in China proposed a modular ethics framework derived from structured document analysis and expert consultation, offering an explicit mapping from ethical principles to workflow components (Xie et al., 2024). Such work demonstrates that standards construction is itself a research process: it requires defining the unit of analysis (ethical norms), specifying actors and interactions, translating norms into procedures, and validating feasibility with stakeholders. However, direct transplantation of any national framework is unlikely to be optimal because journal governance is embedded in local institutional arrangements, incentives, and regulatory environments. Vietnam therefore needs its own standards architecture—not a simple replication—that addresses local constraints (capacity, language diversity, platform variation) while remaining interoperable with international indexing and integrity norms.

This study responds to that need by developing a publication-ethics standards system tailored to Vietnamese scientific journals. Methodologically, we adopt a design-science stance in which the primary contribution is an artifact—a structured standards architecture and associated operational instruments—that is iteratively built and evaluated (Hevner et al., 2004a; Peffers et al., 2007). To improve legitimacy and feasibility, the standards are refined through consensus-oriented expert elicitation following established Delphi principles (Humphrey-Murto et al., 2020). Substantively,

the study makes three contributions. First, it synthesizes a coherent, actor- and lifecycle-oriented taxonomy of publication-ethics

requirements that can be used to audit journal policies and workflows. Second, it proposes implementation-grade components (e.g., policy templates, checklists, and procedural triggers) designed to fit the resource realities of Vietnamese editorial offices while retaining due-process safeguards. Third, it identifies a roadmap for incremental adoption, enabling journals at different maturity levels to prioritize high-impact ethics controls (authorship and disclosure, peer review integrity, corrections and retractions, and transparency practices) and to document progress in ways that are legible to indexers, institutions, and authors.

1.1 Research questions and contributions

This paper addresses three research questions:

RQ1: How can publication ethics requirements be structured for Vietnamese journals to balance international interoperability and local feasibility?

RQ2: How can normative ethics principles be translated into workflow-linked, auditable elements that clarify responsibilities across authors, editors, and reviewers?

RQ3: What validation and updating mechanisms can keep a standards system current under digitalization and AI-mediated publishing practices?

We contribute:

C1: a stakeholder–artifact interaction model tailored to journal workflows;

C2: VPESS v1.0, a modular taxonomy with 27 themes and 81 implementable elements (core vs. advanced);

C3: two lightweight indices to assess policy coverage and workflow readiness;

C4: a Delphi protocol for consensus calibration and versioned updating.

2 CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION: STAKEHOLDER–ARTIFACT INTERACTIONS

The premise of VPESS is that most publication ethics failures are not random; they occur at identifiable interaction points between actors and the manuscript (or its associated objects: data, code, peer review reports, editorial decisions). The Chinese

standards- system study formalizes this insight by treating stakeholder–manuscript interactions as both the origin of ethical problems and a driver for the structure of standards (Xie et al., 2024). Its English abstract explicitly describes a workflow-informed approach: modules are clarified through subject–object relationships and interactions, then theme elements are extracted from domestic and international benchmarks, and finally expert consultation is used for finalization (Xie et al., 2024). VPESS adopts the same underlying logic but extends it in two ways.

First, we treat the manuscript as a *bundle of artifacts* rather than a single object: text, figures, underlying data, code, declarations, reviewer reports, decision letters, and the version-of-record. Second, we explicitly map ethical requirements to *control points* (screening, reviewer invitation, revision, acceptance, post-publication correction) and *evidence artifacts* (forms, logs, metadata fields). This move is intended to reduce the common "policy–practice gap" in which journals have ethics statements that cannot be operationalized.

Figure 1

Stakeholder–artifact interactions in journal publishing. VPESS attaches standards to workflow control points and evidence artifacts.

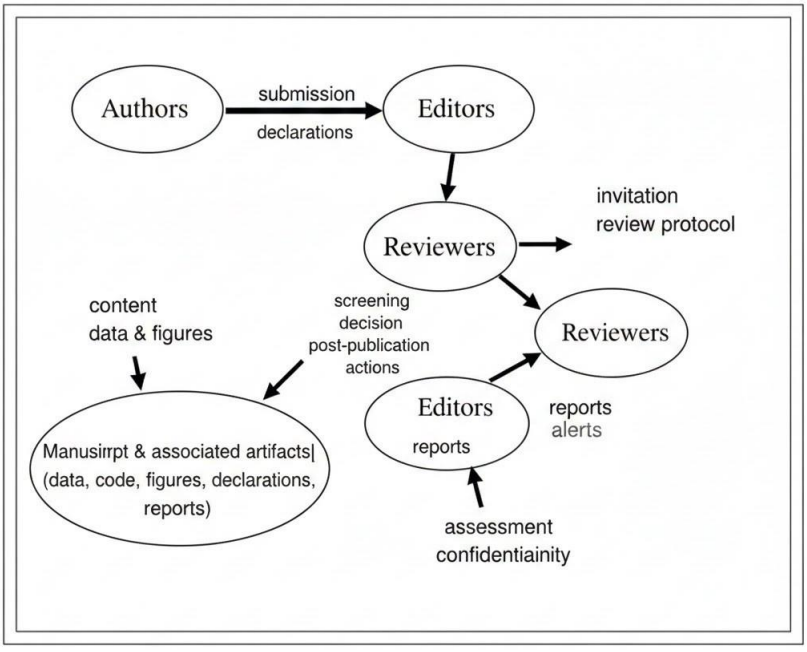
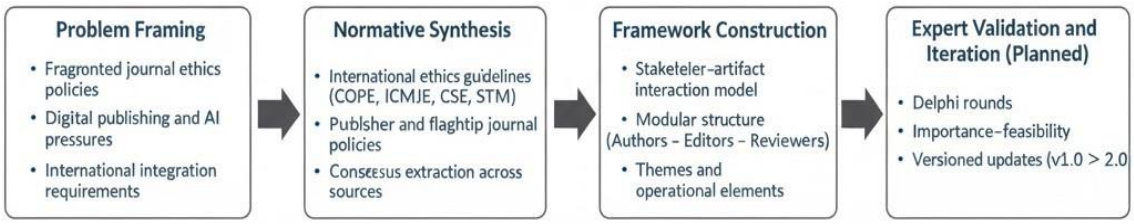


Figure 2

Methodological pipeline for constructing VPESS.



3 METHOD: DESIGN-SCIENCE DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION PLAN

VPESS is developed as a design artifact in the sense of design-science research (Hevner et al., 2004b). The goal is not merely to summarize existing ethics guidance but to create an implementable policy architecture that journals can instantiate, audit, and update. Our method comprises four stages.

3.1 Stage 1: workflow and risk mapping

We model journal publishing as a set of workflow events: (i) manuscript creation and submission, (ii) initial screening and triage, (iii) peer review and revision, (iv) editorial decision and acceptance, (v) production and publication, and (vi) post-publication stewardship. Ethical failure modes are mapped to these events, with responsibility assigned to actors (authors/editors/reviewers) and with explicit attention to the artifacts involved (e.g., underlying data, declarations, review reports). This modeling choice is aligned with the interaction-based logic used in national standards construction (Xie et al., 2024) while shifting emphasis toward auditable implementation.

3.2 Stage 2: benchmark corpus and normative synthesis

We treat international ethics guidance as a benchmark corpus. A representative benchmark set used in standards construction includes professional bodies (e.g., COPE, CSE, ICMJE, WAME, STM) and policy documents from major publishers and flagship journals (Xie et al., 2024); the Chinese study provides a compact empirical illustration of such a benchmark set in its sample table (Xie et al., 2024). In

VPESS, these sources are used to extract recurring themes (e.g., authorship criteria, conflicts of interest, cor- rection/retraction) and to identify emerging concerns (e.g., AI tool use, peer review transparency). We explicitly acknowledge that some benchmark instruments evolve (e.g., COPE's transition from Core Practices to a new Code of Conduct) (Committee on Pub- lication Ethics (COPE), 2025a,b) and therefore treat benchmarks as versioned inputs rather than static rules.

3.3 Stage 3: element engineering for operationality

A frequent failure of ethics policies is excessive abstraction. VPESS therefore expresses each standards element in a consistent operational grammar:

Element = ⟨Actor, Action/Constraint, Evidence, Escalation⟩.

For example, a policy-level principle "disclose conflicts of interest" is rewritten as: *Authors must submit a structured COI declaration; the journal must store it as metadata; omissions trigger a correction protocol; material nondisclosure triggers investigation.* This format- ting is designed to facilitate direct implementation in submission systems and editorial checklists.

3.4 Stage 4: Delphi validation and versioned updating

Because a standards system must be feasible in context, we propose Delphi validation to calibrate importance and feasibility of each element (Humphrey-Murto et al., 2020). Consistent with Delphi practice, panelists would rate each element on (i) importance and (ii) feasibility, with controlled feedback and at least two rounds. The outcome is not simply a "final list" but a tiered system: core elements should be implementable by most journals; advanced elements are recommended where resources permit.

4 RESULTS: VPESS V1.0 TAXONOMY AND ADOPTION TOOLS

4.1 VPESS architecture

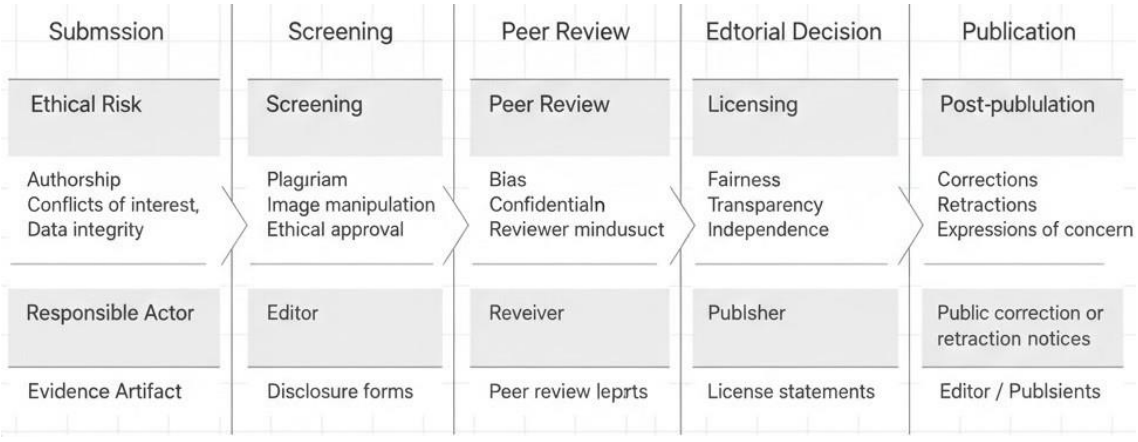
VPESS v1.0 is structured into three modules corresponding to the primary publishing actors, reflecting the role-based partitioning commonly adopted in standards systems (Xie et al., 2024):

- **Module A (Authors):** responsibilities for research reporting, provenance, disclosures, and post-publication stewardship.
- **Module E (Editors):** governance of peer review, screening, decision-making, miscon- duct handling, and transparency.
- **Module R (Reviewers):** competence, impartiality, confidentiality, review quality, and responsible tool use.

Across modules, VPESS specifies 27 themes and 81 elements. The full list is provided in Appendix Appendix A.

Figure 3

Operationalization of ethics principles into workflow controls.



4.2 Core vs. advanced elements

To address uneven editorial capacity, VPESS tags each element as either:

- **Core:** minimum requirements for credible ethics governance (e.g., authorship criteria, plagiarism screening, COI disclosure, correction/retraction pathways).

- **Advanced:** enhancements requiring additional tooling or staffing (e.g., structured image forensics workflow, audit trails for AI-assisted editorial actions, granular data access governance).

This tiering is consistent with the general claim that standards systems strengthen self- discipline and improve international interoperability only when implementation is realistic (Xie et al., 2024).

4.3 Evaluation layer: two lightweight indices

A standards system is more useful when journals can measure progress without expensive audits. VPESS therefore includes two simple indices.

Ethics Policy Coverage Index (EPCI).. Let C be the set of core VPESS elements. For a journal j, define $p_j(e) = 1$ if element $e \in C$ is explicitly addressed in publicly available journal policies (website, author guidelines, reviewer instructions, editorial policies), and 0 otherwise. Then:

$$\mathrm{EPCI}_j = \frac{1}{|C|} \sum_{e \in C} p_j(e). \quad (1)$$

Workflow Readiness Index (WRI).. Let W be the set of core elements that require workflow evidence (forms, logs, templates, or platform fields). Define $w_j(e) = 1$ if the journal can produce the evidence artifact for e, 0 otherwise:

$$\mathrm{WRI}_j = \frac{1}{|W|} \sum_{e \in W} w_j(e). \quad (2)$$

The two indices separate *policy presence* from *implementation readiness*—a distinction that is often blurred when journals self-report ethics compliance.

4.4 Vietnam-relevant extensions

VPESS includes elements that are particularly salient in the Vietnamese context:

Bilingual publication and translation rights.. Many Vietnamese journals publish in Viet- namese, English, or both, and some accept translated versions of previously disseminated research. VPESS treats translation and bilingual publication as legitimate when prove- nance and rights are explicit, requiring authors to disclose prior-language publication and to obtain permission where necessary.

Third-party services and vendor mediation.. Beyond conventional language editing, com- mercial submission services can introduce authorship and integrity risks. VPESS requires disclosure of third-party involvement and sets boundaries for editors regarding recommen- dations or preferred vendors.

AI-assisted writing and reviewing.. The Chinese standards study highlights the emerg- ing ethical questions raised by generative AI, including whether it can be listed as an author and how authors, editors, and reviewers should use it responsibly (Xie et al., 2024). VPESS operationalizes these issues as workflow elements: disclosure requirements, confidentiality constraints (e.g., not uploading manuscript content to non-approved tools), and accountability principles in which responsibility remains with human authors and reviewers.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 From ethics statements to governance capacity

A recurrent pattern in journal ethics is the "thin policy" problem: a short list of prohibitions (no plagiarism, no duplicate submission) without procedural commitments and evidence requirements. VPESS addresses this by treating publication ethics as a governance capacity. The actor–action–evidence–escalation grammar is intended to support routine implementation under constraints, rather than relying on ad hoc judgment during crises.

This approach aligns with the rationale articulated in national standards construction: a comprehensive standards system is expected to enhance self-discipline

of authors, editors, and reviewers and to improve integration with global academic publishing systems (Xie et al., 2024). The contribution of VPESS is to operationalize this expectation via auditability and indices, enabling journals to monitor whether policy text translates into workflow practice.

5.2 International interoperability without wholesale copying

Vietnamese journals seeking international visibility often face pressure to adopt policies from large publishers. Wholesale copying, however, can create a new form of noncompliance: policies exist on paper but are not implemented. VPESS instead advocates *interoperability by design*: core elements are derived from widely used benchmark norms (COPE, CSE, ICMJE, WAME, STM and major publishers) (Xie et al., 2024), but each element is engineered for evidence and escalation within realistic journal operations.

The recent evolution of COPE governance illustrates why versioned design matters. COPE's Core Practices were retired in 2024 and are being replaced by a new Code of Conduct for members in 2025 (Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), 2025a,b). Journals anchored to a single static template may fail to update; a versioned standards system can incorporate such changes with minimal disruption.

5.3 Dynamic extensibility under digitalization and AI

Standards systems risk obsolescence if they cannot absorb new ethical issues. The Chinese study emphasizes dynamic extensibility and specifically points to big data and generative AI as drivers of new ethical debates (Xie et al., 2024). VPESS treats this not as a peripheral add-on but as a design constraint: AI-related elements are embedded across modules (authors, editors, reviewers), and update mechanisms are formalized via a Delphi protocol.

Practically, VPESS recommends that Vietnamese journals define (i) what must be dis- closed about AI assistance, (ii) what is prohibited (e.g., uploading confidential manuscripts to unapproved tools), and (iii) how accountability is assigned. These requirements are consistent with the direction of recent guideline updates in major medical journal gov- ernance systems, including explicit updates in ICMJE

recommendations (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), 2025).

5.4 Limitations and research agenda

This paper offers VPESS v1.0 as a design artifact rather than a fully validated national standard. The next research steps are therefore empirical:

1. **Delphi calibration:** establish consensus on which elements are core vs. advanced for different journal types in Vietnam.
2. **Pilot audits:** apply EPCI and WRI to a stratified sample of Vietnamese journals to identify common gaps and capacity constraints.
3. **Longitudinal updating:** track the evolution of benchmark guidance (e.g., COPE governance updates) and evaluate how quickly journals can incorporate changes under VPESS versioning.

6 CONCLUSION

This study set out to address a practical but under-specified governance challenge in scholarly communication: how to translate widely endorsed publication-ethics principles into a coherent, implementable, and locally appropriate standards system for Vietnamese scientific journals. The central argument running through the paper is that ethics in publishing functions as infrastructure. It is not merely a set of moral aspirations but a bundle of operational commitments that must be embedded into editorial workflows, supported by documentation, and sustained through consistent decision-making. The pressure points documented in the international literature—misconduct-linked retractions (Fang et al., 2012), incomplete corrective metadata (Vuong, 2020; Xu et al., 2023), variability and bias in peer review (Smith, 2006; Lee et al., 2013), and the emergence of predatory business practices (Shen and Björk, 2015; Shamseer et al., 2017)—are best interpreted as system-level failures in governance design rather than isolated ethical lapses. From this perspective, strengthening publication ethics requires building standards that connect principles to procedures, clarify responsibilities across actors, and provide journals with realistic pathways to compliance and continuous improvement.

The main contribution of the work is the standards artifact itself: a structured architecture that organizes publication-ethics requirements in a way that Vietnamese journals can adopt, audit, and revise. In practical terms, the proposed system is intended to help editors move beyond generic policy statements toward explicit process commitments:

how authorship and contribution disputes are handled, how conflicts of interest are disclosed and managed, how peer review integrity is protected, and how corrections and retractions are executed with transparency and due process. The design also reflects the contemporary shift toward openness in research and reporting (Piwowar and Vision, 2013; Nosek et al., 2015; Munafò et al., 2017), recognizing that transparency requirements increasingly sit at the intersection of ethics and quality assurance. Moreover, the inclusion of guidance responsive to AI-assisted writing and related accountability questions (Flanagin et al., 2023) underscores that publication-ethics standards must be adaptive: the relevant risk landscape changes as tools, incentives, and publication models evolve.

A second contribution concerns localization and capacity building. Bibliometric evidence indicates that Vietnam's research community has expanded its international presence (Manh, 2015; Pham-Duc et al., 2022; Vuong et al., 2018), while journal-level assessments highlight persistent gaps in meeting indexing-related criteria, including publication ethics requirements (Tran et al., 2019). Against that background, the standards system proposed here is designed to support incremental implementation rather than demanding immediate full compliance with the most resource-intensive practices. This matters because uneven resourcing is a structural feature of many journal ecosystems: some editorial offices operate with professional staff and stable platforms, while others rely heavily on volunteer labor and fragmented tooling. A standards system that assumes uniform capacity risks becoming symbolic rather than actionable. By contrast, a staged roadmap enables journals to prioritize controls that yield the largest integrity benefits early (e.g., clear authorship policies, disclosure forms, explicit retraction procedures, reviewer identity safeguards), while planning for more advanced measures as infrastructure matures (e.g., deeper transparency checks, systematic audit trails, or integration of persistent identifiers). In this way, the standards system is not only a compliance instrument but also a developmental tool.

Methodologically, the study contributes to publishing-studies and scientometrics re- search by demonstrating a replicable approach to standards construction as design science (Hevner et al., 2004a; Peffers et al., 2007). The combination of structured synthesis from the international literature (including COPE-oriented developments (Wager, 2012) and predatory-publishing consensus work (Cukier et al., 2020)) with Delphi-based expert validation (Humphrey-Murto et al., 2020) provides a template for other national or disci- plinary communities seeking to develop their own ethics architectures. The comparative reference point offered by recent national standardization work in China (Xie et al., 2024) further illustrates that ethics standards can be analyzed and engineered as policy systems, allowing researchers to ask more precise questions about coverage, enforceability, and institutional fit.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, any standards system is sensitive to the composition of its expert base; even when consensus methods are used, priorities can differ by discipline, publisher type, and journal maturity. Second, the rapid evolution of the scholarly communication environment—particularly with respect to AI tools (Flanagin et al., 2023) and changing business models—means that standards require scheduled review cycles and mechanisms for updating operational guidance without destabilizing editorial practice. Third, while standards can specify procedures, consistent implementation depends on training, resourcing, and governance support. Future work should therefore move beyond framework development toward evaluation in the field: pilot deployments across journals of different sizes and disciplines; measurement of policy completeness and adherence; analysis of editorial decision consistency; and assessment of how standards

adoption affects author experience, review quality, and post-publication correction latency. Looking forward, three directions appear especially consequential. The first is in- tegration with publishing infrastructure, including persistent identifiers and metadata practices that strengthen accountability across the research lifecycle (Haak et al., 2012). The second is the development of lightweight audit instruments that enable journals and oversight bodies to monitor ethics compliance without imposing unrealistic administrative burdens. The third is comparative regional research: Vietnam’s experience can be situated alongside other Southeast Asian journal ecosystems to identify common bottlenecks and transferable

solutions. Taken together, these steps would help ensure that publication ethics is not treated as a static appendix to journal policies, but as an evolving governance capacity that supports trust in Vietnamese scholarship and its global circulation.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

VPESS v1.0: Themes and operational elements

Code	Theme	Operational element	Tier
A1.1	Reporting integrity	Provide an accurate, non-misleading account of methods and findings; avoid fabrication or falsification.	Core
A1.2	Reporting integrity	Retain primary research records (data, lab notes, images) and provide them upon justified request within ethical/legal limits.	Core
A1.3	Reporting integrity	State reproducibility constraints (e.g., restricted data) and document key analytic steps sufficiently for verification.	Adv
A2.1	Originality	Avoid plagiarism and inappropriate text recycling; ensure quotations and paraphrases are properly attributed.	Core
A2.2	Originality	Do not submit the same manuscript to multiple journals simultaneously; follow transparent withdrawal rules.	Core
A2.3	Originality	Disclose overlapping manuscripts, prior reports, or segmented publications; provide related documents when requested.	Core
A3.1	Authorship	Meet authorship criteria; ensure all listed authors approve submission and are accountable for their contributions.	Core
A3.2	Authorship	Provide a contributorship statement (e.g., CRediT-style) and identify the corresponding author's responsibilities.	Adv
A3.3	Authorship	Report affiliations accurately and explain multi-affiliation cases when relevant to the work's provenance.	Core
A3.4	Authorship	Request authorship/order changes only via a documented process with written agreement from all authors.	Core
A4.1	Data and code	Provide a data availability statement specifying repository/location, access conditions, and licensing.	Core
A4.2	Data and code	Cite datasets (and code where applicable) using persistent identifiers when available.	Adv
A4.3	Data and code	Disclose restrictions (privacy, IP, security) and provide controlled-access routes when open sharing is not possible.	Core
A4.4	Data and code	Preserve analysis code or computational workflows sufficiently to support verification and error correction.	Adv
A5.1	Research ethics	Document ethics approvals (IRB/REC) for human research where required; provide approval identifiers and oversight body.	Core
A5.2	Research ethics	For human data/images, document consent and privacy protections; justify any waivers where applicable.	Core
A5.3	Research ethics	For animal research, state welfare compliance and oversight; justify species/model choice and endpoints.	Core
A5.4	Research ethics	Identify dual-use or safety-sensitive risks and describe mitigation steps consistent with journal scope.	Adv
A6.1	Figure integrity	Apply image adjustments only within acceptable limits; never use manipulations that alter scientific meaning.	Core
A6.2	Figure integrity	Retain original, unprocessed image files and document processing steps if figures are adjusted.	Core
A6.3	Figure integrity	Disclose any composite images or representative selections, and describe selection criteria.	Adv
A7.1	Funding and provenance	Disclose all funding sources and grant identifiers; describe funder roles in study design, analysis, and reporting.	Core

Code	Theme	Operational element	Tier
A7.2	Funding and provenance	Acknowledge non-author contributions (technical support, translation, editing) with permission and transparency.	Core
A7.3	Funding and provenance	Identify prior dissemination contexts (thesis chapters, reports) when they affect novelty or rights.	Adv
A8.1	Conflicts of interest	Submit structured COI declarations covering financial and non-financial interests relevant to the manuscript.	Core
A8.2	Conflicts of interest	Disclose relationships that could bias interpretation (institutional, professional, personal) and describe mitigation.	Core
A8.3	Conflicts of interest	Disclose third-party services (editing, submission management, data analysis) and specify scope of involvement.	Core
A8.4	Conflicts of interest	Disclose AI tool use in writing, translation, or figure generation; ensure human accountability for accuracy and originality.	Core
A9.1	Preprints and publicity	Declare any preprint posting and provide links/identifiers; ensure consistent version linking when publishing.	Core
A9.2	Preprints and publicity	Describe substantial changes between preprint and accepted version; follow journal rules on embargo/media.	Adv
A9.3	Preprints and publicity	Avoid overstating unreviewed findings in media communication; correct public claims if the record changes.	Adv
A10.1	Peer review conduct	Suggest reviewers responsibly; disclose relationships; request exclusions with justification when conflicts exist.	Core
A10.2	Peer review conduct	Respond to reviews respectfully and with evidence; provide point-by-point responses and tracked revisions when possible.	Core
A10.3	Peer review conduct	Follow confidentiality rules aligned to the journal's peer review model (blind, open, or hybrid).	Core
A11.1	Rights and licensing	Obtain permission to reuse copyrighted figures/tables and provide complete source attribution.	Core
A11.2	Rights and licensing	Comply with journal licensing/copyright transfer terms and state the chosen license for open access publishing.	Core
A11.3	Rights and licensing	For translations or bilingual republication, disclose the prior-language version and obtain necessary permissions.	Core
A11.4	Rights and licensing	Avoid misleading "duplicate publication" patterns by clearly labeling translations, versions, and provenance.	Adv
A12.1	Post-publication	Notify the journal promptly upon discovering significant errors or integrity issues; cooperate with corrections.	Core
A12.2	Post-publication	Support investigation processes by providing data, documents, and author communications as required.	Core
A12.3	Post-publication	Accept proportional editorial actions (correction, expression of concern, retraction) aligned with evidence and due process.	Core
A12.4	Post-publication	Refrain from retaliatory behavior against whistleblowers, reviewers, or editors; use formal appeal channels.	Adv

Module E — Editors

Code	Theme	Operational element	Tier
E1.1	Independence	Ensure editorial decisions are insulated from commercial, institutional, or political pressures.	Core
E1.2	Independence	Manage editor COIs through disclosure, recusal, and documented reassignment of handling editors.	Core
E1.3	Independence	Define boundaries for third-party editorial services; prohibit coercive vendor referral and disclose partnerships.	Core
E2.1	Fairness	Apply consistent criteria irrespective of authors' affiliation, geography, language, or seniority.	Core

Code	Theme	Operational element	Tier
E2.2	Fairness	Maintain respectful communication and protect parties from harassment; implement an appeal mechanism.	Core
E2.3	Fairness	Monitor for bias in desk decisions and review outcomes; implement corrective actions where patterns emerge.	Adv
E3.1	Peer review governance	Publish the peer review model and rules (blind/open), including anonymity expectations and data confidentiality.	Core
E3.2	Peer review governance	Select reviewers based on competence and COI checks; guard against fake reviewer identities and review rings.	Core
E3.3	Peer review governance	Document key decision rationales and maintain an auditable decision trail (within confidentiality constraints).	Adv
E4.1	Confidentiality	Protect manuscript content and personal data; limit access by role and implement secure storage practices.	Core
E4.2	Confidentiality	Protect reviewer identity when promised; handle open review disclosures consistently with journal policy.	Core
E4.3	Confidentiality	Define acceptable AI/tool usage by editors to prevent leakage of confidential manuscript content.	Core
E5.1	Integrity screening	Implement plagiarism/overlap screening and define thresholds and human review procedures for flags.	Core
E5.2	Integrity screening	Check mandatory declarations (COI, funding, ethics approvals, data availability) prior to review or acceptance.	Core
E5.3	Integrity screening	Maintain proportionate image/data checks (including targeted checks for high-risk submissions).	Adv
E6.1	Misconduct response	Operate a documented triage workflow for allegations (receipt, evidence capture, author response, decision).	Core
E6.2	Misconduct response	Ensure due process: proportional actions, timelines, and separation of investigative and decision roles where feasible.	Core
E6.3	Misconduct response	Maintain correction/retraction policies and templates; link notices to the version of record and metadata.	Core
E6.4	Misconduct response	Coordinate with institutions/funders when appropriate; preserve confidentiality and legal constraints.	Adv
E7.1	Transparency	Publish ethics policies in a stable, accessible location; include dates and version history.	Core
E7.2	Transparency	Report journal ownership, fees, and peer review process clearly, aligned with transparency principles.	Core
E7.3	Transparency	Maintain post-publication stewardship procedures to protect the integrity of the record over time.	Adv
E8.1	Timeliness	Track and publish typical processing timelines; intervene when delays threaten fairness or integrity.	Core
E8.2	Timeliness	Respond promptly to integrity concerns post-publication; avoid open-ended delays in case handling.	Core
E9.1	Tools and vendors	Vet and document integrity tools and vendors; define responsibility when tools generate false positives/negatives.	Adv
E9.2	Tools and vendors	Define limits for AI-assisted editorial tasks (summarization, language checks) and require human verification.	Core
E9.3	Tools and vendors	Maintain minimal audit logs for key editorial actions (screening results, invitations, decisions).	Adv

Module R — Reviewers

Code	Theme	Operational element	Tier
R1.1	Competence	Accept reviews only within expertise; disclose limitations and decline when inadequate to judge the work.	Core

Code	Theme	Operational element	Tier
R1.2	Competence	Respond to invitations promptly and deliver reviews within agreed timelines or renegotiate early.	Core
R2.1	Impartiality	Disclose COIs and recuse when objectivity is compromised; avoid biases unrelated to scientific merit.	Core
R2.2	Impartiality	Base recommendations on evidence and journal scope; avoid hostile, discriminatory, or personal language.	Core
R3.1	Confidentiality	Treat the manuscript and review process as confidential unless the journal's model explicitly permits disclosure.	Core
R3.2	Confidentiality	Do not use manuscript content for personal advantage; do not share with others without editor permission.	Core
R4.1	Review quality	Provide specific, actionable feedback distinguishing major validity issues from presentation improvements.	Core
R4.2	Review quality	Flag missing declarations (ethics approval, COI, data availability) and methodological red flags to editors.	Adv
R5.1	Integrity alerting	Alert editors to suspected misconduct (plagiarism, data anomalies, manipulated images, review manipulation).	Core
R5.2	Citation ethics	Avoid coercive citation; recommend citations only when materially improving context, rigor, or attribution.	Core
R6.1	Digital tools & AI	Follow journal rules on AI tools; do not upload confidential manuscripts to non-approved systems.	Core
R6.2	Digital tools & AI	Disclose material AI assistance in the review (if allowed) and verify claims to avoid AI-generated errors.	Adv

Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

How to cite this article (APA)

Phu, N. D., Dat, N. D. T., Dat, M. T., & Huy, N. N. (2026). TOWARD A PUBLICATION ETHICS STANDARDS SYSTEM FOR VIETNAMESE SCHOLARLY JOURNALS: A STAKEHOLDER–ARTIFACT INTERACTION FRAMEWORK, MODULAR TAXONOMY, AND VALIDATION PROTOCOL. *Veredas Do Direito*, 23(1), e233988. https://doi.org/10.18623/rvd.v23.n1.3988