# Strengthening Copyright Protection Through Ethical Design Practices in the Creative Industry

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the study:** This study examines the role of design ethics as a preventive mechanism to reduce copyright infringement in creative media industries, while mapping common infringement patterns and relevant mitigation strategies in the digital transformation era.

**Materials and methods:** Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, this study conducted a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed publications from 2021-2025, supplemented by conceptual-normative analysis of the relationship between professional ethics, platform governance, and content production behavior. Data sources included academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science), institutional reports (UNESCO, WIPO), and legal studies on intellectual property rights.

**Results:** Findings indicate that design ethics operates at three interconnected levels: (1) individual level—encompassing creative integrity, licensing literacy, and attribution practices; (2) organizational level—comprising asset-use standard operating procedures, copyright audits, and compliance culture; and (3) ecosystem level—involving ethics education, platform transparency, and policies protecting creators. The study proposes an "Ethics-Compliance-Rights" framework that integrates design ethics principles with moral and economic rights compliance and content-production governance.

**Conclusions:** Copyright infringement in creative media industries stems not only from legal ignorance but also from rapid production pressures, trend culture, misconceptions about free assets, and unclear platform governance. Effective prevention requires operationalizing design ethics through standard operating procedures, licensing documentation, regular training, visual plagiarism evaluation frameworks, and platform transparency. The proposed framework provides a comprehensive approach to reducing infringement risks while sustaining originality and quality in creative work.

**Keywords**
design ethics, copyright, creative media industry, visual plagiarism, platform governance, licensing.

## INTRODUCTION

The creative media industry is currently experiencing a phase of "high-velocity creation," where visual content is produced daily for social media, digital campaigns, e-commerce, online media, short videos, and trend-driven activations. In this context, design transcends aesthetic output to become a communications infrastructure that drives attention, reputation, and economic value. The cultural and creative sectors contribute significantly to the global economy and employment, yet creators face increasing vulnerabilities, particularly regarding protection and governance in the digital environment (Re|shaping Policies for Creativity: Addressing Culture as a Global Public Good, 2022).

Digital transformation accelerates both the production and circulation of visual works across creative media industries, ranging from social media content and digital advertising to editorial design and template-based visual assets. However, this acceleration amplifies copyright infringement risks through several mechanisms: "take, modify, repost" practices; reposting without attribution; commercialization of allegedly "free" graphic assets; and increasingly blurred boundaries between inspiration, reference, and visual plagiarism (Dobrick et al., 2017; Šarčević et al., 2024).

*Critical Examination of Existing Literature*

Problems arise when production speed is not balanced with copyright literacy and design ethics. Visual assets—photographs, illustrations, icons, fonts, templates, and video clips—are often sourced from the internet, design repositories, or viral content without proper authorization. These actions may constitute copyright infringement, especially when: (1) used commercially without permission or license (Luo & Mortimer, 2016); (2) attribution is omitted; (3) works demonstrate substantial similarity to existing creations (Khan, 2009); or (4) "free" status is assumed without verifying terms of use (Lakshmanan et al., 2015).

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO, n.d.) notes that while digital technology and the internet enable rapid and inexpensive distribution of creative content, they simultaneously pose significant challenges for copyright systems, particularly regarding governance, remuneration, business models, and enforcement in online spaces. These challenges are especially relevant for the creative media industry, as design and visual content are now produced, archived, and disseminated on algorithm-driven

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platforms.

Cases of visual plagiarism increasingly go viral due to digital culture's emphasis on aesthetic trends. Studies of viral trends on platforms like TikTok demonstrate gray areas between inspiration and infringement, as certain formats and aesthetics are widely replicated; copyright protection relies on originality and proof of substantial similarity, which is often difficult to map to everyday creative practice (Galea, 2024; Hacohen et al., 2024). Research by (Dergacheva & Katzenbach, 2023) reveals that creators often experience uncertainty due to opaque copyright moderation; they learn through mistakes, develop "folk theories," and even engage in self-censorship to avoid platform penalties.

In the Indonesian context, legal research indicates the continued widespread use of "free" graphic designs for unauthorized commercial sales, necessitating strengthened legal protection through preventive and repressive measures, including increased public understanding of intellectual property rights (Nasution & Judijanto, 2024; Permatasari & Santoso, 2025). Similarly, studies on intellectual property rights in the digital era emphasize the complexity of legal and ethical challenges, as well as the need for collaboration between government, industry, and society to ensure protection of creative works (Suhaeruddin, 2024).

Despite growing recognition of copyright challenges in digital environments, several research gaps remain. First, most existing studies focus on legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms rather than preventive approaches rooted in professional ethics. Second, there is limited empirical evidence on how design ethics can be operationalized at individual, organizational, and ecosystem levels to prevent copyright infringement. Third, few studies propose comprehensive frameworks that integrate ethical principles, compliance procedures, and rights protection in the context of high-velocity content creation.

Additionally, research on visual plagiarism evaluation criteria remains nascent. While Cui et al. (2022) proposed criteria and factors for evaluating visual plagiarism in posters, practical tools for distinguishing inspiration from infringement in everyday creative practice are lacking. The intersection of platform governance, creator behavior, and ethical frameworks requires further investigation to develop actionable prevention strategies.

This research is necessary because current approaches to copyright protection in creative industries remain predominantly reactive and legalistic. The rapid pace of digital content creation, combined with platform algorithm dynamics and creator economic pressures, necessitates proactive prevention strategies. Design ethics, as a professional framework guiding creative decisions, offers potential as a preventive mechanism that operates before legal violations occur.

Furthermore, the creative media industry requires practical frameworks that can be implemented across multiple stakeholder levels. Individual creators need guidance on ethical decision-making; organizations need compliance systems; and the broader ecosystem needs supportive policies and educational infrastructure. By examining design ethics as a multi-level prevention mechanism, this research addresses a critical gap in copyright protection strategies.

This research aims to: (1) analyze the role of design ethics as a preventive mechanism for copyright infringement in the creative media industry; (2) map dominant forms of copyright infringement and their underlying causes in high-velocity content creation environments; (3) identify relevant mitigation strategies at individual, organizational, and ecosystem levels; and (4) develop an integrated framework that combines ethical principles, compliance procedures, and rights protection to reduce infringement risks while maintaining creative quality and authenticity.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Participants

This study does not involve human participants in the traditional empirical sense. Instead, the research cohort comprises scholarly publications, institutional reports, and legal documents focused on design ethics, copyright protection, and creative industry practices. The analyzed literature spans peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, policy documents from international organizations (UNESCO, WIPO), and legal research publications from Indonesian academic institutions. The temporal scope encompasses publications from 2021 to 2025, capturing recent developments in digital copyright challenges and design ethics frameworks.

### Study Organization

**Methodological Framework:**

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach combining systematic literature review with conceptual-normative analysis. The research integrates two complementary methodologies: (1) systematic review of empirical and theoretical literature on design ethics and copyright protection, and (2) conceptual-normative analysis examining relationships between professional ethics, platform governance, and content production behavior.

**Research Protocol:**

The research followed a structured five-phase protocol: Phase 1 - Literature Search: Comprehensive database searches were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories using keyword combinations including "design ethics," "copyright infringement," "creative industry," "visual plagiarism," "platform governance," and "intellectual property rights." Search parameters were limited to publications from 2021-2025 in English and Indonesian languages. Phase 2 - Selection and Screening: Initial screening identified 87 potentially relevant publications. Inclusion criteria required: (a) focus on design ethics or copyright in creative industries, (b) empirical or theoretical contributions to understanding infringement mechanisms, (c) relevance to digital content creation contexts, and (d) peer-reviewed or institutionally validated sources. After full-text review, 25 publications were selected for in-depth analysis. Phase 3 - Data Extraction: Key information extracted included: theoretical frameworks, empirical findings on infringement patterns, ethical principles and guidelines, platform governance mechanisms, legal and policy recommendations, and practical implementation strategies. Phase 4 - Conceptual-Normative Analysis: Selected literature was analyzed to identify: (a) normative principles underlying design ethics, (b) structural relationships between ethics, compliance, and rights protection, (c) multi-level intervention points (individual, organizational, ecosystem), and (d) gaps in current prevention

frameworks. Phase 5 - Framework Development: Based on synthesized findings, an integrated "Ethics-Compliance-Rights" framework was developed, incorporating preventive strategies across multiple stakeholder levels.

## Data Analysis

This qualitative research does not employ statistical methodologies in the conventional quantitative sense. However, systematic categorization and thematic analysis techniques were applied to organize findings. Content analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships across the literature corpus. Frequency analysis documented the prevalence of specific ethical principles, infringement types, and mitigation strategies mentioned across reviewed sources. Comparative analysis evaluated consistency and divergence among different theoretical frameworks and empirical findings. These analytical approaches facilitated the development of a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of design ethics as a copyright infringement prevention mechanism.

## Ethical Considerations

As this study involved analysis of publicly available published literature and institutional documents rather than primary data collection from human subjects, formal ethics committee approval was not required. All analyzed publications were properly cited according to APA 7th edition guidelines, respecting intellectual property rights and academic integrity standards.

# RESULTS

The systematic literature review and conceptual-normative analysis revealed that design ethics functions as a multi-level preventive mechanism against copyright infringement in creative media industries. Results are organized according to three analytical dimensions: individual-level practices, organizational-level systems, and ecosystem-level governance.

## Individual Level: Creative Integrity and Licensing Literacy

At the individual creator level, design ethics operates through three primary mechanisms: creative integrity, licensing literacy, and attribution practices. The literature consistently identifies lack of understanding regarding asset licensing as a critical vulnerability. Creators frequently operate under misconceptions about "free" resources, failing to distinguish between various Creative Commons licenses, public domain designations, and proprietary assets requiring permission.

Creative integrity emerged as a foundational ethical principle, encompassing commitment to original work creation, honest acknowledgment of influences, and resistance to shortcut practices such as "take, modify, repost" workflows. However, the research reveals tension between ethical ideals and production realities. Time pressures, client expectations, and platform algorithm dynamics frequently compromise ethical decision-making. Creators report feeling compelled to prioritize speed over thorough rights verification, particularly in fast-paced social media and trend-driven content creation contexts.

Attribution practices, while theoretically straightforward, prove complex in implementation. The literature documents confusion regarding: (a) when attribution is legally required versus ethically appropriate; (b) how to attribute works properly in different digital formats and platforms; and (c) whether attribution alone constitutes sufficient rights compliance. Studies emphasize that attribution, while ethically valuable, does not substitute for proper licensing in commercial contexts.

## Organizational Level: Compliance Systems and Copyright Audits

Organizational-level findings reveal significant gaps in systematic copyright compliance infrastructure. The majority of creative organizations lack standardized procedures for asset sourcing, license documentation, and rights verification. This absence creates environments where individual creator ethics alone prove insufficient to prevent infringement.

Research identifies four critical organizational mechanisms: (1) Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for asset usage, specifying approved sources and prohibited practices; (2) role-based approval workflows requiring copyright clearance for high-risk content; (3) periodic internal audits examining projects for undocumented asset usage; and (4) regular training programs ensuring creative team members maintain current licensing knowledge.

Organizations implementing comprehensive compliance systems demonstrate markedly lower infringement rates. However, the literature documents implementation challenges including: resistance from creative staff perceiving procedures as bureaucratic impediments; inadequate resource allocation for compliance activities; and difficulty adapting systems to rapidly evolving platform contexts and licensing models.

## Ecosystem Level: Platform Transparency and Educational Infrastructure

Ecosystem-level analysis reveals that individual ethics and organizational systems operate within broader governance structures shaped by platform policies, educational institutions, and policy frameworks. Platform transparency emerged as a critical factor influencing creator behavior and understanding.

Research documenting social media creator experiences with copyright moderation systems reveals significant opacity in platform enforcement mechanisms. Creators report learning through trial and error, developing informal "folk theories" about what content will trigger copyright claims, and engaging in preemptive self-censorship to avoid penalties. This opacity undermines ethical decision-making, as creators lack clear guidance on compliance requirements.

Educational infrastructure gaps were consistently identified across reviewed literature. Design education programs typically provide limited coverage of copyright law, licensing frameworks, and ethical decision-making in digital contexts. Professional development resources addressing these topics remain scarce, particularly for freelance creators and small creative businesses lacking access to legal counsel.

Policy-level analysis reveals calls for strengthened creator protections, including clearer fair use guidelines, simplified licensing frameworks, and more transparent platform governance. International organizations (UNESCO, WIPO) emphasize the need for digital-era copyright frameworks balancing creator rights with technological realities.

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### Integrated Framework: Ethics-Compliance-Rights

Based on synthesized findings, the study proposes an "Ethics-Compliance-Rights" framework integrating three essential components:

**Ethics Component:**

Foundational values and attitudes including creative integrity, respect for creator rights, and anti-normalization of piracy. This component operates primarily at the individual level but requires institutional and ecosystem support.

**Compliance Component:**

Procedural systems and evidence documentation including asset usage SOPs, license documentation requirements, approval workflows, and periodic audits. This component operates primarily at the organizational level.

**Rights Component:**

Protection mechanisms and ecosystem support including recognition of moral and economic rights, access to ethics education, platform transparency, and supportive policy frameworks. This component operates primarily at the ecosystem level. The framework asserts that effective copyright infringement prevention occurs when ethical values (Ethics) are translated into operational processes (Compliance) and supported by protective environments (Rights). Deficiency in any component compromises overall effectiveness.

### Visual Plagiarism Evaluation Criteria

Research on visual plagiarism detection revealed the need for structured evaluation frameworks distinguishing inspiration from infringement. Analysis identified key evaluation factors including: composition similarity (layout structure, spatial organization, visual hierarchy); element similarity (specific graphic components, illustration styles, typographic choices); conceptual similarity (underlying ideas, symbolic representations, thematic approaches); and expression similarity (specific execution methods, technical treatments, style combinations). Studies emphasize that visual plagiarism evaluation must account for context, including industry norms, genre conventions, and cultural factors. Certain similarities may constitute acceptable references in one context while representing infringement in another. Professional evaluation requires both technical analysis and contextual judgment.

## DISCUSSION

### Interpreting Research Outcomes

The research findings demonstrate that copyright infringement in creative media industries represents a complex phenomenon requiring multi-level intervention rather than singular solutions. The identification of three operational levels—individual, organizational, and ecosystem—reveals that ethical frameworks alone cannot prevent infringement without supporting compliance infrastructure and protective governance structures (Torkestani & Mansouri, 2025).

The tension between production velocity and ethical practice emerges as a central challenge. High-velocity content creation environments prioritize speed and algorithmic performance over thorough rights verification, creating conditions where even ethically motivated creators may commit inadvertent infringement. This suggests that preventing violations requires not only ethical education but also practical tools, streamlined workflows, and organizational systems reducing the compliance burden on individual creators (Goold, 2021; Hu et al., 2024).

The "folk theories" and informal learning documented in creator experiences with platform moderation indicate a significant knowledge gap that formal education and organizational training must address (Mayworm et al., 2023). When creators learn copyright compliance through trial, error, and platform penalties, they develop potentially inaccurate understandings that may perpetuate problematic practices or encourage excessive self-censorship (Fiesler et al., 2015; Palfrey et al., 2009).

### Evaluation in Relation to Antecedent Studies

These findings align with and extend previous research in several ways. Dergacheva & Katzenbach (2023) work on creator experiences with copyright moderation is substantiated and contextualized within the broader ethical framework. Their documentation of creator uncertainty validates the need for ecosystem-level transparency and education emphasized in this study's proposed framework. Nasir et al., (2021) identification of widespread unauthorized use of "free" graphic designs in Indonesian contexts finds explanation in the individual-level licensing literacy gaps documented here. Their call for preventive measures through education aligns with this study's emphasis on ethics training and organizational SOPs (Lodra & Mariasa, 2018; Todorova et al., 2017). However, this research extends beyond legal remedies to propose comprehensive ethical and compliance frameworks.

Temara (2025) work on visual plagiarism evaluation criteria is incorporated and expanded through contextual considerations. While their framework provides valuable technical evaluation factors, this study situates those criteria within the broader challenge of distinguishing inspiration from infringement in fast-paced creative environments where genre conventions and trend participation complicate clear-cut determinations.

International policy frameworks from UNESCO (2022) and WIPO regarding creator protection and digital copyright challenges provide validation for the ecosystem-level interventions proposed in this research. However, this study advances beyond policy recommendations to specify operational mechanisms through the Ethics-Compliance-Rights framework.

### Elucidating Ramifications of the Discoveries

The research findings carry several significant implications for creative industry practice, education, and policy.

**For Creative Organizations:**

The findings necessitate investment in compliance infrastructure previously viewed as optional or bureaucratic. Organizations must recognize that ethical individual creators cannot prevent infringement without supporting systems. Implementing asset usage SOPs, license documentation requirements, and regular training programs represents not merely legal risk management but essential operational infrastructure for sustainable creative practice.

**For Educational Institutions:**

Design and creative media education programs require curriculum reform integrating copyright law, licensing frameworks, and ethical decision-making throughout coursework rather than as isolated topics. Ethics education must address practical realities of high-velocity creation environments, preparing students to navigate tensions between production pressures and rights compliance.

**For Platform Governance:**

The documented creator confusion and folk theories surrounding copyright moderation indicate that platforms must prioritize transparency and education over purely enforcement-focused approaches. Clear guidance, accessible appeals processes, and educational resources should accompany automated content filtering systems.

**For Policy Development:**

The research supports calls for copyright frameworks adapted to digital creation contexts. Policy development should balance creator protection with practical realities of contemporary content production, including clearer fair use guidelines, simplified licensing mechanisms, and protections for creators navigating platform algorithmic systems.

## Recognizing Constraints of the Research

This research acknowledges several important limitations. First, as a literature-based study, findings depend on the scope and quality of available published research. Geographic and linguistic biases in academic publishing may limit representation of diverse creative industry contexts, particularly from non-Western and non-English-speaking regions. Second, the rapid evolution of digital platforms, algorithmic systems, and content creation practices means that some findings may become outdated as technologies and practices evolve. The proposed Ethics-Compliance-Rights framework requires ongoing adaptation to remain relevant in changing technological landscapes. Third, the study's qualitative-descriptive approach provides conceptual frameworks and identifies patterns but cannot quantify infringement rates, measure prevention effectiveness, or establish causal relationships between specific interventions and outcomes. Future research employing quantitative methodologies could complement these findings by testing the proposed framework's effectiveness empirically. Fourth, the research focuses primarily on visual design and creative media, with limited attention to other creative domains such as music, writing, or software development. While many principles may transfer across domains, sector-specific factors require consideration. Finally, the proposed framework requires empirical validation through implementation studies. While grounded in synthesized literature, its practical effectiveness in diverse organizational contexts remains to be demonstrated. Implementation research examining adoption barriers, adaptation requirements, and outcome measurements would substantially advance understanding.

## CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that design ethics plays a crucial role as a preventive mechanism against copyright infringement in creative media industries, operating across individual, organizational, and ecosystem levels. Copyright violations in high-velocity content creation environments stem not merely from legal ignorance but from complex interactions between production pressures, platform dynamics, licensing confusion, and inadequate compliance infrastructure.

The proposed Ethics-Compliance-Rights framework provides a comprehensive approach integrating ethical principles, operational procedures, and protective governance structures. This framework recognizes that effective prevention requires: (1) fostering creative integrity and licensing literacy among individual creators; (2) implementing organizational systems including asset usage SOPs, license documentation, and regular training; and (3) developing ecosystem support through educational infrastructure, platform transparency, and appropriate policy frameworks.

Key findings emphasize that ethical individual creators cannot prevent infringement without supporting organizational systems and protective ecosystem governance. Conversely, compliance procedures prove ineffective without underlying ethical commitment and adequate educational preparation. All three framework components—Ethics, Compliance, and Rights—must function synergistically to achieve meaningful infringement reduction.

The research validates concerns raised in prior literature regarding licensing confusion, platform opacity, and educational gaps while proposing actionable frameworks for addressing these challenges. Implementation of the proposed framework requires concerted effort across multiple stakeholder groups: creative professionals must prioritize ethical practice; organizations must invest in compliance infrastructure; educational institutions must reform curricula; platforms must enhance transparency; and policymakers must adapt copyright frameworks to digital realities.

Moving forward, the most realistic and impactful preventive measures involve operationalizing design ethics through: standardized asset usage procedures; comprehensive license documentation systems; regular ethics and compliance training; visual plagiarism evaluation frameworks; and platform transparency initiatives. These operational mechanisms transform abstract ethical principles into practical tools supporting compliant creative practice.

Recommendations for Future Research: Future studies should: (1) conduct empirical implementation research testing the Ethics-Compliance-Rights framework across diverse organizational contexts; (2) develop quantitative metrics for measuring infringement reduction following intervention implementation; (3) investigate sector-specific adaptations for different creative domains; (4) examine cross-cultural variations in ethical frameworks and compliance practices; and (5) assess the impact of emerging technologies (artificial intelligence, automated content generation) on copyright ethics and prevention strategies.

Practical Implementation Guidance: Organizations seeking to implement this framework should begin with: baseline assessment of current copyright practices and vulnerabilities; development of clear asset usage policies and approval workflows; establishment of license documentation systems; implementation of regular training programs; and creation of internal evaluation criteria for visual plagiarism assessment. Phased implementation with pilot testing and iterative refinement is recommended.

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## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this research. No external funding was received for this study. The research was conducted independently without influence from commercial entities or organizations with vested interests in the outcomes..

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