Embracing Transparency: A New Editorial Standard for the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Scholarly Publishing

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Abstract

Generative AI tools are transforming academic publishing, offering efficiency, language support and assistance in complex tasks. NJDVL encourages its responsible use while emphasizing that AI is a tool, not an author. Human accountability, transparency and ethical oversight remain paramount. Full disclosure and human oversight ensure accountability, transparency and integrity, allowing AI to enhance rather than compromise scholarly rigor.

Key words: Artificial Intelligence; Generative Artificial Intelligence; Scholarly Communication

Introduction

The landscape of academic publishing is being reshaped before our eyes. Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools—such as Chat GPT, Gemini, and Bing AI—are no longer speculative but have become widely available assistants for researchers, authors, and editors alike. At the Nepal Journal of Dermatology and Venereology & Leprology (NJDVL), we acknowledge the potential benefits of these tools to enhance efficiency, facilitate language polishing, or assist in complex tasks.[1] However, with that power comes a profound responsibility. As we begin to integrate these technologies into our workflows, we must fortify a clear, ethical, and transparent framework—one that safeguards scholarship's integrity and maintains the trust of our readers and authors.

The Case for Radical Transparency

In adopting GenAI tools, the fundamental boundary between human and machine–generated content must never be blurred. To preserve accountability, NJDVL now requires full disclosure by authors who employ AI in any aspect of manuscript preparation—whether in drafting, language editing, summarization, image generation, or statistical code generation.[1] A concise statement such as:

"The authors used Chat GPT (OpenAI) for language assistance in drafting the manuscript; all AI-generated text was reviewed and revised by the authors." should be included in the Acknowledgements or Methods section. Far from being a confession of lesser work, such transparency demonstrates commitment to ethical rigor and allows readers, editors, and peer reviewers to understand the provenance of the work. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) now explicitly recommends disclosure of AI-assisted technologies at submission, either in the cover letter or in the manuscript, with a description of how the tool was used.[2] AI tools must not be listed as authors, because they cannot assume responsibility for a manuscript's accuracy, originality, or integrity.[2] Similarly, the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) recommends that editors and reviewers also disclose any use of chatbots in decision-making, reviewing, or correspondence.[3]

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Human Accountability: AI Is a Tool, Not an Author

A GenAI tool is akin to a laboratory instrument or statistical software—not a collaborator. It cannot conceive a research question, assume responsibility for ethical conduct, or vouch for the trustworthiness of outputs. The named human authors must remain accountable for every word, figure, and reference. This principle guards against the gravest perils of scholarly misconduct: fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism. Use of AI to generate fabricated data, concoct references, or manipulate peer review is strictly forbidden and constitutes a serious breach of publication ethics.[2]

In line with the best practices, AI-assisted content must be carefully reviewed, verified, and edited by human authors. AI hallucinations—plausible but false statements—or invented citations are well-documented risks with large language models.[3,4] Any inadvertent plagiarism must also be avoided and traced back to the original sources by the human authors. Further, AI tools cannot be included in the reference list or cited as primary sources, as they are not original content creators—they generate from underlying corpora without unique provenance.[4]

Safeguarding the Review and Editorial Process

The use of AI should not be limited to authors. Editors and reviewers, too, may see appeals in using AI for summarization, grammar checking, or content comparison. Yet human judgment must remain central to evaluating scientific validity, novelty, and methodological soundness. WAME's guidelines assert that any use of chatbots by editors or reviewers must also be disclosed, and such tools cannot override human decision-making.[3] Importantly, confidentiality of the peer review process is sacrosanct. Uploading manuscript content into public or third-party AI systems that retain or harvest user input violates this trust and is prohibited.[1,2] Editors should include guidance about AI use in instructions to reviewers, reminding them not to reveal content, to maintain confidentiality, and to avoid AI platforms that do not guarantee privacy.[1]

Aligning with Global Editorial Standards

NJDVL's policy is not formulated in isolation. It draws upon and aligns with established global norms.[1]
ICMJE now includes AI in its updated "Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work" (January 2024) by specifying the need for disclosure and prohibiting AI authorship.[2]
WAME's recommendations provide guidance for editors handling Chabot's and generative AI in manuscripts and reviews.[3]
COPE, in its "Authorship and AI Tools" statements, affirms that AI tools cannot be authors and calls for transparent reporting of AI use.[4]

Publication Ethics

Published journal policies have instituted parallel mandates for AI disclosure, forbidding AI authorship, and requiring authorship accountability.[3] A recent bibliometric survey found that, among the top 100 publishers, only ~17% had guidance on generative AI. Among journals that do, ~95% prohibit AI authorship, but disclosure practices vary widely (cover letter, acknowledgments, methods, etc.). This heterogeneity underscores the necessity for a clear, consistent editorial policy.[5,6]

The Path Forward at NJDVL

At NJDVL, we are committed to upholding the highest standards of editorial ethics in this rapidly evolving landscape. Our new AI policy is a forward step toward a future in which technology serves scholarship without subverting its foundations. We call on all stakeholders—authors, reviewers, editors—to join us in this commitment.

By embracing transparency and reaffirming responsibility, we can harness the benefits of AI while preserving the bedrock values of academic integrity and trust upon which scientific progress depends. For queries, concerns, or to lodge complaints regarding the use of AI, ethics, or process, please contact njdvl. sodvelon@gmail.com

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