Cybrarians Journals Issue 79, August 2026

Research

https://doi.org/10.70000/cj.2026.79.752

Policies on the use of artificial intelligence in scientific publishing: an analytical study of journal publishers' policies for authors

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Article info

History
Received: 01.07.2026
Accepted: 15.08.2026
Published: 29.08.2026

Keywords
Generative artificial intelligence, scientific research, publication ethics, scientific authorship, disclosure practices, scientific integrity

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze policies on the use of artificial intelligence in scientific publishing by examining the policies and guidelines for authors at several international scientific journal publishers. The study adopted content analysis to examine the policies published on the official websites of these publishers. The study sought to identify similarities and differences among publishers' policies on regulating AI use, the nature of permitted and prohibited uses, and publishers' positions on authorship and scientific responsibility. The findings revealed a consensus among scientific publishers that artificial intelligence tools should not be included in the list of authors, with a general trend toward allowing linguistic and editorial uses, as well as analytical uses that support research, while reservations are growing regarding uses related to the creation of original content or images. The study also revealed variations among publishers' policies in the level of detail and clarity, the limits on permitted uses, and disclosure requirements regarding the use of AI tools. The study concluded that AI usage policies for authors are still in their formative stages, as scientific publishers seek to balance leveraging AI's potential with maintaining the integrity and originality of scientific publications.

1. Background, Objectives, and Research Methodology

1.1 Context and Adoption Growth

Generative AI tools capable of processing natural language, code, data, and imagery have migrated rapidly into the scientific domain. This shift has driven significant efficiency gains while raising deep ethical questions regarding scientific integrity, accountability, intellectual property, and transparency.

- Wiley Explanations Survey (2025): A study of 2,430 international researchers revealed that AI adoption grew from 57% in 2024 to 84% in 2025. Tasks specific to research and publishing grew from 45% to 62%.
- Productivity and Citation Impact (Hao et al., 2026): An analysis of over 41 million scientific papers identified 310,000 papers utilizing AI techniques. AI-utilizing researchers published ~3x more papers and gained ~5x more citations, accelerating their career advancement.

1.2 Study Purpose and Core Research Questions

The study by Bakhit & Al-Hassan (data collected April 2026) addresses a notable gap in Arabic academic literature regarding the institutional policies governing AI in scientific publishing. The study investigates:

1. Publisher positions on AI integration in academic publishing.
2. Permitted, restricted, and prohibited AI use cases for authors.
3. Policy frameworks addressing authorship, legal liability, and research originality.
4. Ethical risks and technical challenges associated with AI.
5. Points of alignment and divergence across major publishing guidelines.

1.3 Methodology and Analytical Sample

The study utilizes a qualitative Content Analysis Approach coupled with a critical epistemological framework. The study examined a purposive sample of seven major global academic publishing entities selected based on international reach, structural impact, and published AI guidelines:

1. Wiley
2. SAGE Publications
3. Elsevier
4. Taylor & Francis
5. Springer Nature

6. American Psychological Association (APA) (dual standard-setting and publishing role)
7. Science Journals (published by AAAS)

The study also benchmarked policies against international standard-setting bodies:

- Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)
- Council of Science Editors (CSE)

2. Examination of Publisher Policy Frameworks

Publisher policies governing author AI usage fall into three main regulatory tiers:

2.1 Permitted Uses Without Disclosure

Several major publishers allow basic technical and linguistic refinements without requiring explicit author disclosure:

- Springer Nature & SAGE: Explicitly state that disclosure is not required when LLMs are used exclusively for light linguistic editing (correcting grammar, spelling, and basic punctuation). Springer Nature defines AI-assisted language editing as human-authored text refined for readability without autonomous content generation.
- Wiley: Waives disclosure for standard syntax correction, document formatting, word choice suggestions, reference search, and literature summarization. However, full style rewriting requires disclosure.
- Science Journals: Permits basic proofreading, code optimization, text polishing, and literature retrieval without mandatory disclosure.
- Elsevier: Strictly limits non-disclosure to elementary grammar, spelling, and punctuation checks.

Strict Non-Exemption Exception

- APA & Taylor & Francis: Maintain a stringent stance. They do not automatically exempt any AI use; even minor proofreading or language enhancements require formal disclosure.

2.2 Permitted Uses Requiring Mandatory Disclosure

When AI directly influences content creation, methodological design, or data analysis, disclosure becomes mandatory across virtually all policies.

Key Direct Analytical & Substantive Tasks

1. Literature review synthesis and source identification.
2. Translation of research text across languages.
3. Generating, testing, or debugging software code.

4. Data analysis, dataset visualization, and conceptual flow diagrams.
5. Re-organizing narrative logic and argument structuring.

Disclosure Placement Requirements

- Ganjavi et al. (2024) examined 100 top-ranked journals and found that 58% had explicit AI disclosure policies. Of these, 99% mandated formal documentation, specifying placement within:
    - Methodology section: 64% (mandatory when AI touches study design, data analysis, or image processing).
    - Acknowledgements section: 49% (used for language polishing, restructuring, or translation).
    - Cover Letter: 20%.
    - Independent AI Statement section: 15%.

Technical Specifics Required

Both CSE and COPE mandate that disclosures state the specific tool name, version number, date used, manufacturer, exact purpose, prompt formulations, and an explicit statement that human authors verified all AI outputs for accuracy.

Exemplar Disclosure Model (Wiley Guidelines)

"The authors acknowledge the use of Microsoft Copilot (accessed August 2024) to draft the Acknowledgements section and translate the Methodology section from Spanish to English. Gemini (accessed July 2025) was used to re-organize the Discussion section for clarity. The authors reviewed and edited all AI-processed text to ensure factual accuracy."

2.3 Prohibited and Highly Restricted Uses

Publishers enforce strict prohibitions against AI applications that replace human scientific oversight or compromise data authenticity:

- Synthetic Content & Fabricated Data: SAGE explicitly forbids generating fake interview transcripts or synthetic trial results. Taylor & Francis prohibits synthetic data generation lacking clear, validated methodology.
- Full Text Generation: Science Journals and APA strictly reject papers where original research text is entirely generated by AI, even if presented as an authentic manuscript.
- Scientific Image Manipulation: Elsevier, Springer Nature, Wiley, SAGE, Taylor & Francis, and Science Journals broadly prohibit AI image generation or alteration (including gel images, micrographs, and clinical photography).

- Exceptions: Highly controlled exceptions are allowed for conceptual diagrams, flowcharts, or studies where AI imagery is itself the subject of research, provided explicit disclosures and original raw data files are supplied.
- Flexibility Exception: APA is the most flexible entity regarding AI-generated imagery, allowing it provided full methodology and disclosures are documented.

3. Authorship, Responsibility, and Critical Epistemological Analysis

3.1 Unanimous Exclusion of AI as Co-Author

All sampled publishers (Wiley, SAGE, Elsevier, Taylor & Francis, Springer Nature, APA, Science) and regulatory bodies (COPE, CSE) unanimously maintain that AI tools cannot be listed as authors. COPE highlights that AI tools lack legal personality and cannot:

1. Accept legal or ethical liability for published work.
2. Formally execute copyright transfers or licensing contracts.
3. Disclose conflicts of interest.

Human authors remain fully accountable for any copyright breaches, plagiarized text, or fabricated data generated by AI tools used in their work.

3.2 Epistemological Critique of Current Policies

The study by Bakhit & Al-Hassan introduces critical theoretical insights regarding systemic oversights in current publishing policies:

1. The Conflation of Cognitive Composition and Legal Liability: Current policies reject AI as an author solely because it lacks legal liability. However, this creates a theoretical paradox: it ignores the reality that AI performs actual cognitive composition (generating structured knowledge). By treating AI merely as an administrative assistant, policies hide the true extent of non-human intellectual input.
2. The Artificial Generative Dichotomy: Policies that exempt "linguistic editing" from disclosure while penalizing "content generation" rely on a flawed epistemological assumption. Language is inherently generative; modifying syntax, tone, and structure directly alters the underlying cognitive and conceptual meaning of scientific thought.
3. Lax Enforcement Gaps: Policies such as Science Journals' rule prohibiting papers "generated entirely by AI" leave unaddressed vulnerabilities for manuscripts generated at 80% or 90% capacity by AI tools.

4. Ethical Challenges and Operational Risks

The deployment of AI in scientific publishing introduces six major ethical and operational vulnerabilities highlighted across the sources:

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4.1 Algorithmic, Structural, and Geopolitical Bias

- Paywall Bias: AI tools trained on open-access literature over-represent freely available sources while under-representing high-impact, paywalled scientific literature.
- Geopolitical & Corporate Dominance: As noted by El-Nour (2025) and Al-Obaidi (2024), AI models are not neutral. They are embedded within state-controlled infrastructures (e.g., China) or corporate monopolies (e.g., the United States), reinforcing Western/Northern hemisphere language styles, methodologies, and socio-political priorities.

4.2 AI Hallucinations

Studies (Aljamaan et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2023) highlight the persistent problem of AI "hallucinations"—where LLMs generate fictitious literature citations, invalid data points, or incorrect mathematical steps. Uncritical reliance on AI outputs without rigorous human verification compromises research validity.

4.3 Lack of Attribution and Loss of Originality

- Anti-Detection Platforms: The emergence of "anti-detection platforms" designed to bypass AI-detection tools creates a market for "pseudo-originality." These tools obfuscate synthetic content to simulate human writing, undermining research integrity.
- Uncited Borrowing: AI synthesis frequently outputs concepts, quotes, and structural arguments derived from training datasets without providing proper citation back to original researchers (Taylor & Francis).

4.4 Intellectual Property (IP) and Copyright Infringement

Regenerating text from vast training datasets carries the risk of inadvertently reproducing copyrighted material (Wiley). Authors who input proprietary data or unpublished drafts into commercial AI platforms risk forfeiting IP rights or breaching publisher copyright policies (Elsevier).

4.5 Data Security and Missing "Right to Erasure"

When authors upload raw data or drafts to external AI platforms, data privacy cannot be guaranteed. Crucially, current technologies and service agreements lack mechanisms ensuring a permanent "right to erasure," meaning submitted scientific data may permanently remain stored on external servers and integrated into future model training logs.

6. Conclusions, Recommendations, and Future Horizons

6.1 Core Conclusions

1. Developing Regulatory Phase: Academic publishing policies for AI remain dynamic and transitional. Publishers are continually adjusting guidelines to balance technical innovation against scientific integrity.
2. Clarity Deficits: Significant variations exist in detail and transparency. Publishers such as Wiley, SAGE, and Springer Nature maintain highly structured frameworks, while others (e.g., Elsevier, Science) rely on broader guidelines that grant substantial discretion to journal editors.
3. Focus on Human Responsibility: The academic ecosystem universally reinforces that ultimate responsibility for scientific truth, empirical validation, ethics, and copyright compliance rests solely with human authors.

6.2 Key Recommendations

- For Standard-Setting Bodies (COPE, CSE): Develop unified international disclosure standards and standardized citation protocols to eliminate regulatory fragmentation across journals.
- For Universities and Research Institutions: Implement targeted training programs for academic staff covering ethical AI utilization, prompt engineering, verification protocols, and data protection risks.
- For Regional/Arab Publishers: Establish comprehensive AI guidelines aligned with international benchmarks (e.g., adopting Wiley-style explicit disclosure templates) with mechanisms for annual policy updates.

6.3 Future Research Horizons

1. Empirical audits evaluating AI policy implementation and compliance across Arab regional journals.
2. In-depth analysis of AI utilization guidelines within peer-review and editorial evaluation workflows.
3. Philosophical and legal re-examination of the concept of Authorship to establish updated frameworks that accurately differentiate human cognitive contributions from machine-generated content.