

Gatekeepers of Science: Evolving Publishing Policies in the Age of AI

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INTRODUCTION

As artificial intelligence (AI) permeates every aspect of life, including scientific research, it is important that traditional routes of data dissemination have policies to address its use. Publishing houses are gatekeepers to most scientific research presented to the public and as such their policies should reflect the changing world. The increasing retractions due to AI misuse indicates a problem already exists.^{1, 2}

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) positions are that AI authorship is not permitted. The ICMJE further accepts the analytical and editorial support AI can provide but requires disclosure in the methods, if appropriate, as well as the cover letter, and that a human is ultimately responsible for the final outputs. This study aimed to understand how scientific journal publishing houses are responding to the potential use of AI in scientific research.

METHODS

To capture a broad array of publishing houses we identified journals from the SJR listings (www.scimagojr.com/index.php) in the “Medicine (misc.)” category, using the five journals at 1, 100, 200, 300 and 400 in the listings (25 journals in total). The parent publishing houses of the journals were then consolidated to create our sample.

Author guidelines and/or policies of each publishing house were reviewed to identify:

- (1) if there was a policy on AI authorship,
- (2) if external guidance was referenced,
- (3) if there was a distinction between generative and non-generative AI,
- (4) if disclosure of the use of AI was required,
- (5) if human ownership was required, and
- (6) if the use of AI was permitted for image generation.

RESULTS

Our sample constituted the following 12 publishing houses:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Chinese Academy of Sciences
- Elsevier
- Lippincott Williams and Wilkins Ltd.
- Mary Ann Liebert Inc.
- Massachusetts Medical Society
- Nature Research
- Oxford University Press
- Royal Society of Chemistry
- Sage
- Wiley
- Wolters Kluwer Health

As of June 2025, 11/12 had policies related to the use of AI in the development of research they publish. Lippincott simply referenced the COPE and ICMJE guidelines.

Where policies were in place, none permitted AI to be recognised as an author. Half referenced the COPE or ICMJE guidelines.

A distinction was made between generative and non-generative AI in 4/12 policies.

According to the policies, currently a frequent use of AI to support manuscript development was for image generation.

Nearly all required that disclosure of AI use at any point in the research.

In addition, 5/12 also had a policy in place regarding the use of AI in peer review.

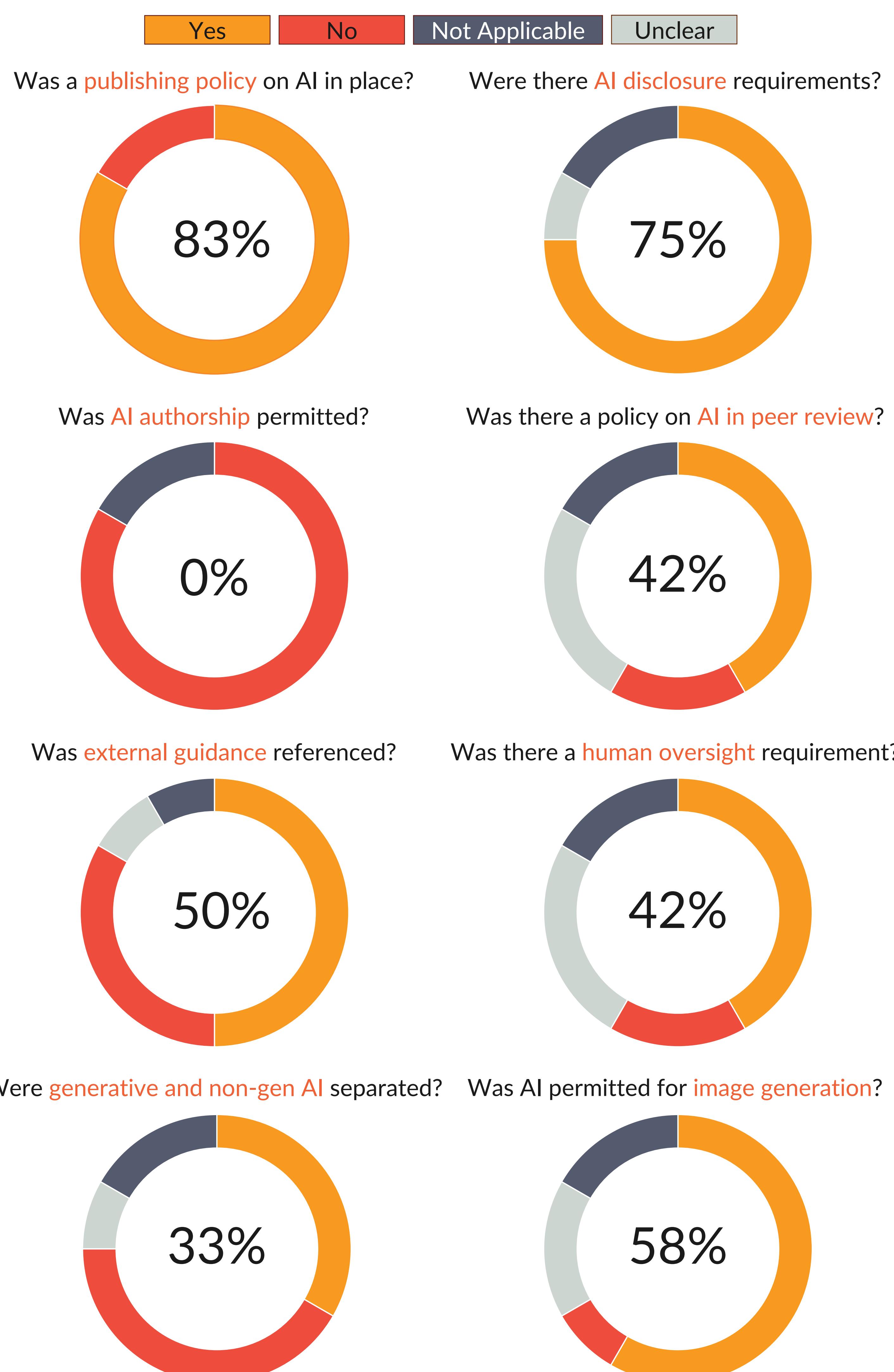
CONCLUSIONS

Publishing houses have recognised the reality that AI is being used in research and have produced policies to try and ensure transparency of what they publish.

In all cases, AI authorship was not permitted, but it was recognised that AI was increasingly likely to be used in the research process therefore if this was disclosed by authors then this was generally seen as permissible.

As with all research, this relies in large part on the honesty of authors, which initiatives such as www.academ-ai.info/ indicate cannot always be guaranteed.

It is expected that publishing houses' policies will need to evolve with the AI tools.



1. <https://retractionwatch.com/2025/02/10/as-springer-nature-journal-clears-ai-papers-one-universitys-retractions-rise-drastically/>

2. <https://etikostarnyba.lt/en/increasing-number-of-retractions-due-to-ai-use-in-academic-publishing/>

For the two publishing houses without a policy in place, responses to all further questions were not applicable. Where a publishing house had a policy, but the response to the question was not apparent, an unclear assessment was assigned.