AI Co-authorship in Academic Publishing

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1 Introduction: AI and Academic Collaboration

Academic collaboration has become the dominant mode of knowledge production in artificial intelligence research. Analysis of over 464,000 AI articles published between 1991 and 2020 reveals that only 8.6% are single-authored, while nearly half (48.9%) have two or three authors, and another 34.9% have four to six authors. Moreover, more than half (53.8%) of these publications involve researchers from multiple organizations, highlighting the cross-institutional nature of modern AI research. [15]

These collaborative relationships form specialized academic networks known as co-authorship networks, where authors are represented as vertices and collaborations between authors as edges. Understanding these networks has become increasingly important in the academic landscape. [38] The emergence of artificial intelligence techniques has created new possibilities for analyzing and predicting potential research partnerships within these networks, helping researchers identify suitable collaborators for projects and publications. [17]

The composition of research teams significantly impacts both the impact and novelty of AI research. Teams consisting exclusively of industry researchers tend to produce work that receives greater attention and citations, and are several times more likely to develop state-of-the-art models. In contrast, purely academic teams, which publish the bulk of AI research, tend to produce more novel and unconventional work. Interestingly, academic-industry collaborations appear to achieve the greatest overall impact, suggesting that diverse institutional perspectives enhance research outcomes. [14]

> Academic collaboration has become increasingly prevalent in artificial intelligence research, with the vast majority of papers having multiple authors from various institutions. Both AI as a field of study and AI tools are transforming collaboration patterns in academic publishing.

2 Current Practices of AI Co-authorship

The phenomenon of AI co-authorship in academic publications began appearing in late 2022 and early 2023, with notable examples across various fields. Several researchers listed ChatGPT and other large language models (LLMs) as co-authors in their publications, including manuscripts in medical journals [11] [16] and other scholarly outlets [36]. By November 2023, a systematic review identified 104 scholarly works that listed generative AI tools as authors or co-authors [8].

This practice sparked immediate controversy in the academic community. While some researchers viewed AI as evolving from a mere tool to a genuine collaborator in the research process [23], others raised concerns about accountability, responsibility, and intellectual contribution. ChatGPT has been documented as a co-author in at least four articles in the literature, though corrections were subsequently made in some cases due to inaccuracies [37]. One such example occurred in a preprint on medical education published on medRxiv, where ChatGPT was initially listed as one of twelve authors [10].

In response to this trend, major scientific publishers and journals quickly established policies regarding AI authorship. Science, Nature, and all Springer-Nature journals explicitly stated that AI or large language models cannot be listed as authors in their publications [23] [30]. Similar policies were adopted by SAGE Publishing and the Academy of Marketing Science [23]. Nature specifically added to its editorial policies that "Large Language Models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT, do not currently satisfy our authorship criteria. Notably an attribution of authorship carries with its accountability for the work, which cannot be effectively applied to LLMs" [13].

This consensus against AI authorship is grounded in established principles of academic publishing. Organizations including the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), and the JAMA Network emphasize that authors must be able to fulfill fundamental authorship requirements, including declaring conflicts of interest, managing publication rights, and signing licensing agreements—responsibilities that AI tools cannot fulfill [37]. The core issue centers on whether generative AI meets the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors' criteria for authorship, particularly regarding accepting responsibility for work and granting content approval [10].

Despite prohibiting AI authorship, most publishers and journals now require transparent acknowledgment of AI usage in research. Nature suggests that "publishers need to acknowledge their legitimate uses and lay down clear guidelines to avoid abuse," while SAGE recommends that authors "clearly identify AI-generated content within the text and acknowledge its use within your Acknowledgements section" [23]. The Academy of Marketing Science similarly requires full disclosure and documentation of generative AI use in any stage of research described in submitted manuscripts [23].

The ongoing debate about AI's role in academic authorship reflects broader questions about how AI tools are transforming research practices. While some

experts maintain that AI shouldn't receive authorship credit, others highlight AI's contributions to idea generation and content production [9]. As AI integration in research continues to evolve, authorship conventions may undergo further changes [9] [34] [24].

AI tools like ChatGPT have been credited as co-authors in several academic publications, leading to significant debate about their role in research. In response, most major publishers and journals have established policies explicitly prohibiting AI tools from being listed as authors while requiring transparent disclosure of AI usage.

3 Journal and Publisher Policies

Following the initial instances of researchers listing ChatGPT and other AI tools as co-authors, major academic publishers quickly developed explicit policies addressing AI authorship in scientific publications. Nature, Science, and all Springer-Nature journals issued clear statements prohibiting AI or large language models from being listed as authors in their publications [23]. This position was similarly adopted by SAGE Publishing and the Academy of Marketing Science, with the latter explicitly stating that "Generative artificial intelligence agents cannot be listed as co-author (or author) on a published paper or paper submitted for publication" [23].

Nature specifically added to its editorial policies that "Large Language Models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT, do not currently satisfy our authorship criteria. Notably an attribution of authorship carries with its accountability for the work, which cannot be effectively applied to LLMs" [13]. Similarly, Science updated its license and editorial policy to specify that ChatGPT-generated output cannot be used and attributed in papers [13].

Elsevier was among the publishers who pioneered new policies related to AI-assisted tools, requiring authors to make a statement on their use of AI in submissions [31]. The rationale behind these restrictions is consistent across publishers: AI tools cannot be credited as authors because "any attribution of authorship is connected to responsibility" that cannot meaningfully apply to AI [31].

This prohibition on AI authorship is supported by major academic ethics organizations. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), and the JAMA Network emphasize that authors must be able to fulfill fundamental authorship requirements such as declaring conflicts of interest, managing publication rights, and signing licensing agreements—responsibilities that AI tools cannot fulfill [37]. The World Association of Medical Editors specifically emphasizes that AI chatbots should not be recognized as coauthors in scientific literature from both ethical and legal standpoints [19] [22].

A cross-sectional bibliometric study of the top 100 academic publishers and scientific journals found that 24% of publishers and 87% of journals provided

guidance on generative AI use, with almost all (96% of publishers and 98% of journals with guidelines) prohibiting the inclusion of AI as an author [3] [6]. The Committee of Publishing Ethics (COPE) and the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) have both adopted criteria prohibiting AI authorship, noting that generative AI tools are non-legal entities that cannot take responsibility for manuscripts or manage conflicts of interest [3].

While prohibiting AI authorship, most publishers now require transparent disclosure of AI use in research. Nature suggests that "publishers need to acknowledge their legitimate uses and lay down clear guidelines to avoid abuse," while SAGE recommends that authors "clearly identify AI-generated content within the text and acknowledge its use within your Acknowledgements section" [23]. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors stresses the importance of transparency regarding any AI involvement in research [26].

However, there remains considerable variability in how AI use should be disclosed. The disclosure requirements vary between journals and publishers, with some requesting disclosure in methods sections, acknowledgments, cover letters, or dedicated new sections [3] [6]. This heterogeneity in guidelines sometimes persists even among affiliated publishers and journals, with researchers observing that guidelines in 12 journals directly conflicted with those developed by their publishers [3] [6].

> Major academic publishers and scientific organizations have established explicit policies prohibiting AI systems from being listed as authors while requiring transparent disclosure of AI use in manuscripts. These policies are grounded in fundamental authorship criteria that AI cannot fulfill, including accountability for content and ability to approve final manuscripts.

4 Authorship Criteria and AI

The debate over AI co-authorship centers on established authorship criteria that have guided academic publishing for decades. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) criteria—widely adopted across disciplines—require authors to make substantial contributions, draft or revise content critically, approve the final version, and be accountable for all aspects of the work [27] [28] [29]. These criteria present significant barriers to considering AI as a legitimate co-author.

The accountability requirement poses the most fundamental challenge to AI authorship. As Solomon and colleagues note, "If the methods that LLM AI tools use to generate text are not transparent (they probably will never be), then who is accountable?" [27]. This concern has led organizations like the American College of Rheumatology to explicitly prohibit AI co-authorship in their journals [28]. Similar positions have been adopted by numerous academic publishers who emphasize that AI cannot "take full responsibility for all content in the published Works" as required by established standards [7].

Some researchers have conducted formal evaluations of AI's potential qualifications for authorship. Osmanovic-Thunstrom and colleagues designed a case study to test GPT-3 against all four ICMJE authorship criteria with minimal human interference. While they found the system could potentially meet the criterion of making substantial contributions to conception or content, they acknowledged that the ICMJE criteria were established in 1978, long before the emergence of AI systems capable of producing human-like text [21]. Their work raises important questions about whether authorship definitions should evolve to accommodate new technologies.

Beyond accountability, other aspects of authorship also present challenges for AI systems. Cho and colleagues argue that current AI systems fail to meet multiple authorship criteria simultaneously: "In terms of intellectual contribution, it is still highly debated whether AI-generated content can be considered original," and "there is no concrete evidence that AI is capable of giving final approval to the manuscript" [4]. They suggest that academic communities may need to "revisit and update the traditional definition of authorship" if they wish to explicitly exclude AI from authorship eligibility.

Moffatt and colleagues identify additional fundamental limitations that disqualify AI from authorship, arguing that "AI systems should not be included on the author by-line" not only because they "are incapable of taking responsibility for their work" but also because "AI tools also do not write in a meaningful sense nor do they have persistent identities" [20]. This lack of a persistent identity makes attribution and accountability even more challenging.

The debate about AI authorship is evolving alongside the technology. While current consensus firmly rejects AI authorship, some publisher guidelines use language that leaves room for future changes. Nature's guidelines, for example, specify that large language models "do not currently satisfy our authorship criteria," with the qualifier "currently" suggesting potential evolution as AI technology advances [7]. This indicates that while AI does not meet authorship criteria now, the academic community recognizes that future developments may require reconsideration of these positions.

> Traditional authorship criteria require accountability, substantial contributions, and approval of the final manuscript—requirements that AI systems currently cannot fulfill. While some researchers have tested whether AI can meet these criteria, the consensus is that current limitations in transparency, accountability, and autonomous reasoning disqualify AI from authorship.

5 Arguments Against AI Co-authorship

The primary argument against AI co-authorship centers on accountability, a fundamental requirement of academic authorship. As Solomon and colleagues emphasize, "If the methods that LLM AI tools use to generate text are not transparent (they probably will never be), then who is accountable?" [27] [28]

[29]. This accountability concern has led organizations like the American College of Rheumatology to explicitly prohibit AI co-authorship in their journals, as they cannot fulfill the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors' requirement that authors agree "to be accountable for all aspects of the work" [27].

Beyond accountability issues, critics argue that AI lacks the capacity for moral reasoning and understanding necessary for authorship. Sahin and colleagues point out that "The AI system lacks the ability to comprehend, analyze, or morally assess the subtleties inherent in the work it contributed to, therefore cannot be held responsible for the accuracy and implications of the work produced" [39]. This perspective frames AI as a sophisticated tool rather than a collaborator, with Sahin noting that "Sophisticated laboratory equipment and complicated statistical software are not regarded as co-authors. The same logic applies to AI" [39].

The question of originality and autonomous contribution also undermines AI's authorship claims. Yildiz argues that "Language models powered by artificial intelligence lack consciousness, autonomy, and the ability to claim ownership of their contributions" and that AI systems "do not so much transform or recreate a wellspring of knowledge as they present it in its preexisting state" [35]. This view suggests that AI tools are fundamentally repositories and reorganizers of existing human knowledge rather than original contributors.

Another significant barrier to AI authorship is the lack of persistent identity, which Moffatt and colleagues identify as a fundamental limitation: "AI systems should not be included on the author by-line" not only because they "are incapable of taking responsibility for their work" but also because "AI tools also do not write in a meaningful sense nor do they have persistent identities" [20]. This absence of a stable, accountable entity makes attribution and responsibility impossible to maintain.

The Committee of Publishing Ethics (COPE) and the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) have formalized these objections, declaring that "generative AI tools are non-legal entities, therefore, AI chatbots can neither take responsibility for the manuscript nor manage conflicts of interest" [3]. Additionally, critics point out that "information generated by AI chatbots may be inaccurate, and prone to errors and biases" [3] [12], which further compromises their suitability for authorship.

These critiques have led to a broad consensus that while AI use in research should be acknowledged, actual authorship should remain limited to human contributors. As Ugwu and colleagues conclude, "While AI should not be listed as an author or co-author on its own, its use in the development of the work deserves acknowledgment" [33]. This position attempts to recognize the utility of AI tools in research while maintaining traditional standards of human accountability and responsibility in scholarly publishing.

Critics of AI co-authorship argue that AI systems fundamentally cannot meet established authorship criteria because they lack transparency, ac-

countability, moral reasoning capacity, and persistent identity. The inability of AI to take responsibility for content, understand ethical implications, or maintain an enduring scholarly identity forms the basis for widespread prohibition of AI authorship.

6 Arguments For AI Co-authorship

Despite the consensus against AI authorship in current academic publishing, some researchers argue for recognizing AI systems as legitimate co-authors. Tomlinson and colleagues propose that "one possible approach could be to recognize AI systems as co-authors of the work, alongside the human scholar who created the work," suggesting this would allow for "a more nuanced understanding of authorship, acknowledging the role of both the human scholar and the AI system in the creation of the work" [32]. They argue that as AI becomes increasingly competent, "reasons to deny AIs from being listed as authors will likely grow more difficult to sustain" [32].

This perspective is reinforced by the observation that current AI systems have evolved beyond mere writing assistants into more sophisticated collaborators. McGuire contends that "Large language AI tools have transcended their role as mere writing assistants and have emerged as sophisticated co-authors" that "generate content autonomously, suggest novel ideas, and facilitate the development of complex arguments" [18]. In this view, modern AI represents "creative collaborators, challenging conventional authorship norms" [18].

Some researchers go further, suggesting that AI co-authorship is not only inevitable but ethically appropriate. Serpa and colleagues argue that "although this is a challenging and even controversial position, it is inevitable and even ethically desirable to accept artificial intelligence, if it subsidizes sufficiently, as a (co-)author of any scientific publication" [25]. They advocate for beginning to develop frameworks for how "this attribution can be controlled and achieved with increasing respect for the ethics of scientific publication" [25].

The question of whether AI meets traditional authorship criteria remains complex and evolving. Cho and colleagues note that while current AI systems may not fully satisfy all three main criteria for authorship (intellectual contribution, accountability, and final approval), this assessment could change with technological advancement [4]. They observe that "recent generative AI models seem to be able to generate previously unseen contents, sometimes even offering seemingly fresh insights" [4]. While they acknowledge current limitations, they suggest that "if future research could provide enough evidence that AI can indeed meet all the three criteria, the answer to the question could be that AI is indeed qualified to be credited as a co-author" [4].

Interestingly, the question of AI authorship may ultimately depend on the evolving standards of specific academic communities. Alberth notes that "some journals and academic educational institutions may well consider including AI, such as ChatGPT, to be a valid co-author for a paper" [1]. As the debate is still emerging, continued discussion about AI's role in academic publishing

is essential "to enable us to make informed decisions" about how authorship standards might evolve [1].

> Some scholars argue that as AI systems become increasingly sophisticated in content generation and idea development, they deserve recognition as co-authors alongside human collaborators. Proponents suggest that evolving definitions of authorship may eventually accommodate AI contributions, particularly as the technology advances in capability and autonomy.

7 Recommended Practices for AI Attribution

While academic publishers overwhelmingly prohibit AI authorship, they increasingly require transparent attribution of AI's role in research. The heart of emerging best practices centers on comprehensive documentation of how AI tools contributed to research. Friederich and colleagues propose requiring a "documentary statement" that clearly outlines both human and AI contributions, similar to contribution statements already common in multi-authored publications that specify who provided research ideas, collected data, or performed analysis [5]. This approach aligns with guidelines from major publishers requiring documentation of large language model use in methods or acknowledgments sections.

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) emphasizes transparency regarding any AI involvement in research, requiring researchers to clearly disclose how AI tools were used [26]. This position is reinforced by the consensus that while AI should not receive authorship credit, "its use in the development of the work deserves acknowledgment" [33]. The acknowledgment approach maintains the distinction between tools and authors while ensuring readers understand how AI influenced the work.

For more granular attribution, some researchers propose standardized frameworks to track AI's specific contributions. Beel and colleagues have introduced the Research Attribution Markup Language (RAML), a JSON-based schema that can be embedded within research papers to track which sections were AI-generated, AI-edited, or AI-influenced. RAML defines various levels of AI involvement: "Generated" (fully AI-created content), "Edited" (AI-generated but human-revised), and "Suggested" (AI-suggested but primarily human-authored) [2]. This approach provides a structured method for transparent attribution that could enhance reproducibility and academic integrity.

Beyond formal academic requirements, AI providers themselves are establishing attribution guidelines. OpenAI, for instance, requires that "the role of AI in formulating the content is clearly disclosed" while maintaining that published content is attributed to the human user or company [7]. This aligns with journal policies requiring AI use acknowledgment in Methods or Acknowledgments sections.

The language used in many of these guidelines suggests potential evolution as AI technology advances. Nature's statement that large language models

"do not currently satisfy our authorship criteria" indicates that requirements may change as generative technology develops further [7]. This suggests that while current best practices focus on acknowledgment rather than authorship, attribution standards may continue to evolve alongside AI capabilities.

> As AI tools become increasingly integrated into academic research, clear attribution and disclosure practices are essential for maintaining transparency and integrity. Current recommendations include documenting AI contributions in dedicated sections, distinguishing between levels of AI involvement, and developing standardized frameworks for attribution.

8 Future Implications

As generative AI becomes increasingly sophisticated, the academic community faces profound questions about the future of authorship and collaboration in scholarly publishing. The current consensus against AI authorship may evolve as these systems continue to advance in capability and autonomy. Cho and colleagues note that while current AI systems may not fully satisfy all three main criteria for authorship—intellectual contribution, accountability, and final approval—this assessment could change with technological advancement [4]. They observe that "recent generative AI models seem to be able to generate previously unseen contents, sometimes even offering seemingly fresh insights" and suggest that "if future research could provide enough evidence that AI can indeed meet all the three criteria, the answer to the question could be that AI is indeed qualified to be credited as a co-author" [4].

The academic community must address several critical questions in the coming years, including whether AI should be credited as a co-author when involved in the writing process and how to measure and evaluate the relative contributions of human authors and AI systems [4]. These questions challenge traditional notions of authorship and may necessitate updating established definitions. As McGuire argues, "Large language AI tools have transcended their role as mere writing assistants and have emerged as sophisticated co-authors" that "generate content autonomously, suggest novel ideas, and facilitate the development of complex arguments" [18]. This evolution represents "a substantial reconfiguration of the authorship landscape" where "authors are no longer sole creators but work in tandem with AI counterparts" [18].

The future of AI attribution will likely involve more nuanced frameworks that go beyond current acknowledgment practices. Tomlinson and colleagues suggest that "one possible approach could be to recognize AI systems as co-authors of the work, alongside the human scholar who created the work," allowing for "a more nuanced understanding of authorship, acknowledging the role of both the human scholar and the AI system in the creation of the work" [32]. They further note that "as AI becomes increasingly competent, reasons to deny AIs from being listed as authors will likely grow more difficult to sustain" [32].

Some researchers go further, suggesting that AI co-authorship may become

not only inevitable but ethically appropriate. Serpa and colleagues argue that "although this is a challenging and even controversial position, it is inevitable and even ethically desirable to accept artificial intelligence, if it subsidizes sufficiently, as a (co-)author of any scientific publication" [25]. This perspective suggests that the academic community should begin developing frameworks for how "this attribution can be controlled and achieved with increasing respect for the ethics of scientific publication" [25].

The language used by publishers in their current guidelines suggests awareness that standards may evolve alongside AI technologies. Nature's statement that large language models "do not currently satisfy our authorship criteria" indicates openness to future changes as generative technology advances [7]. This suggests that attribution standards will continue to develop in response to AI capabilities, potentially moving beyond simple acknowledgment toward more sophisticated recognition of AI contributions.

The resolution of these questions will likely vary across different academic communities and disciplines. As ChatGPT itself reportedly noted in one study, "whether AI can co-author a paper also depends crucially on the journal tradition and specific academic community" [1]. This observation highlights that "some journals and academic educational institutions may well consider including AI, such as ChatGPT, to be a valid co-author for a paper" [1]. As this debate continues to unfold, ongoing discussion about AI's role in academic publishing remains essential "to enable us to make informed decisions" about how authorship standards might evolve [1].

The integration of AI in academic publishing is poised to transform authorship norms, requiring the academic community to address complex questions about AI-human collaboration. Future developments may include evolving attribution frameworks, reevaluation of intellectual contribution criteria, and potential recognition of AI systems as legitimate collaborators as their capabilities advance.

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Generative AI has been used to prepare this manuscript.

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