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Prevalence and Content of Generative Artificial Intelligence Use Policies in Iranian Medical Science Journals

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Abstract

Background: The rapid growth of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools has created new opportunities for scientific publishing while also introducing challenges related to research integrity and editorial ethics. Although awareness of these opportunities and challenges is increasing globally, there is limited evidence regarding how Iranian journals have addressed the use of AI through formal policies in scientific publishing. This study investigates the prevalence and content of AI use policies in Iranian medical science journals.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted using medical journals listed in the Iranian Research Information System (IRIS). Of the 429 journals initially identified, inactive or inaccessible journals were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 411 journals. From August to October 2025, each journal website was manually examined using a structured checklist designed to assess 25 variables related to the existence and specific content of AI use policies. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods in Microsoft Excel and SPSS.

Results: Among 411 journals, 117 (28.5%) had a publicly accessible AI use policy. The adoption of such policies was significantly more prevalent in English-language journals, those indexed in major international databases, and journals affiliated with the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). Among the journals with policies, the most commonly included elements were mandatory disclosure of AI use (99.1%), clarification of permission type (98.3%), and author responsibility (88.0%). In contrast, only a small proportion of journals specified the consequences of policy violations or provided guidance on AI-assisted translation.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that AI policy development within Iranian medical science journals remains in its nascent stages. It is essential to establish clearer and more comprehensive AI usage policies to promote transparency, accountability, and responsible AI practices in scientific publishing.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence, Publication Ethics, Editorial Policy, Medical Science Journals, Iran

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Introduction

Scientific journals serve as the primary platforms for disseminating research findings, validating scientific methods, and fostering academic discussions (1). The emergence of new technologies, particularly generative artificial intelligence tools such as Large Language Models (LLMs) and chatbots, has created significant opportunities for scientific research and academic practice. These innovations have been widely embraced by academics, contributing to rapid and transformative changes in the culture of scientific publishing (2, 3). Studies have demonstrated that AI tools possess considerable potential in supporting scientific research (4). These tools assist authors by expediting writing, enhancing editing and translation, facilitating literature review and citation management, generating drafts, analyzing data, and summarizing results (5-8). Additionally, they aid journal staff in

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↑What is "already known" in this topic:
The increasing use of AI tools in scholarly publishing has raised significant ethical and editorial concerns. Although many international journals have begun to establish policies regarding their use and disclosure, there is limited evidence concerning the AI-related policies adopted by domestic journals.

→What this article adds:
This study is one of the first to systematically examine the AI use policies of medical science journals in Iran. The findings indicate that many Iranian medical journals are still in the early stages of developing AI policies and would benefit from clearer and more consistent guidelines to promote responsible AI use in scientific publishing.

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tasks such as detecting plagiarism, editing, and reviewing manuscripts (9).

Although AI tools provide substantial benefits, their use also raises significant ethical, legal, and academic concerns (8, 10). These concerns include the generation of inaccurate or fabricated content, false citations, and invalid references (4, 6, 9), as well as risks such as plagiarism (5), bias, data manipulation, and misinformation (4, 11).

Furthermore, AI's capability to produce human-like text has heightened concerns regarding academic integrity and authorship responsibility (12, 13). To address these challenges, publishers and editorial organizations have begun to create and implement policies for the responsible use of AI in scientific publishing (7, 14). Journals such as Science and Nature explicitly prohibit listing AI tools as authors (14). However, research indicates that strict bans may encourage unreported AI use, while unclear or absent guidelines can lead to inconsistent practices among authors and editors (8). Consequently, journals are increasingly expected to establish clear and comprehensive procedures to ensure integrity, transparency, and consistency in scientific publishing (7, 14, 15).

Previous studies indicate substantial variation in the adoption of AI policies across journals and disciplines. A review of physical medicine and rehabilitation journals found that nearly half of the titles indexed in MEDLINE had established policies regarding AI use (7). Among the 162 publishers listed as members of the International Association of Scientific, Technical, and Medical Publishers (STM), only about one-third had publicly available policies on AI use (4). In the fields of bioethics and health humanities, only 16% of 50 journals had specific AI policies (15). Other studies have reported higher adoption rates among leading journals, with one report indicating that 87% of top journals and 24% of major publishers have policies on generative AI, nearly all of which prohibit AI authorship (2). Similarly, an analysis of 300 leading journals found that over half had adopted AI policies, with many emphasizing the importance of clearly disclosing AI use in the methods section or acknowledgments (14).

A study examining psychiatry and mental health journals found that only 39% had formal policies governing the use of artificial intelligence. Higher-ranked journals were more likely to implement such policies, influenced by factors such as affiliation with large publishers, frequent policy updates, and increased editorial awareness (16). In a broader context, a cross-disciplinary analysis of AI policies governing peer review in high- and medium-impact journals revealed that although most journals had established AI policies, their implementation varied significantly across disciplines. Notably, fields within science, technology, and medicine (STM) adopted more restrictive approaches compared to the social sciences and humanities (17).

Despite the increasing international emphasis on AI governance, there is a notable lack of systematic evidence regarding AI policies in Iranian scientific journals. As Iranian scholarly publishing expands and gains greater visibility in global indexing systems, it is becoming increasingly important to understand how these journals regulate the use of generative AI. This study aims to investigate the existence and content of policies related to the use of generative AI in Iranian medical science journals. Specifically, the study has two objectives: 1) to determine the prevalence of generative AI use policies in Iranian medical science journals and to examine how policy adoption varies according to journal characteristics, such as publication language, indexing status, and COPE membership; and 2) to analyze the content of these policies in terms of the extent to which they address specific applications of generative AI and key ethical requirements, including disclosure, authorship, and author responsibility.

Methods

This study employed a cross-sectional design to assess the prevalence and content of generative AI use policies in Iranian medical science journals. The list of journals was initially obtained from the Iranian Research Information System (IRIS). As of August 2025, this database included 429 medical science journals across various subject categories. Out of the 429 journals initially identified, 18 were excluded due to inaccessible, inactive, or defunct websites during the data collection period. This resulted in a final sample of 411 titles. The research team developed a structured checklist to systematically collect and evaluate data on AI use policies (Appendix A). The checklist was created based on existing peer-reviewed studies evaluating journal and publisher AI policies, as well as guidance from major academic publishers, and was reviewed and refined by the research team prior to data collection (2, 4, 5, 15, 18-22). Content validity of the checklist was assessed through expert review by team members with experience in publication ethics and journal policy analysis, and feedback from the pilot phase was incorporated to finalize the instrument. Since journals were not independently assessed in duplicate, formal inter-rater reliability statistics (e.g., Cohen's kappa) were not calculated. Instead, consistency and accuracy were ensured through reviewer training, pilot testing, resolution of ambiguous cases through group consensus, and random cross-checking of extracted data by other team members.

The complete set of journals was allocated to two trained reviewers, who assessed journal websites from August to October 2025. They examined key sections, including "About the Journal," "Instructions for Authors," "Publication Ethics," and "Peer Review Process," to identify explicit statements or guidelines regarding AI use. Prior to data collection, a virtual training session was conducted, and the checklist was pilot-tested on a sample of 10 journals. Two additional researchers independently reviewed the extracted information from these pilot journals to verify consistency and ensure uniform application of the checklist. Ambiguous cases identified during the pilot phase were discussed by the research team, leading to minor adjustments in the checklist and extraction instructions before the commencement of full data collection.

During the data collection process, uncertainties regarding policy interpretation or website content were ad-

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dressed through consultations with other team members, and additional independent checks were conducted as necessary. Once data extraction was completed, other members of the research team randomly reviewed portions of the dataset to confirm data quality, accuracy, and consistency. The collected data were imported into Microsoft Excel for compilation, cleaning, and analysis. Descriptive statistics were calculated using Microsoft Excel, while inferential tests were conducted using IBM SPSS (version 28). Pearson's chi-square tests of independence were employed to examine associations between journal characteristics, specifically the language of publication, indexing status, COPE membership or adherence, and the presence of AI use policies. When expected cell counts were small, Fisher's exact test was utilized as an alternative to the chi-square test.

Results

Prevalence of Generative AI Use Policies in Iranian Medical Science Journals by Journal Characteristics

A total of 411 Iranian medical science journals were reviewed to evaluate the prevalence of policies regarding the use of generative AI tools. Overall, fewer than one-third of the journals (28.5%) had a publicly available AI use policy. The presence of AI policies varied significantly across key journal characteristics. The language of publication was a critical factor, with English-language journals being significantly more likely to report AI policies compared to Farsi-language journals, while no policies were identified among the very small number of bilingual titles. This overall relationship was statistically significant ($\chi^2(2, N = 411) = 21.23$, $P < 0.001$). Given the small size of the bilingual subgroup, an exact comparison between English and Farsi journals was conducted, which confirmed the robustness of this association (Fisher's exact test, two-sided, $P < 0.001$). Indexing status was also significantly associated with policy adoption. Journals indexed in at least one major international database, such as Web of Science, Scopus, or PubMed, were significantly more likely to report AI use policies than non-indexed journals ($\chi^2(1, N = 411) = 9.19$, $P = 0.002$). This finding remained consistent when evaluated using Fisher's exact test. A significant association was also observed between COPE membership or adherence and the presence of AI use policies. COPE-affiliated journals were significantly more likely to provide AI use guidance than journals without such affiliation ($\chi^2(1, N = 411) = 32.59$, $P < 0.001$). This association remained statistically significant when assessed using Fisher's exact test (Table 1).

Content of Generative AI Use Policies in Iranian Medical Science Journals

An analysis of the 117 journals that published AI use policies revealed that nearly all addressed the permission status of generative AI use. Specifically, 98.3% of journals explicitly stated whether generative AI was prohibited, conditionally allowed, or permitted without restrictions. Most journals permit AI use for specific purposes, such as language editing or text refinement, provided that authors disclose its use, while a few completely prohibit AI in all cases. Disclosure requirements were nearly universal, with 99.1% of policies mandating authors to disclose AI use. In most instances, disclosure was obligatory regardless of the purpose or extent of AI involvement. A small number of journals differentiated between types of use, typically exempting routine grammar correction from disclosure while requiring it for content creation or analytical tasks. The location for AI use disclosure was specified in 81.2% of policies. Most journals instructed authors to include disclosures in sections such as acknowledgments, methods, cover letters, or author contribution statements, while a few required a separate declaration. Approximately 60.7% of journals provided sample disclosure wording, and just over half (53.0%) explicitly referenced international editorial guidelines. These policies cited organizations such as COPE, ICMJE, EASE, and WAME to justify their positions and demonstrate alignment with global publishing standards.

Explicit consequences for policy violations were relatively rare (11.1%). When mentioned, sanctions typically included manuscript rejection, post-publication retraction, or restrictions on future submissions. In contrast, author responsibility was strongly emphasized, with 88.0% of journals clearly stating that authors are fully responsible for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of work produced with or without AI assistance. Similarly, 70.1% of policies explicitly prohibited listing AI tools as authors. Regarding specific applications, the use of AI for writing or text revision was addressed in most policies (91.5%), with many journals prohibiting fully AI-generated text while allowing AI-assisted editing when transparently disclosed. AI-assisted translation was rarely addressed (11.1%). Policies concerning AI-generated figures, tables, or visual materials were relatively common (78.6%), with most journals prohibiting such use due to concerns about data fabrication or lack of verifiability. Approximately

Table 1. Prevalence of Generative AI Use Policies in Iranian Medical Science Journals by Selected Characteristics (N=411)

Journal Characteristics	Category	Number of Journals (n)	Journals with AI Policy (n, %)	χ^2 (df)	*P*-value
Language of Publication	English	283	100 (35.3%)	21.23 (2)	< 0.001 (Fisher $P < 0.001$) $P < 0.001$
	Farsi	126	17 (13.5%)		
	Bilingual	2	0		
Indexing in Major Databases	Indexed	180	65 (36.1%)	9.19 (1)	0.002 (Fisher $P = 0.003$)
	Not indexed	231	52 (22.5%)		
COPE membership or Adherence	Member or adherent	337	116 (34.4%)	32.59 (1)	< 0.001 (Fisher $P < 0.001$)
	Not member	74	1 (1.4%)		
Overall		411	117 (28.5%)		

χ^2 = chi-square test of independence; df = degrees of freedom

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Table 2. Summary of Content Elements Found in Iranian Medical Science Journals' Generative AI Use Policies (n=117)

Policy Aspect	Description	Journals Mentioning the Aspect (n, %)
Permission Type	The policy specifies whether the use of AI is prohibited, conditionally allowed, or unrestricted.	115 (98.3%)
Mandatory Disclosure	Policy mandates that authors disclose any utilization of AI tools.	116 (99.1%)
Specification of Disclosure Location	The policy specifies the instances in which the use of AI must be disclosed within the manuscript.	95 (81.2%)
Example of Disclosure Statement	The policy provides sample wording and templates for disclosing the use of AI.	71 (60.7%)
Reference to International Guidelines	The policy references international standards and recommendations (e.g., COPE, ICMJE, EASE, WAME).	62 (53.0%)
Consequences of Policy Violation	The policy outlines sanctions for non-compliance with AI usage guidelines.	13 (11.1%)
Author Responsibility	The policy stipulates that authors retain full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of their manuscripts.	103 (88.0%)
AI Authorship	The policy clarifies that AI tools cannot be listed as authors.	82 (70.1%)
AI Use for Writing or Rewriting Text	The policy addresses the use of AI for drafting, paraphrasing, or editing text.	107 (91.5%)
AI Use for Translation	Policy addresses AI use for translation	13 (11.1%)
AI Use for Image or Table Generation	The policy addresses the use of AI for the creation of figures, tables, and other visual elements.	92 (78.6%)
AI Use for Coding or Data Analysis	The policy addresses the use of AI for programming, statistical analysis, and data modeling.	60 (51.3%)
AI Use by Reviewers or Editors	The policy addresses the use of artificial intelligence (AI) during peer review and editorial decision-making.	45 (38.5%)
Policy Under Development or Revision	Policy indicates that the guidelines are currently under review and may be subject to future updates.	28 (23.9%)

half of the journals (51.3%) addressed the use of AI for coding or data analysis, generally permitting it under strict conditions, such as full disclosure and independent verification of outputs. Finally, AI use in peer review or editorial decision-making was disclosed in 38.5% of policies, and nearly all explicitly prohibited such use due to confidentiality and accountability concerns. About one-quarter of journals (23.9%) indicated that their AI policies were temporary, under review, or subject to future changes, reflecting the evolving standards in this area (Table 2).

Discussion

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the presence and content of policies regarding the use of generative AI in Iranian medical science journals. Overall, the findings indicate inconsistent practices across these journals, with fewer than one-third having formalized guidance on the use of AI tools. This proportion is lower than that reported by Behroozinia and Khosrawi, as well as by Lund and Naheem, who found that approximately half of the journals in their samples had implemented AI use policies (7, 14). It is more closely aligned with the lower levels reported by Bhavsar et al. (4), suggesting that the adoption of AI policies varies substantially across publishing communities and regions. This low prevalence indicates that the Iranian scholarly communication system has not yet fully addressed the ethical, methodological, and editorial implications of AI use.

Statistically significant differences were observed based on journal characteristics. Journals that publish in English, are indexed in major international databases, or report COPE membership or adherence were significantly more likely to have AI use policies. This pattern suggests that journals with greater international visibility may face heightened expectations to address emerging ethical and editorial concerns, including the use of AI. In other words, the disparity in policy adoption between Persian- and English-language journals may stem from the increased international visibility of English-language journals and the corresponding pressure on them to meet established publishing standards. Conversely, Persian-language journals may encounter fewer external demands to formalize policies regarding the use of artificial intelligence tools. Our findings align with international evidence indicating that journals with higher rankings and impact are more likely to adopt formal AI use policies. This trend likely reflects closer affiliations with large publishers, more frequent policy updates, and increased editorial exposure to emerging AI-related guidance (16). Furthermore, policy adoption and enforcement appear to vary by disciplinary context, with journals in science, technology, and medicine (STM) generally implementing more explicit and restrictive AI policies compared to those in the social sciences and humanities (17).

Analysis of policy content revealed that most journals emphasize broad principles rather than specific instructions. The majority of policies focus on whether the use of AI is permitted and highlight the importance of disclosure and author responsibility. However, fewer journals provide clear guidance on how disclosures should be made in practice, including where they should be positioned in the manuscript and how they should be articulated. This lack of detail may result in inconsistent reporting by authors and create uncertainty for editors during the manuscript review process.

Insufficient clarity in policy design can have significant practical consequences. Journals that lack detailed disclosure standards or clearly defined enforcement measures

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may struggle to consistently identify and address instances of undisclosed or inappropriate AI use. Over time, these inconsistencies could undermine editorial credibility, transparency standards, and alignment with international indexing expectations. Therefore, journals and publishers are advised to establish clear guidelines regarding how authors should report the use of AI, explicitly outline the consequences of policy violations, and provide examples of acceptable and unacceptable AI applications. Furthermore, enforcement mechanisms are rarely specified, which can further limit the effectiveness of existing policies. Without clear consequences for policy violations, editors and reviewers may find it challenging to consistently address undisclosed or inappropriate use of AI.

The discussion of specific AI applications varied significantly. AI-assisted writing and text editing were mentioned most frequently, likely due to their widespread use and direct impact on manuscript preparation. In contrast, the use of AI for translation, data analysis, and image generation was less frequently cited, possibly owing to heightened concerns regarding accuracy, verification, and accountability.

The observation that some journals characterize their AI policies as provisional or under development underscores the evolving nature of AI governance in scholarly publishing. Many editorial boards seem to acknowledge the necessity for guidance while still adapting to rapidly changing technologies and standards. From a policy and institutional perspective, these findings clearly delineate the current status of Iranian medical journals in aligning with international publishing standards and integrating technological advancements, including the increasing utilization of AI tools. The checklist developed in this study offers a practical framework for journal editorial boards to create, enhance, or evaluate their AI policies. Future research could expand this analysis to other academic disciplines, investigate policy changes over time, and assess the effectiveness and enforcement of implemented policies. Furthermore, qualitative studies involving editors or peer reviewers may yield insights into how AI policies are comprehended and applied in practice.

Limitations

A major limitation of this study is its reliance solely on publicly available information from journal websites, which may not fully reflect internal editorial practices, informal guidance, or policies directly communicated to authors during the submission or peer review process. Additionally, the study examined the existence of AI use policies and outlined their content but did not evaluate the consistency with which these policies are implemented or enforced in practice, nor how editors and reviewers interpret or apply them in actual submission scenarios. The analysis was also confined to medical science journals in Iran, potentially limiting the applicability of the findings to other academic fields or national publishing contexts, particularly those with different regulatory environments or publishing infrastructures. Furthermore, due to the rapid evolution of generative AI technologies and related editorial guidance, some journal policies may have been updated shortly after data collection, despite efforts to incorporate the most recent information during the study period.

Conclusion

In conclusion, most Iranian medical science journals remain in the early stages of developing formal policies for the use of generative AI in scholarly publishing. When such policies are established, they exhibit significant variability in scope, clarity, and alignment with internationally recognized editorial standards. The limited and inconsistent adoption of AI policies underscores the necessity for more systematic and coordinated guidance at both the journal and publisher levels. Establishing clearer, more comprehensive, and regularly updated guidelines for AI usage will be essential to enhance transparency, safeguard research integrity, and facilitate the responsible and ethical integration of generative AI technologies within Iran's medical publishing sector.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions

MA: Conceptualization, Methodology. MH: Conceptualization, Methodology. HA: Validation, Investigation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review and Editing. AE: Formal Analysis, Validation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review and Editing.

Ethical Considerations

Not applicable.

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Data Availability

The dataset developed for this research is available upon reasonable request.

AI Use Statement

ChatGPT 5.1 was used only to improve the clarity and readability of specific sections of the manuscript. No other research activities, including data collection, analysis, or drafting the paper, were conducted using AI tools. All authors have reviewed the final manuscript and accept full responsibility for its content

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Appendix A. Checklist for Evaluating Generative AI Use Policies in Iranian Medical Science Journals

No.	Checklist Item	Description / Response options
1	English Title of Journal	Full English title of the journal
2	Persian Title of Journal	Full Persian title of the journal
3	Publisher	Institution or organization responsible for the journal
4	COPE Membership or Adherence	Reported / Not reported
5	Language of Publication	English / Farsi / Bilingual
6	Indexing in Major Databases (Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed)	Indexed / Not indexed
7	Journal Website	URL of the official journal website
8	Presence of AI Use Policy	Yes / No
9	URL of Policy Page	Web address of the page containing the AI use policy
10	Language of Policy	English / Farsi / Bilingual
11	Date of Last Update	Most recent revision or update date of the AI policy
12	Permission Type	Mentioned / Not mentioned
13	Mandatory Disclosure	Mentioned / Not mentioned
14	Specification of Disclosure Location	Mentioned / Not mentioned
15	Example of Disclosure Statement	Mentioned / Not mentioned
16	Reference to International Guidelines	Mentioned / Not mentioned
17	Consequences of Policy Violation	Mentioned / Not mentioned
18	Author Responsibility	Mentioned / Not mentioned
19	AI Authorship	Mentioned / Not mentioned
20	AI Use for Writing or Rewriting Text	Mentioned / Not mentioned
21	AI Use for Translation	Mentioned / Not mentioned
22	AI Use for Image or Table Generation	Mentioned / Not mentioned
23	AI Use for Coding or Data Analysis	Mentioned / Not mentioned
24	AI Use by Reviewers or Editors	Mentioned / Not mentioned
25	Policy Under Development or Revision	Mentioned / Not mentioned

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