



# Unethical Editorial Practices in a journal: Extending Unfounded Accusations to Third Parties without Direct Communication

Pathum Sookaromdee<sup>1</sup>, Viroj Wiwanitkit<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Private Academic Consultant, Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>2</sup>Adjunct Professor, Joseph Ayobabalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji, Nigeria.

## Abstract

This article addresses the unethical editorial practices demonstrated by in rejecting a manuscript submitted by author “A”, the corresponding author, based on concerns over the prolific authorship of “A” and his co-author “B”, as well as unfounded accusations about the potential use of artificial intelligence (AI) in previous publications co-authored by “B” and “C”. The decision to extend these concerns, which were entirely unrelated to “A”’s current submission, to him is deeply problematic. The accusations regarding AI use are especially unfounded, given the technological context of the articles' publication in 2018 and 2020, when generative AI was not capable of producing scholarly-level content. The rejection based on perceived “excessive” publishing, rather than any factual concerns about the manuscript, signals a deeper issue of editorial bias and academic jealousy. This article calls attention to how such negative sentiment can cloud editorial judgment and undermine the principles of fairness, professionalism, and academic integrity in peer review.

**Keywords:** Unethical editorial practices, manuscript rejection, academic publishing, academic jealousy, artificial intelligence, editorial bias, academic freedom, transparency

## Introduction

The editorial process in academic publishing is essential for maintaining the integrity and rigor of scholarly communication. Editors are expected to evaluate manuscripts based on their academic quality, rigor, and relevance to the field. Unfortunately, a recent editorial decision from a journal reveals a breakdown in these practices, resulting in the rejection of a manuscript by corresponding author “A” and co-author “B”. The rejection was grounded in an unfounded accusation of artificial intelligence (AI) use in unrelated publications co-authored by “B” and “C”, as well as concerns over “A” and “B”’s prolific publication history.

While there may be legitimate questions to raise about publishing practices, the editorial board's decision to extend concerns from past letters to “A”'s current submission is a clear violation of fairness. Moreover, the accusation of AI involvement is especially misguided, given the technological context of the articles' publication in 2018 and 2020 [1 -2], when generative AI was not capable of producing scholarly-level content. These editorial decisions appear to be fueled by negative biases toward prolific authors, potentially driven by academic jealousy. This article highlights the unethical nature of these editorial actions and how academic jealousy and bias can influence peer review and publishing practices.

*“During the review we have noted that the corresponding author has almost 400 publications this year (mostly letters to the editor) and the second author has more than 4,000 publications, more than 500 this year, and most of them also letters. This correspondence addresses topics from extraordinarily varied disciplines and in many cases appears to have been produced through applications of artificial intelligence (AI). Among them we have found two letters to the editor in our journal from the second author: “C”, “B”. Retraction of publications. Gac Sanit. 2020 Jul-Aug;34(4):417. doi: 10.1016/j.gaceta.2019.09.007 and “C”, “B”. Hotline for Zika virus. Gac Sanit. 2018 May-Jun;32(3):318. doi: 10.1016/j.gaceta.2017.06.009.”*

## **Extending Concerns to Unrelated Authors**

The rejection letter sent to “A” was based not on the content or quality of the manuscript submitted but rather on concerns about the prolific authorship of “A” and his co-author, “B”. The journal expressed unease regarding the large volume of letters to the editor published by “B” in various fields, and even more concerning, it raised the possibility that two previous letters co-authored by “B” and “C” involved the use of artificial intelligence (AI). However, these concerns are entirely unrelated to “A”'s current manuscript, and the editorial board failed to directly address these concerns with “C”, the corresponding author of the prior publications. Instead, the board unjustly extended the accusations to “A”, effectively holding him responsible for the actions of other author who had no involvement in his current submission.

This approach is not only unfair but also shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the proper editorial process. If there were valid concerns regarding those previous publications, including the potential use of AI or authorship practices, these should have been directed at “C”, not at “A”. By failing to communicate directly with “C” and instead placing the burden of those concerns on an unrelated author, the editorial board undermines the principles of due process, fairness, and transparency that are essential to academic publishing.

## **Unfounded Accusations of AI Use**

Another significant issue with the editorial decision is the accusation regarding the use of artificial intelligence in the previous publications co-authored by “B” and “C”. The journal's editorial board raised concerns that these articles, Retraction of Publications (2020) and Hotline for Zika Virus (2018), may have been generated with the aid of AI. However, this accusation is both unfounded and factually incorrect. At the time of these publications, in 2018 and 2020, generative AI tools capable of producing coherent and academically rigorous content—such as

GPT-3—had not been developed or publicly released. Therefore, it is highly improbable that these articles were produced using AI, as the technology simply did not exist in the form necessary to generate academic content of this nature.

By raising these concerns without any evidence or understanding of the technological limitations of AI at the time, the editorial board has made an unsupported and damaging accusation. Such accusations are not only misleading but also reflect a lack of critical understanding of the capabilities of AI and how it intersects with academic publishing. The suggestion that the articles involved AI use in the absence of any factual basis is deeply unethical and reflects poor editorial practice.

## **The Role of Academic Jealousy and Bias in Editorial Decisions**

Underlying these editorial decisions may be a more subtle, but nonetheless problematic, issue of academic jealousy or bias. “B”’s prolific authorship, especially his frequent publication of letters to the editor in various fields, seems to have triggered negative perceptions within the editorial board. In some academic circles, a high volume of publications can be seen as suspicious or indicative of a lack of depth or rigor. However, letters to the editor are a legitimate and valuable form of scholarly communication, and publishing at a high rate does not inherently reflect a lack of quality or academic rigor.

The decision to scrutinize “A” and “B”’s work, particularly without any direct evidence of wrongdoing, and to extend these concerns to an unrelated submission suggests that negative feelings toward prolific authors may have influenced the board’s decision-making. This is an unfortunate reality in academia, where prolific researchers may be unfairly targeted or viewed with suspicion by their peers. Academic jealousy, whether it is conscious or subconscious, can lead to biased decision-making that harms authors who are merely productive and engaged in scholarly discourse.

## **The Ethical Breakdown of Editorial Practices**

The editorial decision to reject “A”’s manuscript based on concerns about “A” and “B”’s prolific publishing history and unsupported AI accusations against unrelated past publications represents a serious ethical breakdown in the peer review process. The failure to directly address these concerns with the correct author (“C”) and the misapplication of these concerns to an innocent authors in the previous 2 published article that is falsely accused (“A” and “C”) violate the principles of fairness, transparency, and due process. Furthermore, the unfounded AI accusations reflect a lack of understanding of the technological context in which the articles were published, raising serious concerns about the professionalism and ethical standards of the editorial board.

## **Recommendations for Improving Editorial Integrity**

To prevent similar issues from arising in the future, the following recommendations are offered:

- 1. Direct Communication with Relevant Authors:** Any concerns regarding past publications, including allegations of AI use or authorship practices, should be communicated directly to

the authors involved-in this case, “C”, the corresponding author-not to an unrelated co-author like “A”. Editors should ensure their concerns are targeted appropriately and that they follow clear procedures for addressing such issues.

2. **Evidence-Based Editorial Decisions:** Accusations, particularly those related to AI or academic misconduct, should always be based on verifiable evidence. The editorial board should ensure they fully understand the technological context before raising concerns about AI use, especially when generative AI tools were not available at the time of publication.
3. **Fairness and Objectivity:** Editors should strive to evaluate manuscripts based on their merit, not the authorship history or perceived “prolificness” of a particular researcher. Academic productivity, particularly in the form of letters to the editor, should not be used as a basis for bias or judgment about the quality of an author’s work.
4. **Avoiding Academic Jealousy:** It is essential for editorial boards to recognize and counteract any potential biases, including those driven by academic jealousy or negative perceptions of prolific authors. Decisions should be made impartially, with a focus on the quality of the manuscript and its contribution to the field.

## Conclusion

The editorial practices demonstrated by the journal in this case reflect serious ethical lapses. By extending concerns about past publications to an unrelated manuscript, failing to communicate with the correct author, and raising unsupported accusations about AI use, the editorial board has acted in a way that undermines the principles of fairness and professionalism in academic publishing. These actions appear to be influenced by personal biases, potentially stemming from academic jealousy or negative feelings about prolific authors. To restore confidence in the journal and ensure fairness in the future, the journal must adopt more transparent, evidence-based, and impartial editorial practices, free from the influence of personal bias or misunderstanding of technological contexts.

## References

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