



Letter to the Editor: The Use of Artificial Intelligence for Manuscript Writing Violates the Core Principle of Originality

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Dear Editor,

Thank you for publishing the recent article titled “The Use of Artificial Intelligence for Manuscript Writing Violates the Core Principle of Originality”.¹ I appreciated the opportunity to read Dr. Sergio Huerta’s thoughts on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as it pertains to originality in manuscript writing. I want to offer several comments to build further upon this discussion. My main points are:

(1) the comparison of AI assistance in scientific writing to informal and interpersonal correspondence is a false equivalence,

(2) originality is a significant value in all forms of expression, but it needs to be well-defined in this context to evaluate AI’s role,

(3) the suggestion that “today is not the day”¹ for journals to consider submissions assisted by AI is a philosophy that will leave a publication far behind its competitors.

The Purpose of Scientific Writing and Avoiding a False Equivalence with Other Forms of Expression

When reading literature, we wear a “critical reading lens” that influences how we analyze and interpret the work.² Among other possibilities, the lens may incline us to view the socio-economic, gender, or psychoanalytic perspective. In the same way, as an author, you write with what one may consider a “critical writing pen.” The purpose and goal of your writing should influence how you write and how your work is evaluated. In the original article, Huerta asks whether “scientific writing [is] not deserving of th[e] same scrutiny” as that which we apply to wedding vows. I would suggest that this is setting up a false equivalence, and the two do not deserve the same type of scrutiny. The purpose of scientific writing should be to deliver a precise, clear, and objective message based on research observations.³ Wedding vows, on the other hand, are meant to express emotional, subjective, and, at times, abstract concepts that are highly context-dependent for those involved. Thus, the comparison of AI assistance in these two writing styles is

not appropriate. Instead, I propose a better pairing: political writing or speech. While these may also appeal to emotion, they are meant to be clear, precise, and objective representations of a politician’s beliefs. Voters would be appalled if they discovered that their preferred candidate used artificial intelligence to generate their campaign messages. Why? Because voters expect those messages to be the politician’s *original* analysis of a given scenario. Further, because the message is meant to be conveyed to a large audience, it is a more apt comparison to scientists expecting *original* thoughts from a scientific journal. Altogether, I recognize the author’s intention in setting up the comparison, but I strongly urge him to reconsider the types of writing he chooses to compare.

Defining the Core Principle of Originality in an AI World

Huerta emphasizes that the “core of [his] argument is ORIGINALITY”, yet he does not define this principle. While one might suggest that originality does not require a definition, I would argue that there are significant gray areas. For example, Huerta recognizes that programs such as Microsoft Word® have positively impacted manuscript writing. One key feature of Word® is its ability to offer suggestions about language and syntax. Would the use of these suggestions violate originality? If one restructures a sentence that would have otherwise been left untouched, is that still one’s original writing style? At what point does a work cease to be one’s own and become unoriginal? Although I agree with the principle espoused by the author, I suggest that he offer a specific and clear definition of originality as he views it. Then, he may provide succinct examples of how AI violates this definition. Otherwise, I believe that his argument does not stand scrutiny. If one provides AI with their data, results, and discussion points, yet it creates the manuscript, at which moment and how has originality been violated? A definition is necessary to clarify this point.

Looking Forward to Avoid Getting Left Behind

My final comment is in regard to the author's concluding suggestion that "today is not the day" and that "we are not ready" for AI in scientific writing. While I agree that the pace of artificial intelligence is outpacing society's ability to comprehend these advancements, I truly believe that there is no turning back. We have unlocked Pandora's box, and the only option is to face that which lies within. All creators, from artists to television producers to scientists, must learn to live in this new landscape. Journals which choose to neglect or censor AI will rapidly be outcompeted by those which utilize it to their advantage. In the same way that authors report the tools they use in their methods, I would urge journals, including this one, to develop guidelines for how authors report the use of AI. I would suggest that rather than broad declarations of how *much* content was written by AI, authors should clearly delineate *how* they used AI. For example, if AI performed data analysis, this should be cited in the same manner as other statistical tools. If AI was used for generating parts of the discussion, authors should be required to report the exact query input so that the intention is clear. Authors must take full responsibility for any mistakes or falsehoods produced by AI, and it should always be the role of the researcher to validate the veracity of their publication.

Concluding Statement

Dr. Sergio Huerta's article raises a profound ethical question pertinent to all forms of expression. I admire the value that he places on originality and his evident respect for the art of writing. My points in this letter are not to diminish or repudiate the philosophy and intention of his article; rather, I hope to embellish and build upon this discussion by providing a constructive critique. In the future, an analysis of *why* scientists write, how we define *originality*, and how we move *forward* as a society will be critical for navigating the new age of artificial intelligence.

References

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Response

I am pleased that this editorial has ignited controversy and hopefully this will provide a platform to continue to discuss the use of AI in manuscript publishing. We need to continue talking about this and I welcome further feedback on the comments based on the original editorial.¹

I will address the response according to B. Popokh's points of contention.

1. The idea of using a metaphor should be to elicit an immediate "gut" response of what main controversial issue is about. Metaphors sometimes rely on fictional issues or characters to provide the intended effect. For instance, I recently reviewed the issue of futility in medicine. Futility is derived from the Latin word "leaky". In classical mythology, Daughters of Danus were condemned to carry water in leaky buckets. The task was then futile. This metaphor today is still a good analogy of what medical futility means to physicians. The issue I discussed was about being ORIGINAL not about the types of writing or to whom they should be written to. In fact, deciding something that was emotional and easily relatable was a deliberate strategy. It is because, to me, this issue is as emotional as writing something and lying to my wife about it. If we used an entirely similar connection, then it would not be a metaphor. It would be stating the same fact with different words. Nevertheless, I will use another metaphor later that would address AI in manuscript writing. But again, this is a metaphor.
2. The second point about defining ORIGINALITY. In the context that I presented the question of originality is not something that requires explanation, but experience with the issue at hand. On August 26, 2016, I ran the Mexico City Marathon. The next day, as I prepared to find my result on the official webpage of the race, I recognized that about one third of participants were disqualified for cutting corners and not running to the check points that would register their times. It is not difficult for anyone who knows nothing about marathons to say that this was clear cheating and that the runners should not be considered finishers of the Mexico City Marathon that year. But most of those cheaters did cross the finish line and they probably received a medal and a finisher's T-shirt. There were even some allegations that some individuals had taken the subway to get from one point to the next. I do not think anyone could argue that that is a clear violation of the sport. Just as doping would be for any sport.

later learned. It all has to do with the scope of the lenses that we use to see the reality that we have in front of us.

It gets trickier if we start talking about the strategies of other runners. On October 12, 2019, Eliud Kipchoge broke the barrier of running a sub-2-hour marathon in Vienna. However, this was not an official record, because he had a specific course, he had several experts looking at the weather conditions, he had nutritionists, he also had nine sets of pacers that were shielding him from the wind. There was always a truck in front of him that also served as a pacer. The original idea was to see if this could be done. But, during the controversy of whether this was an official title or not (which it was not), the Nike shoes that he used were also brought up by some critics. He used state of the art Nike running shoes that have a carbon fiber plate that are expensive and according to critics provide an unfair advantage to those who can afford them. I have a pair of these shoes. I have run several marathons in them. Have I cheated compared to someone that did not have the money to afford these shoes? I also use expensive nutritional gel supplements when I run marathons. Do I cheat compared to others that do not have this ability to buy them? In this analogy, to me, the shoes and the nutritional supplements are equivalent to the use of Word and EndNote to write manuscripts. If this is cheating, I am guilty as charged and I would be willing to return my medals (I actually do not know what to do with the medals, and the finisher's T-shirts would need to be retrieved from an individual in Guatemala, where I typically donate them). However, doping or taking the subway to get from point A to point B during a marathon is equivalent to using AI for manuscript writing. These actions are different from Nike shoes and nutritional supplements, which I am open to continue to argue.

Let's get more specific. Let's say that there was an AI algorithm that would allow a runner to avoid corners where there are no check points. At the end of the race, this runner comes first in his age group. His GPS watch says that with the aid of AI, he cut 2.3 miles distance compared to all other runners who run the 26.2-mile course. Would the use of AI be acceptable in this situation? As I wrote in my paper, maybe there is a race out there that allows runners to use technology to get from point A to point B, but you cannot be competing in the same race with assistance that gives this advantage. It is unfair.

Define legal and illegal running a marathon. For someone who is a runner and has done marathons in the past, all these concepts are crystal clear. There is no need to spell everything that is legal and not legal for running a race. But, for someone who has never run a race a few of these items might not be as trivial. When I ran my first marathon there were a few things that I did not know that I could not do. For instance, receiving hydration from one of my students who waited for me at strategic points throughout the Dallas Marathon Course to give me a disposable bottle of water is not permitted. Also, I did not know that I could not use pacers not provided by the race organizers. I had a good friend of mine run with me to pace me. This was illegal! I

3. The last issue has to do with timing. Over the past year, I have submitted 8 manuscripts for consideration for publication in various well-recognized international journals. They all have a check box to indicate if any of the authors have used AI for any part of the manuscript. This is clear evidence that Editors are taking this matter seriously. Well-recognized journals will not lose in the race for publishing. Well-recognized journals will continue to thrive because they publish ORIGINAL articles.

I still maintain that my metaphors were valid and accomplished the desired goal. There is no need to clearly define all of the terms of ORIGINALITY. There will always be something new. We must use common sense and rely on people who have experience. The time is not here. Good journals will thrive based on their editorial board and the extreme scrutiny that they place on the originality of the papers they accept for publication.

References

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