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Will Generative Artificial Intelligence-Generated Knowledge Contribute to the Junkification of Science, and Does it have Intrinsic Commercial Value?

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Abstract

There is a growing perception among scholars that academic research and publication are entering a phase of junkification, namely the infusion of knowledge that offers limited scientific contribution, or that clutters journals and databases without offering any major enlightenment. Although it is tempting to blame researchers for this phenomenon, junk science can only enter the knowledge stream when peer reviewers and editorial management permit it. Thus, the crisis of knowledge due to junkification is also a crisis of leadership. Although a counter-balance to junkification already exists, in the form of retraction, this is leading to the rise of a new culture ('retract-and-perish') and potentially behaviors (retractophobia and retractophilia). Prompt-based generative artificial intelligence (GenAI)-generated knowledge may pose the greatest risk to science's junkification if human knowledge is no longer considered to be important or superior, and if GenAI-derived information is commercialized. This commentary provides a compact but subjective appreciation of some of the talking points surrounding science's actual or perceived junkification, weighing in on how GenAI-derived information could be weighed, and whether aspects of it may contribute to an intensification of that junkification.

Keywords: *credibility; editorial failure; junk science; generative artificial intelligence; predatory publishing; retractions; trust*

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1. Introduction

"Junk science" does not emerge in a vacuum

With the accumulated degradation of values and when ethos is assailed (Hass & Kleine, 2003), including through the trivialization of information (Chargaff, 1976), this ultimately renders academic stakeholders (authors, peer reviewers, editors, journals, publishers, policy-makers, ethics societies) and processes untrustworthy, and then 'junk science' emerges (Klyce & Feller, 2017). The overarching impression is that such information has little or no value or worth (Teixeira da Silva, 2023), and includes information with reduced credibility (de Lorenzo et al., 2025) or with algorithmically-generated content (Cabanac & Labbé, 2021), often represented as a stream of "incessantly irrelevant and pointless documents" (p. 3673) (Fernandez-Cano, 2021), rendering the journals where they are housed also as 'junk' (i.e., something that has reduced value, or is worthless) (Yurevich & Yurevich, 2021; Smirnov & Lukyanov, 2022).

In this school of thought, false findings (Ioannidis, 2005) lead to unreliable science, and this in turn can lead to pseudoscience (O'Brien, Palmer, & Albarracin, 2021). The junkification of science has also been noted as the knowledge's structural degradation due to abuses caused by its commercialization, including exploitative forms of open access (OA) publishing, alongside the degradation of values within academia, such as reliance on metrics, the 'publish-or-perish' culture, journal and institutional rankings, free labor during peer review, and other factors (Kapoor, 2024; Rhodes & Linnenluecke, 2026), and the over-simplistic mismeasure of science through the use of citations (MacRoberts & MacRoberts, 2018). One consequence was the emergence of predatory OA publishing (Beall, 2012), although predation cannot take place without some level of exploitation (Puehringer, Rath, & Griesebner, 2021), making it increasingly difficult to differentiate both behaviors (Teixeira da Silva et al., 2019).

As the volume of publications grows exponentially, albeit absent a robust infrastructure that can maintain sufficient quality control, the cumulative outcome on the academic ecosystem is strain, making it unsustainable (Hanson et al., 2024). That pressure caused by needing to keep journals active and productive may also contribute to science's junkification by allowing "low-hanging" fruit, i.e., articles of limited scientific worth, of low-quality scholarship, or that have not been rigorously vetted, as well as fake science (Teixeira da Silva, 2017), to be published. And wherever such research is offered any form of value, appreciation, or recognition in the form of publications in

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journals that claim to be rigorously peer reviewed, then waste of resources, funding, public taxes, etc. can be inferred (Rosengaard et al., 2024).

2. Science's junkification: Who or what is to blame?

Groome, Yong, and Li (2026) placed exclusive blame on researchers for science's junkification, but ultimately it is both personal and communal agency that drives knowledge's growth, or its degradation. Consequently, "junk science" or "academic slop" (Pendergrass et al., 2025; Daly, Teixeira da Silva, & Nazarovets, 2026) would likely not permeate literature that is made widely available on platforms like Google Scholar or even in so-called reputable scientific databases like Web of Science or Scopus, if the academic leadership responsible for quality control, namely editors and peer reviewers, acted in an equally conscientious manner (Gronemeyer, 2026; Teixeira da Silva, 2023). It has not been empirically tested whether the concept of imperfectionism (Calvard & Prasad, 2026) contributes to science's further junkification.

Journals operate with different standards due to inherent human differences in editorial leadership and management skills, and since editorial freedom breeds differences in publishing standards, even among journals that claim to be committed or subscribe to the same or similar ethical value systems (Moussa & Teixeira da Silva, 2023), "junk science" is difficult to unambiguously characterize, i.e., its definition is highly subjective, thus making it difficult to identify or remove. The over-simplistic characterization of journals into a binary classification of "elite" and "junk" (Rhodes & Linnenluecke, 2026) offers little justice to the rich bibliodiversity that emerges from the non-profit diamond OA peer-reviewed publishing model (Sabel & Larhammar, 2025; Brabazon, 2026), so is thus not a robust solution to dealing with "junk science".

For example, it was recently argued that the junkification of knowledge is equated with, or can result from, a degradation of integrity of both science and its systems of propagation, while even minor aspects can cause a sizeable degradation of knowledge when they are collectively appreciated as a set of integrity-degrading phenomena (Teixeira da Silva & Daly, 2026a). When heavy-weight factors, like misconduct and fraud (Biagioli et al., 2019; Armond et al., 2021), impoverished peer review (Macdonald, 2025), paper mills (Byrne et al., 2024) and other blatant forms of abuse of science's trust and integrity are added to the mix, such as authorship manipulation (Kendall & Teixeira da Silva, 2024; Martínez-Rojas & Zahn-Muñoz, 2025), identity hijacking and fraudulent or false attribution (Godskesen, 2025), misinformation (Heikkilä, 2026), and cultural inequalities and regional disparities in database coverage

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(Asubiaro, Onaolapo, & Mills, 2024), it is easy to appreciate why there is an increasing perception that science and academia are becoming junkified. When skepticism about the integrity of published science inhabits minds within the scholarly community, including among researchers (Piret et al., 2025), it is not surprising that society and the public at large would also become increasingly skeptical.

3. *The newest elephant in science's room: GenAI*

The uncontrolled and massive infusion of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI)-generated ideas, text, and articles into indexed and non-indexed knowledge, including through prompt-based querying of chatbots (Daly & Teixeira da Silva, 2026), is already being traded and commodified (Hallonsten, 2021), and offered a commercial value equivalent to that of human-generated knowledge, then marketed to the academic community through both subscriptions and as OA article processing costs. This monetized commodification takes place even though there is a lack of human cognitive oversight (Guo, Mao, & Zhang, 2026), reducing the epistemic security (Kester & Aliman, 2026) and epistemological grounding (Saroj, 2026) of such information, in some cases rendering it as misinformation (Heikkilä, 2026).

If in theory, human editors and peer reviewers were entirely replaced by GenAI-driven systems that could automatically screen article submissions and identify any number of 'red flags' that would cause them to classify such work as "junk", then it may be theoretically possible to implement a system-wide GenAI-driven filtering and quality control system that could benefit science. However, this would first require the recognition that science is becoming junkified, the need for a standardized definition of what constitutes "junk science" across disciplines, and the formal implementation of those definitions as publishing policy. Moreover, the radical exclusion (partly or fully) of humans from knowledge creation and assessment—apart from being science's greatest pivot away from knowledge creation and quality control, leading to the minoritization of humans in these processes (Teixeira da Silva & Daly, 2026b)—might be met by strong resistance, even if it comes at the expense of maintaining a minimum threshold level of human-induced junkification of science and knowledge.

In this age of GenAI, academics, other stakeholders (peer reviewers, editors, policy-makers) are invited to appreciate and reflect on how they embrace GenAI-generated knowledge from "three different moral perspectives: consequentialism (the ethics of outcomes), deontology (the ethics of duties), and virtue ethics (the ethics of character)" (p. 1) (Daly & Teixeira da Silva, 2026), using this ethical "golden standard" to guide editorial decision-making (Willmott, 2026). Those stakeholders should consider whether GenAI serves as a catalyst of science's degradation (Kietzmann et al., 2026)

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and junkification (Illingworth, 2026), and if not, then offer a viable justification for the intellectual and commercial value of GenAI-generated "knowledge" (Timpka, 2024), especially when it is being derived from the synthesis of large volumes of information that humans might not be able to otherwise process on their own (Islam & Greenwood, 2024).

In other words, can human-generated knowledge and GenAI-generated "knowledge" be equated as being equal, and if not, what epistemic and commercial value does each one have?

4. One antidote to science's junkification: Retractions

The culture of retraction has emerged in recent years as one prominent mechanism by which some of science's junkification can be filtered out of the system, following post-publication peer review (Yeo-Teh & Tang, 2023), although this has now bred an apparently new culture of fear and attack in the form of retractophobia and retractophilia, respectively (Teixeira da Silva, 2025). Even though retraction as a corrective mechanism may stymy would-be bad actors into proliferating "junk science", as the scientific community begins to adapt to this new cultural reality, so too is the 'publish-or-perish' culture evolving into one of 'retract-and-perish' in which the risks of even basic errors have the potential to be translated in reputationally damaging retractions, not only for authors, but also for journals, publishers, funding agencies and indexing platforms (Teixeira da Silva & Nazarovets, 2026). One example of the risks of careless GenAI use is the proliferation of false or fabricated information, in the form of "hallucinations", which are a new form of citation-based GenAI-generated "junk" that is increasingly polluting the scientific literature in volume (Topaz et al., 2026). GenAI-related article retractions reveal that the existing publishing system is unable to effectively deal with some of the challenges posed by embracing this new trend (Sridharan & Sivaramakrishnan, 2026), while GenAI has been suggested as a possible solution to "junk science", albeit with heavy reservations (Nazarovets & Teixeira da Silva, 2026). The challenge to academia in being able to better qualify "junk science" will be how researchers and readers of the scientific literature can effectively differentiate between irresponsible research and *a*responsible research, which "makes no real difference to anyone but clogs the pages of journals with work that matters little" (p. 497) (Tourish & Craig, 2025).

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5. Inconclusive conclusion

No definitive conclusions can be drawn from this commentary. This is because, in the author's opinion, "junk" knowledge, information, and science can take on many forms and formats, ranging from careless errors that misrepresent the accuracy of information, to profoundly knowledge-revolutionizing events such as the age of GenAI-generated information that science currently finds itself in. The interpretation of what constitutes "junk" is also highly subjective, and within the context of academic publishing, may vary widely, ranging from the opinion that short letters to the editor that offer brief and possibly superficial commentary on prior literature, brief research notes that do not offer a substantial increase in the scientific appreciation of a phenomenon, or poorly written articles may lie at the lower end of the "junk" scale, while its upper echelons are populated by scientific literature that has emerged as the product of misconduct, fraud, falsification, and abuses (e.g., of authorship, including paper mills). Whenever a charged term such as "junk" is used in an otherwise highly objective context, like science or academic publishing, tension is likely to arise.

It is up to the research community, and not policy-makers, to devise a "junk scale" that would then allow this subjective topic to be more objectively measured, allowing then for research, the products of research, i.e., academic papers, journals, and publishers to be better characterized whenever someone refers to any of these entities or their actions as "junk". Evidently, the massive volume of GenAI users, at least in the biomedical sciences (Topaz et al., 2026), do not consider GenAI as "junk", or if they do, such a characterization might be artificially suppressed because they find that the benefits of using GenAI far outweigh its risky, damaging or negative aspects, such as "hallucinations". The existence of wide discrepancies in opinion about the risks and value of GenAI in scientific knowledge production suggests that finding a solution to dealing with "junk science" will not be easy, and that a division will, in the foreseeable future, exist within the scientific community as to whether information (e.g., text, figures, analyses, etc.) generated by GenAI has intrinsic value, or whether that value supersedes that of human-created knowledge.

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