

## Case details

**Presenter of cases:** Hiroki Naito

**COPE members involved:** *Discover Artificial Intelligence* (Springer Nature)

**Date at which cases was received:** 31 March 2026

**Article involved:** Manuscript submission to the journal

**Category of concern:** Concern that review for the manuscript was AI generated

## Scope of review by subcommittee

Taking into consideration the scope of the Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee, the review focuses on the procedural aspects of the journal's evaluation of concerns about the handling of the manuscript.

The following items fall beyond the scope of the subcommittee's review:

- The editorial decision on publication reached by the journal
- An evaluation of the scholarly content of the manuscript or of the reviewer's report

## Summary of issue, as outlined by presenter

I am the corresponding author of the manuscript "The GPT-4o Shock: Emotional Attachment to AI Models and Its Impact on Regulatory Acceptance — A Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Immediate Transition from GPT-4o to GPT-5", submitted to *Discover Artificial Intelligence*, a Springer Nature journal, in 2025. I am raising a complaint about the peer-review and editorial handling of this submission, which involves editors Shubham Gurav and Da Tao (Shenzhen University), and which I believe fails to meet COPE Core Practices on fair and competent peer review.

The referee reports used to reject the paper repeatedly asserts that GPT-5 "does not exist as of 2025", that GPT-4o has not been discontinued, and that the backlash and hashtag campaigns analysed in the manuscript are "fictional". A referee report that denies such basic, widely known facts is not a valid scientific evaluation.

The report in question also has a highly generic, template-like structure and contains long boilerplate passages that could apply to almost any empirical paper, with only superficial adaptation to my topic. Combined with the factual impossibilities described above, this strongly suggests that the referee text was produced largely by a generative AI system with an outdated knowledge cut-off, without disclosure. Springer Nature's own policies state that reviewers must not upload manuscripts to generative AI tools and must declare any AI assistance that is used in peer review. If a reviewer did submit my unpublished

manuscript to such a system, this would also raise serious concerns about breach of confidentiality and unauthorized disclosure of unpublished data and ideas.

The handling editor, Shubham Gurav, nevertheless relied on this flawed report, stating in the decision letter that “both reviewers recommended rejection.” This statement is in direct and demonstrable contradiction with the referee's own conclusion within the very same document, which explicitly states “Recommendation: Major revisions required before reconsideration.” This internal inconsistency serves as clear evidence that the editor either failed to read the full content of the referee's report before issuing the rejection decision, or deliberately misrepresented the reviewer's recommendation to justify the rejection.

The journal, under the editorial leadership that includes Da Tao, therefore based its rejection on a report that is factually wrong, internally inconsistent, and potentially generated in violation of Springer Nature's AI and peer-review policies. This failure of transparent and responsible editorial decision-making has exposed me to reputational harm as an author and raises serious concerns about the integrity and confidentiality of peer review in this case.

## Member's response

Please see the responses to the following questions:

- Does the journal consider appeals based on peer-review integrity concerns or concerns about decisions, in the absence of new data?
  - Yes.
- Was the Editor-in-Chief involved in evaluating the appeal (in addition to the handling editor), as is described in the journal's policy?
  - Yes.
- Please comment on whether and how the journal or the Springer Nature Research Integrity Group followed up on the presenter's concerns about (i) AI use in peer review, (ii) the identity of Reviewer 2, and (iii) a potential breach of the unpublished submission's confidentiality.
  - When the concerns were raised the EIC and handling editor reviewed the reviews submitted to consider the quality of the reviews and on if they believed the review had been generated by an LLM. As stated previously, they believed the reviews to be acceptable and did not believe them to be LLM generated. This is a decision made by the handling editor and the EIC. No tools are used for this, as SN has not found any LLM detecting tools with a high enough level of reliability for these cases.
- The journal's policy on AI in peer review asks peer reviewers not to upload manuscript contents to generative AI tools but also indicates that any AI use must be disclosed in the peer-review

report. Can you please clarify what types of AI use in peer review would be considered acceptable by the journal?

- The journal may consider language editing to be an acceptable use, but this is considered on a case-by-case basis.

## COPE's review

A member of the Facilitation & Integrity subcommittee reviewed the information submitted by the presenter. The editorial decision for the manuscript is out of scope, but the subcommittee member deemed the questions about peer-review integrity in scope for the Facilitation & Integrity process.

COPE approached the publisher for comments on Hiroki Naito's concerns. The publisher confirmed that the journal had reviewed the concerns about the review for Dr Naito's manuscript. The process involved an assessment of the reviews for the manuscript by the handling editor. The publisher's response states that the Editor-in-Chief was involved in evaluating the appeal. Discover Artificial Intelligence has had no Editor-in-Chief since the predecessor's departure in 2024. Accordingly, the report describes an assessment conducted solely by the handling editor whose conduct was the subject of the complaint. The editor considered the reviews acceptable and did not find indications that they were generated by a LLM tool. The journal and the publisher replied to Dr Naito in response to their appeal.

The Facilitation & Integrity subcommittee member reviewed the information provided by the publisher. The information established that the journal's follow-up was conducted solely by the editor whose conduct was the subject of the complaint, without independent review.

## Conclusions

The journal's peer review policy states: 'All research articles, and most other article types, published in Discover journals undergo peer review. This usually involves review by at least two independent, expert peer reviewers.'

The peer review for Dr Naito's manuscript was not handled per these standards.

The journal considered Dr Naito's concerns by completing an assessment of the reviews received for the manuscript, this involved the handling editor. The editor's determination was that the reviews were appropriate and not generated by an AI tool and that there was no breach in the journal's policy.

Upon consideration of the information provided by the presenter and the member's response, the Facilitation & Integrity subcommittee considers that the journal did not follow an adequate process aligned to COPE expectations to follow up on the concerns raised and to communicate the outcome of the journal's review to the author.

## Disclaimer

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## UTIE INSTRUMENTS INC. ADDENDUM

### NOT PART OF THE ORIGINAL COPE REPORT

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UTIE Instruments Inc. notes that the section titled "Summary of issue, as outlined by presenter" does not accurately reflect the presenter's actual submission. This summary was not reviewed or approved by the presenter before publication. It even misidentifies the handling editor by name.

The principal omitted issues include the following:

- The complaint was not that the review merely had a generic or template-like writing style. The presenter identified specific technical indicators of AI generation, including factual impossibilities, internally contradictory reasoning, internally inconsistent editorial handling, and coercive citation demands.
- The handling editor who conducted that assessment reported that, although the reviewer had stated that the manuscript's research subject (GPT-5) did not exist and had characterized the entire research topic as "fictional", this was a "very minor aspect" and that "any editor or reviewer with basic research training would reasonably reach the same conclusion".
- The omitted issues also included the presenter's allegation of fabrication of Reviewer 2 by the handling editor. That is, Springer Nature's explanation requires accepting that an AI-specialist reviewer and the handling editor coincidentally made the same factual error about GPT-5; that the reviewer and the handling editor coincidentally preferred a science-fictional reframing over an empirical paper; that the reviewer coincidentally raised privacy concerns about fictional data subjects; that the reviewer submitted a long and comprehensive report immediately after the handling editor found the reviewer; that the reviewer coincidentally coerced citation of TAM/UTAUT frameworks aligned with the handling editor's own field; and that the handling editor coincidentally reported a "Major Revisions Required" recommendation as a recommendation for rejection. The presenter's submission argued that these errors were not a series of unfortunate coincidences, but were more coherently explained by fabrication of Reviewer 2 by the handling editor. Following this allegation, COPE asked Springer Nature to address the existence of Reviewer 2. Springer Nature refused to answer this point.
- COPE confirmed that the relevant editor's Google Scholar profile and official university profile had been deleted, but this was not included in the section titled "Summary of issue, as outlined by presenter".

As of May 2026, UTIE Instruments Inc. has published a separate case record identifying 10 findings and 39 annotations concerning the peer-review process at issue. Those findings are not part of the COPE report.