

Journal of

# Media Psychology

**Editor-in-Chief**  
Christoph Klimmt

**Associate Editors**  
Nick D. Bowman  
Jesse Fox  
Diana Rieger  
Catalina Toma  
Ivar Vermeulen

Theories, Methods, and Applications

## **Retraction Policy and Protocol**

Adopted by the Annual Assembly of Editors\* 2018, May 26, 2018, Prague, Czech Republic

\*Christoph Klimmt, Nicole Krämer, Nicholas Bowman, Jesse Fox, Diana Rieger, and Ivar Vermeulen

### **1. Retraction as an Editorial Decision**

Retraction is a drastic action taken by decision makers of academic journals that can have severe consequences for the reputation of authors, editors, and the journal itself. Careful handling of complaints about published manuscripts is required to prevent unnecessary damage and to ensure integrity in managing conflict within the academic community.

As an international academic publication outlet, the *Journal of Media Psychology (JMP)* is committed to the principles of good scientific practice and the requirements of ethical responsibility in social scientific research, particularly with regard to the involvement of human participants in empirical studies.

These criteria are part of any peer-review process managed by the editors of the journal. However, the editorial procedures include this policy document for the case that violations of important principles of good scientific practice are only detected and brought to the editors' attention after a manuscript has been published. If allegations about such a violation are substantiated by the journal team's own investigation (see section 3), the Editor-in-Chief (EIC) can, together with the majority of the associate editors, make the decision to retract the corresponding manuscript, after completing an according protocol of process handling (see section 2).

If the decision to retract a manuscript formerly published by *JMP* is made, the EIC will make an according announcement both in the next print issue of the journal and on the journal's official website. Additional communication about the incident may be filed through the journal's social media site(s). Retracted manuscripts will be removed or blocked on the journal's website, and an official list of all retracted manuscripts shall be made available online by the publisher.

In case a retraction has been implemented, the authors of the retracted manuscript will be informed by the EIC by a print letter. A copy of this letter will be sent to the executives of the academic institutions of the author(s), that is, both the institution(s) named as affiliations of the author(s) in the retracted manuscript and the institutions with which the author(s) are affiliated at the time the decision of retraction is made.

Retraction is only the ultima ratio in handling allegations against published manuscripts. The investigation (see section 2) may lead to the conclusion that problems with a published manuscript have been identified that (a) had not been considered during pre-publication peer review, that are (b) worthwhile of mentioning within the academic community, but that (c) do not justify retraction. In this case, the handling protocol will foresee a limited action by the editors, that is, publication of an erratum or a published expression of concern over the allegation(s) which includes a transparent documentation of the editors' investigation, reasoning, and evaluation of the allegation. These comments shall be published in the next print issue of *JMP* as well as on the journal's website (<https://www.hogrefe.com/j/jmp>) .

## **2. Criteria for Retraction of Manuscripts Published by JMP**

Decisions about the possible retraction of a manuscript published by JMP may originate in any violation of principles of good scientific practice. Authors of published manuscripts may have committed violations of such principles intentionally, by negligent action, or by mistake. Retraction will only be a realistic option to decide for in case of severe violations of principles of good scientific practice.

Allegations that are most likely to require a decision on retraction of a manuscript published by *JMP* refer to

- Falsification of empirical data or false statements about the existence of an entire study, of data, or study results
- Misreporting of empirical results in a way that leads to massively biased or otherwise problematic interpretation of findings and/or conclusions and recommendations
- Plagiarism or failures to acknowledge other scholars' work or contribution (including omission of scholars who have contributed to the work reported in the manuscript under consideration)
- Failure to provide raw data or original output files that demonstrate the correctness of empirical findings reported in the manuscript to the journal team upon request.

These situations represent the most likely scenarios of reasons to debate retraction of a manuscript, based on past experiences with recent incidents at other academic journals. However, the editors of *JMP* shall be aware of different scenarios of allegations against a published manuscript that may also require investigation and a decision on retraction.

### **3. Protocol of the Decision Process About Manuscript Retraction**

The EIC will be responsible to manage the standardized handling process in case of allegations against a manuscript published by *JMP*. The required procedure is structured in five steps. Throughout the process, the EIC shall follow the recommendations expressed in the retraction guidelines of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE, [https://publicationethics.org/files/retraction%20guidelines\\_o.pdf](https://publicationethics.org/files/retraction%20guidelines_o.pdf))

#### **Step A. EIC is Notified of a Problem with a Manuscript Published by JMP**

Allegations against a manuscript published by *JMP* may be brought up

- by members of the journal team,
- by reviewers,
- by scholars not involved in authorship or quality assurance (e.g., colleagues who detected statistical misreporting),
- by academic institutions that are involved in the research reported in the manuscript or have been notified about suspicions of or evidence for scientific misconduct of one or more of the authors,
- or by authors of the manuscript themselves.

If allegations are noticed by associate editors or editorial assistants first, they shall inform the EIC immediately in order to enable her/him to carry out the decision making protocol.

#### **Step B. Consultation With Responsible Associate Editor and Investigation**

The EIC will approach the associate editor(s) who were involved in the decision to accept the incriminated manuscript for publication. This may imply to involve former associate editors who are not serving the journal actively any more. Together with the associate editor(s) and the editorial assistant(s), the EIC shall investigate the corresponding manuscript and check whether the allegation against it can be substantiated or should be dismissed due to a lack of substantiation. If the journal team's internal investigation can rule out the validity of the allegation (e.g., the allegation is obviously not justified), the EIC will inform the entire group of associate editors and make the decision not to react publicly to the allegation (Decision type **E1**, see below).

### **Step C. Hearing of the Authors of the Incriminated Manuscript**

If the internal investigation suggests that the allegation brought up against the manuscript is justified or cannot be evaluated without further information, the EIC shall approach the author(s) of the incriminated manuscript and confront them with the allegations with a request to respond to them in a timely manner. Typically, authors will be given four weeks to react. The EIC shall insist on complete and accurate reactions by authors and require further information from them in case their initial response is deemed insufficient. Any correspondence with the authors shall be treated confidentially among the academic journal team (editors and editorial assistants). If allegations have been brought up by individuals who are not members of the journal team, they shall not be informed about the hearing of the authors conducted as part of the journal's own investigation.

### **Step D. Analysis and Discussion of Author Responses and Severity of the Problem**

Once the responses by the authors have been recorded, the EIC shall produce a report on the entire process and disseminate it among the journal team for discussion. At least one member of the journal's editorial board – an expert on the research topic of the manuscript – shall be involved as external discussant as well. If possible, the reviewers who had been involved in the peer review process that led to acceptance of the incriminated manuscript for publication, shall also be included in the discussion. The EIC will then moderate the debate on how to proceed with the case. The group of editors will select from four options to act (see Step E). Members of the editorial board, external reviewers, and editorial assistants will not participate in formal decision making. Decision of the group of editors is made by majority vote; in case there is no majority for one option, the EIC shall make the decision on how to proceed. Results of the voting will be documented as part of the EIC's report on the case.

### **Step E. Decision and Implementation of Action Taken by the Journal Team**

Based on the information available on the manuscript, the allegations against it, and the authors' responses, the editors will have four options to handle the case, depending on whether they acknowledge a violation of good scientific practice and if so, on how severe they regard this violation.

**Option E1.** *No Public Response Due to Non-Substantial Allegation.* The editors may conclude that no serious problem is evident with regard to the criticized manuscript. In this case, the EIC shall inform the authors and the individuals who have brought up the allegation initially by letter. No public communication will be initiated on the case; the report on how the journal team has implemented the handling protocol will be treated confidentially, but will be made available upon request by the EIC to parties with a legitimate interest (authors, scholars who have brought up the allegation, representatives of ethics committees who have been approached by stakeholders).

**Option E2.** *Mediation of Conflict Between Authors and Critics of the Incriminated Manuscript.* The editors may come to the conclusion that the problems addressed cannot be solved by retraction, but require debate or conflict mediation among involved parties, between authors and critics in particular. In such a case, the EIC shall take action to initiate and moderate such a dialog, which may lead to an agreement among stakeholders, that does either not require any public communication by the journal or enable the group of editors to make a decision (options E1, E3, E4).

**Option E3.** *Expression of Concern or Publication of an Erratum in Response to Identified (Minor) Problems.* In some cases, the allegations against a manuscript may be serious, but do not imply a fundamental questioning of the validity of findings, the contribution of the paper, or the overall compliance of the authors and their manuscript with ethical guidelines and good scientific practice. The typical way of handling problems of this type will be the publication of an erratum, that is, a public statement of correction that will make the deficits of the manuscript explicit to the entire readership of the journal. Publishing an erratum will require consent and admission of problems by authors. Alternatively, if problems of this severity are identified and neither the authors of the incriminated manuscript nor their academic institution want to cooperate on publishing an erratum, the group of editors may decide to publish an expression of concern over the entire case. This expression of concern shall be detailed and make the reasoning of the journal team as well as information on the allegation and the journal's investigation transparent to readers. It shall be made available both in the print journal and on the journal's website.

**Option E4.** *Retraction.* If the group of editors concludes that allegations against a published manuscript are validated, severe violations of fundamental principles of good scientific practice, they will decide to retract the manuscript. Prior to formalizing the decision, the EIC shall connect with the legal experts of the journal's publishing company to discuss possible consequences of the case that the authors of the manuscript do not consent to the retraction (Resnik, Wager, & Kissling, 2015). Once legal issues have been clarified, the EIC shall inform the authors about the journal's decision to retract the manuscript. A copy of the letter shall be sent to the academic institution(s) with which the authors are (and have been) affiliated (see section 1). Moreover, the public measures to be taken are identified in section 1 and shall be implemented in compliance with the recommendations by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

## Reference and Resources

Resnik, D. B., Wager, E., & Kissling, G. E. (2015). Retraction policies of top scientific journals ranked by impact factor. *Journal of the Medical Library Association: JMLA*, 103(3), 136–139. <https://doi.org/10.3163/1536-5050.103.3.006>

Source of Reference:

Committee on Publication Ethics COPE: <https://www.publicationethics.org>