Note
This flowchart relates only to cases where concerns related to digital photographic images are raised (e.g., duplication of parts within an image, or use of identical images to show different things). For wider concerns about potential data fabrication, please consult the flowchart ‘Fabricated data in a published article’ [https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.4].

READER EXPRESSES SUSPICION OF IMAGE MANIPULATION

Thank reader and state your plan to investigate. Consider getting a second opinion from another reviewer.

Contact author to explain your concerns but do not make direct accusations

No response

Response

Satisfactory explanation

Unsatisfactory answer

Consider whether you have sufficient evidence of image manipulation to publish a retraction or a correction (e.g., does zooming in show that parts of images are duplicated). Consider using software to analyse images.

Unclear/suspected image manipulation

Clear image manipulation

publish a retraction (or consider a correction if the manipulation is very minor and the majority of the results and conclusions of the article remain valid), contacting all authors and telling them what you plan to do

Authors not guilty of image manipulation

No response or inconclusive reply

Authors guilty of image manipulation

APOLOGISE TO AUTHOR. PUBLISH CORRECTION IF NECESSARY (e.g., if an honest error has been detected that does not invalidate conclusions)

CONSIDER CONTACTING AUTHORS’ INSTITUTION EVERY 3-6 MONTHS

If no resolution, consider contacting the authorities (e.g., ORI in US, GMC in UK). Consider publishing an Expression of Concern

INFORM READER OF OUTCOME

Authors’ superior and/or person responsible for research governance

Inform authors’ superior and/or person responsible for research governance at authors’ institutions, and inform authors.