



How to respond to whistle blowers when concerns are raised via social media

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<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.14>

A published article is criticised on social media or a post-publication peer review site(s). This could include anonymous or not anonymous concerns about scientific soundness or allegations of plagiarism, figure manipulation or other forms of misconduct

Let the publisher and the communications team know about any allegations. It is useful to establish an escalation procedure and agree a process for responding ahead of time

Do the allegations contain specific and detailed evidence to support the claim?

Yes

Treat in the same way as concerns raised directly

Respond via the same social media, ideally within 24 hours, saying that you are going to investigate

Let the authors know via email that concerns were raised and ask them for an explanation. You should not generally add them to an exchange, e.g. in a Twitter response. If the concerns were raised only about the research findings, in some instances the authors may wish to respond themselves

Investigate according to the appropriate COPE flowchart or guidance and also follow own publisher's guidance

If there is an outcome to your investigation, such as a correction or retraction, consider putting information about it on the same social media/site(s) where the concerns were originally raised. It may not be appropriate for Twitter but useful on other sites. Post a link to the resolution on the journal site

No

Are the comments targeted directly at the author, editor, publisher or the journal?

Yes

Respond via the same social media to say thank you, if you would like to raise a complaint please contact [xyz]. Provide a generic contact, e.g. customer services, who will be able to forward the complaint to the appropriate person. It is appropriate to respond from a journal/publisher account rather than a personal Twitter account for legal and ethical reasons. If they persist with vague claims, politely say you cannot pursue this further and do not respond to any further comments

No

Don't respond, but flag to the publisher so they can decide on their approach. Consider letting the authors know and explain why you are not responding at the moment. Make sure the authors will be able to access the comments (e.g. some authors are not able to access Twitter or Google)

Note

The tone of the allegations may be aggressive or personal. Respond politely; don't get drawn into personal exchanges

Note

Sometimes the whistle blower may prefer to remain anonymous. It is important not to try to "out" people who wish to be anonymous

Note

It is important to take the discussion away from the public domain; don't engage in specific discussions on social media

Developed in collaboration with BioMed Central

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Version one
Published
November 2015

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