



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

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 No Treat in the same way as Are the comments targeted directly at the concerns raised directly author, editor, publisher or the journal? Respond via the same social media, ideally within 24 hours, saying that Yes No you are going to investigate Let the authors know via email that Don't respond, but flag to the Respond via the same social media publisher so they can decide on concerns were raised and ask them to say thank you, if you would like for an explanation. You should not their approach. Consider letting to raise a complaint please contact generally add them to an exchange, the authors know and explain why [xyz]. Provide a generic contact, e.g. in a Twitter response. you are not responding at the e.g. customer services, who will be If the concerns were raised only moment. Make sure the authors able to forward the complaint to the about the research findings, in will be able to access the comments. appropriate person. some instances the authors may (e.g. some authors are not able to It is appropriate to respond from wish to respond themselves access Twitter or Google) 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

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

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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

Investigate according to the

appropriate COPE flowchart

or guidance and also follow

own publisher's guidance

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