

# CELEBRATING FAILURE: LEARNING LESSONS FROM A LEADING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR JOURNAL'S RETRACTIONS

*Celebrando o Fracasso: Aprendendo lições com as retratações de uma importante revista do comportamento do consumidor*

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** A retraction is the removal of a published article from the scientific record. It is an admission of failure. Yet, every retraction, regardless of its cause(s), is instructive. Using the oxymoron/concept of celebrating failure, this study investigates retractions in the *Journal of Consumer Research (JCR)*.

**Method:** The content of each *JCR* retraction notice was examined to determine the initiator(s) of the retraction, retractors, reason(s) for retraction, and time-to-retraction.

**Findings:** According to the findings, *JCR* issued ten retraction notices between June 2012 and October 2020. The ten retraction notices generated together, and up to April 11, 2022, some 18,378 pageviews, 3,944 PDF

## Resumo

**Objetivo:** Uma retratação é a remoção de um artigo publicado do registro científico. É uma admissão de fracasso. No entanto, toda retratação, independentemente de sua(s) causa(s), é instrutiva. Usando o oxímoro/conceito de celebrar o fracasso, este estudo investiga retratações no *Journal of Consumer Research (JCR)*.

**Método:** O conteúdo de cada aviso de retração do *JCR* foi examinado para determinar o(s) iniciador(es) da retração, os responsáveis pela retratação, os motivo(s) para retração e tempo para retração.

**Resultados:** De acordo com as descobertas, a *JCR* emitiu dez avisos de retratação entre junho de 2012 e outubro de 2020. Os dez avisos de retratação geraram juntos, e até 11

downloads, and a total Altmetric Attention Score of 36. The authors of the retracted articles initiated four of the ten retraction processes. The retractors were the authors in five of the cases. The most common reason for retraction, with five occurrences, is “data and analysis anomalies”. It took 947.6 days on average for a *JCR* retracted article to be withdrawn.

**Originality:** Instead of pointing fingers and assigning blame, a list of ten lessons learned based on these findings is dressed up. These lessons apply to the *JCR* and its entire ecosystem, including authors, editors, peer reviewers, readers, its owner, and publisher.

**Keywords:** Retraction; *Journal of Consumer Research*; failure; lessons learned

de abril de 2022, cerca de 18.378 *pageviews*, 3.944 *downloads* de PDF e uma pontuação total de atenção Altmetric de 36. Os autores dos artigos retratados iniciaram quatro dos dez processos de retratação. Os responsáveis pelas retratações foram os autores em cinco dos casos. O motivo mais comum de retratação, com cinco ocorrências, são “anomalias de dados e análises”. Demorou 947,6 dias em média para que um artigo *JCR* retratado fosse retirado.

**Originalidade:** Em vez de apontar o dedo e atribuir culpa, uma lista de dez lições aprendidas com base nessas descobertas é elaborada. Essas lições se aplicam ao *JCR* e a todo o seu ecossistema, incluindo autores, editores, revisores, leitores, seu proprietário e editor.

**Palavras-chave:** Retração; *Journal of Consumer Research*; falha; lições aprendidas.

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## INTRODUCTION

In scholarly publishing, a retraction is “the removal of an article from the scientific record at any time after its publication” (Moussa, 2022, p.11). Retracting a published article is an infrequent incidence. According to Brainard and You (2018), about one out of every 2,500 published articles is retracted. Although retracted articles constitute a negligible portion of the published literature, the topic of retractions has recently gained attention across disciplines, including economics (Jin et al., 2019), psychology (Stephan, 2020), and marketing (Moussa, 2022). This growing interest in retractions could be attributed foremost to the fact that their number is increasing at an alarming rate. The number of academic retractions per annum has skyrocketed from practically zero in 1990 to 1,970 in 2020 (Fanelli, Wong, and Moher, 2021). Retractions have increased because of a variety of factors, including the surge in post-publication peer review (e.g., via sites like PubPeer), an emboldened anonymous whistle-blowing movement, and the advent of (academic) social media (e.g., Twitter or ResearchGate) (Haunschild&Bornmann 2021; Teixeira da Silva & Al-Khatib, 2021). Irrespective of its causes, the rise in retractions is a positive sign because it highlights the self-correcting spirit of scientific research (Vuong, 2020a).

Retractions occur, particularly in prestigious journals. Fahimifar et al. (2022, p.316) found that 46% of the 5,693 retracted articles they examined were published in influential, high-impact journals. According to Moussa (2022, p.17), 40% of the retracted marketing articles he found were published in journals on the prestigious Financial Times Top 50 list of business and economics journals (or the FT50 list for short).

Having been founded in 1974, the *Journal of Consumer Research (JCR)* is the most prestigious/influential consumer behavior journal (Moussa, 2019; Wang et al., 2015). Several studies have conducted bibliometric analyses of the *JCR* over the last four decades (e.g., Leong, 1989; Hoffman & Holbrook, 1993; Wang et al., 2015). None, however, has been devoted to *JCR*’s retractions. “Retractions represent failure”, wrote Teixeira da Silva (2016, p.11). Retractions, no matter how many there are, are important in research and research communication because they highlight and explain why research projects fail, preventing similar errors from occurring in the future (Vuong, 2020b). So,

regardless of the reason (unintended mistake or premeditated deceit), every retraction is illuminating and instructive. This study focuses on *JCR*'s retractions to celebrate the lessons learned from these failures.

Without assigning blame or pointing fingers, this study aims to respond to questions like: How many retractions has the *JCR* issued so far? Who initiated the retraction process? Who are the retractors? What are the stated reasons for these retractions? How long did it take for these retraction notices to be issued on average? To the author's knowledge, no published study has provided answers to such questions. The goal of this research is to fill that void.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: the first section provides an overview of retractions, retracted articles, and reasons for retraction. It also discusses what is meant by celebrating failure. The methodology used is described in the second section. In the third section, the learned lessons are listed and recommendations are made. The last section is a conclusion pointing to limitations and further research directions.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Retractions, retraction notices, and retracted articles**

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), whose membership comprehended at the time of writing over 13,650 journals (the *JCR* included), defines a retraction as "a mechanism for correcting the literature and alerting readers to articles that contain such seriously flawed or erroneous content or data that their findings and conclusions cannot be relied upon" (COPE, 2019, p.3). Retractions differ from and should not be confused with errata. Unlike retractions, errata are usually issued to correct specific errors (in a table, figure, equation, or reference) or to remove any erroneous or misleading information from the text of a published article.

A retraction typically entails the publication of a freely accessible retraction notice (RN) that should: (1) state the reason(s) for the retraction; (2) identify who is retracting the article; (3) clearly identify the retracted article; and (4) be objective and factual (COPE 2019, p.2). For Vuong (2020a), four pieces of information should be provided within any RN: (1) who initiated it; (2) the cause (such as severe errors, plagiarism, or fraudulent practices); (3) whether there is consensus between editors and authors about it; and (4) whether post-publication review (such as comments on PubPeer) was involved.

Depending on the publisher, an RN may be referred to as a "Retraction Notice" (for Sage Publishing) or simply "Retraction" (for Oxford University Press). The RN is normally linked directly to the original article, which is labeled "Retracted". A retracted article is an article that has been "pulled from the literature due to ethical issues and containing erroneous, or even fabricated data, analysis, and findings" (Bar-Ilan&Halevi, 2021, p.48). The retracted article's PDF is usually digitally watermarked with the word "Retracted" in red (Bar-Ilan&Halevi, 2021; Moussa, 2022). The retracted article is then archived online to preserve the scholarly record. Such retractions are frequently publicized by the journal itself, the journal's publisher, and/or individual (e.g., Aaron Charlton's blog <https://www.openMKT.org>) and institutional (e.g., the Center for Scientific Integrity's Retraction Watch, <https://www.retractionwatch.com>) initiatives that track and disseminate information on these retractions.

### **Reasons for retraction**

Not all retractions are created equal, and they happen for a variety of reasons, ranging from intentional and malicious to inadvertent and fortuitous. COPE's (2019, p.2) Retraction Guidelines list eight such reasons. For the COPE, an article should be considered for retraction if: (1) there is clear evidence that the findings are unreliable, either as a result of a major error (e.g., miscalculation or experimental error), or as a result of fabrication (e.g., of data) or falsification (e.g., image manipulation); (2) it constitutes plagiarism; (3) its findings have previously been published elsewhere without proper attribution to previous sources; (4) It contains material or data without authorization for use; (5) it infringes copyrights; (6) it reports unethical research; (7) It has been published solely on

the basis of a compromised or manipulated peer review process; (8) its author(s) failed to disclose a major competing interest. For Bar-Ilan and Halevi (2018), the reasons for retraction fall into three broad categories: (1) scientific distortion (e.g., manipulation of data, falsified data, unsupported conclusions, dubious data validity, non-replicability, and data errors—even if unintentional); (2) ethical misconduct (e.g., duplicate publication, plagiarism, missing credit, ownership issues, authorship issues, interference in the review process, and citation manipulation); (3) administrative error (e.g., the article was published in the incorrect issue, it was not the final version published, and there were publisher errors).

Thus, retractions ensure that the scientific literature is corrected. Retractions, in fact, are the pinnacle of science's self-correcting nature (Fanelli et al., 2021). Despite this, consumer researchers have never investigated retractions, particularly those in *JCR*, the publication venue of the “latest and greatest” in consumer research.

## Celebrating failure

*What is failure?* Failure “is and has always been a pervasive part of life” (Kjeldgaard et al., 2021, p.278). The Oxford English Dictionary (2022) defines failure as the “*lack of success* in doing or achieving something”. One of the most elaborated definitions of failure could be found in Newton et al. (2008, p.229; emphasis added):

Failure is defined as an experience in which (a) achievement is integral to one's personal identity and accompanying sense of self-worth; (b) one feels a personal sense of responsibility for the outcome; (c) *lack of success* has significant consequences in psychological, professional, and/or interpersonal domains; and (d) one's personal definition of self, the experience, and the success-failure continuum is integral to the process.

As these definitions show, failure is juxtaposed with success. It is conceived of as a “lack of success” or a deficiency, whether in the ability to fully control something or in falling short of a goal. As humans, we live in a society that rewards success and rejects failure (Appadurai & Alexander, 2020; Firestein, 2015). Very few stories of failure are told in popular culture, but success is commonly celebrated. As Adams and Floyd (1977, p.38) put it, “failure is becoming a taboo in our society”. In academia, “[f]ailure is a typical experience in research, but it is largely taboo in published studies” (Eckert, 2020, p.1).

*How failure is celebrated?* However, the conventional notion that failure is something bad, negative, and undesirable is increasingly being challenged, and alternative valorizations of failure are emerging in which it is celebrated as productive and positive. For instance, the Failure Institute (<https://www.thefailureinstitute.com/>), a social enterprise that helps companies drive a culture shift where they learn from failure, uses the slogan “Failure Sucks but Instructs”. The Failure Institute is also known for organizing Fuckup Nights (<https://www.fuckupnights.com>), a global movement and event series that shares professional failure stories (Chua, 2021). At the time of writing, the Failure Institute claimed that the Fuckup Nights had active chapters in over 300 cities across 90 countries. The Failure Institute also claimed to have collaborated with companies such as Coca-Cola, Facebook, and Microsoft.

Several corporations celebrate failure and have even created awards to recognize it: Grey, the New York advertising agency, has a “Heroic Failure” award, as does Procter & Gamble; NASA has a “Lean Forward, Fail Smart” award; and the Tata Group has a “Dare to Try” award (Birkinshaw & Haas, 2016). Google fostered a culture of failure. It was proud of its 161 failures by 2019 and even set up a memorial website in their honor (Linkner, 2019).

Failure appreciation has also made inroads into academia. Former Princeton Assistant Professor Johannes Haushofer shared his “CV of Failure” in 2016, which quickly went viral within the academic community. The CV details Haushofer's paper, job, and scholarship rejections demonstrating

that even seemingly successful scholars frequently fall short and that failures go unnoticed, lacking representation and articulation (Kjeldgaard et al., 2021).

*Celebrating retractions.* As Davies et al. (2021, p.1) put it, “failure is an inherent part of academic knowledge production”. A retraction is “an expression of a system that has failed at so many levels” (Teixeira da Silva & Al-Khatib, 2021, p.252). Acceptance of retraction is also gaining traction in academia. Frances Arnold, the 2018 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, began 2020 by announcing in a series of tweets that she and her co-authors have decided to retract a 2019 *Science* paper. She humbly admitted in these tweets that she “was busy when this was submitted” and “did not do [her] job well” (Conroy, 2020). Also in 2020, *The Lancet* group’s editors (2020) published a comment titled “Learning from a Retraction”. In that comment, they list the changes to the declarations they seek from authors, the data sharing statements they require for published research papers, and the whole peer-review process. In a *Nature* paper titled “What my retraction taught me”, De Haas (2021) describes the circumstances of his first retraction. He also discusses the lessons he learned from that stigmatizing experience. On the Retraction Watch blog, there is an archive called “Doing the Right Thing” that lists authors who have used retractions to correct their errors. In 2017, Retraction Watch launched the “Doing the Right Thing” award which recognizes individuals (i.e., authors and editors) or organizations (i.e., publishers and academic associations) that clean up the scientific literature.

Retractions “reflect a failure at an individual, editorial, institutional or organizational (publisher) level” (Teixeira da Silva, 2016, p.12). A retraction, on the sinister end of the spectrum, represents: a fraud committed by authors who sought to game the system for financial or other gains; editors who purposefully turned the other cheek to misconduct; editorial board members/ad hoc reviewers who performed a biased/fake peer review; or publishers who sought fame and profit at any cost, including sacrificing basic publishing ethics and quality control. Authors who had poor guidance or misguided ethical principles that were not aligned with those of the publishing industry; editors who had inadequate oversight during peer review or editorial processing; editorial board members/ad hoc reviewers who were so busy that they provided an incomplete peer review; and publishers who published work that had not been thoroughly vetted are at the honest end of the spectrum, but within a range of levels of responsibility (Teixeira da Silva & Al-Khatib, 2021). To put it briefly, a retraction is both an individual and a group research failure (Pearson, 2022).

What can consumer researchers learn from looking at their own and group research failures? What if, instead of dismissing or concealing retractions, they celebrated them? These are this study’s two key questions.

## METHODOLOGY

### Searching retraction notices

The *JCR* was originally published (on behalf of Journal of Consumer Research, Inc.) by the University of Chicago Press and is since 2015 been published by Oxford University Press (OUP). The author searched for RNs on *JCR*’s page on OUP’s website (<https://academic.oup.com/jcr>) using the advanced search features and the search term “retraction”. The search was carried out on April 11, 2022.

Because RNs are freely available (as COPE recommends), the author examined the content of each one to determine which *JCR* article was retracted, who initiated the retraction process, who retracted it, why, and when. Each RN was then assigned a number based on the date of electronic publication (RN No.1, RN No.2, etc.). RN No.1 is the oldest.

The author gathered three metrics while on OUP’s website to gauge the popularity of each RN: (1) the number of HTML pageviews; (2) the number of PDF downloads; and (3) the Altmetric Attention Score (AAS). The AAS is a metric that assesses how much attention a scholarly document receives from non-traditional sources such as mass media, social media, policy documents, and scholarly blogs.

## Identifying retracted articles

Any RN should be linked to a retracted article (RA). On the *JCR*'s page of the OUP website, each of the found RNs was digitally associated with the corresponding RA. Time-to-retraction could be straightforwardly calculated because the exact date of RA online publication and the exact date of electronic release of RN are both available. A retracted article's time-to-retraction is defined "as the time between its publication and the time of its retraction" (Chen et al., 2013, p.242). Time-to-retraction in this study is measured in days.

## Authors of the retracted articles

The authors' names, countries of affiliation (as stated in the articles), and academic titles were obtained from the authors' notes, which can be found at the left bottom of the RAs. However, one article was withdrawn before production and formatting. Therefore, the authors' notes for that specific article are on the second page of the post-peer review, pre-production PDF file.

Information on the fate of these authors was searched for in the public domain and on *JCR*'s website (i.e., are they still active researchers? Are they on the editorial board of *JCR*? Are they ad hoc *JCR*'s reviewers? Did they resign, and when did they resign?).

Rejecting finger-pointing is part of celebrating failure (Edmondson, 2011). As such, the authors of the retracted articles will not be named in this paper. Letters will be used instead (e.g., Author A, Author B, and so on). The retracted *JCR* articles will also not be cited. As Teixeira da Silva and Bornemann-Cimenti (2017, p.366) advise, "a retracted scientific paper should not be used, or cited". Instead, the author will employ numbers (e.g., RA No.1, RA No.2, and so on). RA No.1 is associated with RN No.1, RA No.2 with RN No.2, etc.

## Data analysis and visualization

The collected data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel (for descriptive statistics). To visualize them, the author used RAWgraphs (<https://rawgraphs.io/>). VOSviewer (Version 1.6.16), a free bibliometrics software, was used to identify author clusters in the retracted *JCR* articles (van Eck & Waltman, 2020). Using data from Clarivate's Web of Science (WoS), the author performed a co-authorship network analysis on VOSviewer. In a co-authorship network, authors are represented by nodes. Co-authorship relations are represented by edges (Bendle et al., 2016). Given that VOSviewer displays the full names of the authors, an anonymized co-authorship network was created using the output of VOSviewer. The "original" (i.e., with author names) co-authorship network is available upon request.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *JCR*'s retraction notices

On the *JCR* page on the OUP's website, the author found ten RNs that are digitally associated with ten RAs. The oldest RN was issued on June 12, 2012. The most recent one was issued on October 8, 2020. Half of *JCR*'s RNs were released in 2020. The title, online publication date, volume/issue, and pagination information for each of the ten RNs are shown in Table 1. As Table 1 indicates, while the first five RNs were simply titled "Retraction", the last five have the titles of the RAs included in their titles.

**Table 1**  
The ten *JCR* retraction notices

| Retraction Notice No. | Online Publication Date | Title        | Volume/Issue and Pagination                 |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 1                     | June 12, 2012           | "Retraction" | Volume 39, Issue 2, 1 August 2012, Page 444 |
| 2                     | July 11, 2012           | "Retraction" | Volume 39, Issue 2, 1 August 2012, Page 444 |
| 3                     | April 10, 2014          | "Retraction" | Volume 41, Issue 1, June                    |

|    |                   |                                                |                                              |
|----|-------------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
|    |                   |                                                | 2014, Page 236                               |
| 4  | April 10, 2014    | "Retraction"                                   | Volume 41, Issue 1, June 2014, Page 236      |
| 5  | November 22, 2019 | "Retraction"                                   | Volume 46, Issue 5, February 2020, Page 1008 |
| 6  | January 20, 2020  | "Retraction: [Title of the retracted article]" | Volume 46, Issue 6, April 2020, Page 1127    |
| 7  | February 18, 2020 | "Retraction: [Title of the retracted article]" | Volume 46, Issue 6, April 2020, Page 1128    |
| 8  | July 3, 2020      | "Retraction: [Title of the retracted article]" | Volume 47, Issue 3, October 2020, Page 472   |
| 9  | July 30, 2020     | "Retraction: [Title of the retracted article]" | Volume 47, Issue 3, October 2020, Page 473   |
| 10 | October 08, 2020  | "Retraction: [Title of the retracted article]" | Volume 47, Issue 4, December 2020, Page 632  |

Source: The author

Note: The retraction notices are listed in the order in which they were published online.

*JCR's* RNs are viewed and downloaded, according to Table 2. They have received 18,378 pageviews and 3,944 PDF downloads in total. The AAS indicates that eight of them have been commented on. In terms of pageviews and downloads, RN No.9 is the most popular among *JCR's* retractions. Despite having the fewest pageviews and downloads, RN No.2 has the highest AAS. Five of the ten RNs have AASs equal to or greater than six. Four of them received over 2,000 views each. Four RNs have had their PDFs downloaded over 500 times.

**Table 2**

Metrics for the ten *JCR* retraction notices

| Retraction Notice No. | Pageviews    | PDF downloads | Altmetric Attention Score | Data Retrieval Since |
|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 1                     | 722          | 137           | 1                         | 2/1/2017             |
| 2                     | 389          | 104           | 9                         | 2/1/2017             |
| 3                     | 617          | 136           | 6                         | 12/1/2016            |
| 4                     | 597          | 115           | 6                         | 12/1/2016            |
| 5                     | 2,659        | 420           | 1                         | 11/1/2019            |
| 6                     | 1,430        | 387           | -                         | 1/1/2020             |
| 7                     | 1,832        | 568           | 1                         | 2/1/2020             |
| 8                     | 3,374        | 663           | 6                         | 7/1/2020             |
| 9                     | <b>3,940</b> | <b>867</b>    | 6                         | 7/1/2020             |
| 10                    | 2,818        | 547           | -                         | 10/1/2020            |
| Median                | 1,631        | 403.5         | 6                         | -                    |
| Total                 | 18,378       | 3,944         | 36                        | -                    |

Source: The author

Notes: Italicized numbers are the bare minimum. The numbers in boldface are the highest.

## Retracted *JCR* articles

The ten RAs are listed in Table 3. All of them are research articles. No *JCR* review article was retracted. They were all digitally watermarked "Retracted" in either red or gray. The oldest RA was online-published on October 20, 2009. The ever first *JCR* article to be retracted was published in Volume 37, Issue 6, April 2011. The most recent one was published online on November 8, 2019.

While examining the authors' notes in the ten RAs and researching their backstories, the author found that four of them evolved from presentations at Association for Consumer Research's (ACR) conferences. The ACR is one of *JCR's* 11 sponsoring organizations. Articles Nos. 1, 4, 8, and 10 are the four in question.

**Table 3**  
Retracted *JCR* articles

| Article No. | Online Publication Date | Volume/Issue and Pagination                      | Retraction Notice No. |
|-------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1*          | October 14, 2010        | Volume 37, Issue 6, April 2011, Pages 1030–1045  | 1                     |
| 2           | October 5, 2011         | Volume 39, Issue 1, June 2012, Pages 199–214     | 2                     |
| 3           | July 14, 2011           | Volume 38, Issue 6, April 2012, Pages 1030–1046  | 3                     |
| 4*          | October 20, 2009        | Volume 36, Issue 6, April 2010, Pages 930–949    | 4                     |
| 5           | June 19, 2014           | Volume 41, Issue 3, October 2014, Pages 697–712  | 5                     |
| 6           | November 8, 2019        | Volume 46, Issue 6, April 2020, Pages i1–i58     | 6                     |
| 7           | June 9, 2018            | Volume 46, Issue 1, June 2019, Pages 53–68       | 7                     |
| 8*          | July 6, 2018            | Volume 46, Issue 1, June 2019, Pages 99–118      | 8                     |
| 9           | January 23, 2017        | Volume 44, Issue 2, August 2017, Pages 283–312   | 9                     |
| 10*         | May 18, 2017            | Volume 44, Issue 4, December 2017, Pages 778–793 | 10                    |

Source: The author

Note: \* denotes articles that arose from presentations at Association for Consumer Research's conferences.

### Reasons for retraction

In nine of the ten RNs, the reason for retraction was specified. In one case, the reason for the retraction was never mentioned, which is inconsistent with COPE's guidelines. For COPE (2019, p.2), an RN should state the reason(s) for retraction.

With five occurrences, the most frequent reason for retraction of *JCR*'s RAs is "Data and analysis anomalies". The second most common reason is "Blameworthy inaccuracies" with two occurrences. One article was retracted for "Fraudulent/manipulated/fabricated data". Another one was retracted because "it overlaps with an article published previously in another journal" (or duplicate publication for short) (see Table 4).

**Table 4**  
Reasons for retraction, retractors, and initiators of retraction

| Retracted Article No. | Number of the Retracted Article's Co-authors | The Then Country/Countries of Affiliation of the Authors of the Retracted Article | Main Reason for Retraction as per Retraction notice | Retractors as per Retraction Notice | Initiators of Retraction                                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1                     | 3                                            | The Netherlands                                                                   | Fraudulent/manipulated/ fabricated data             | "We" (not clearly indicated)        | Investigation led by three universities in the Netherlands    |
| 2                     | 3                                            | The Netherlands                                                                   | Not mentioned                                       | Not mentioned                       | Not mentioned                                                 |
| 3                     | 3                                            | The Netherlands/ The Netherlands/U.S.                                             | Blameworthy inaccuracies                            | "We" (not clearly indicated)        | Investigation commissioned by a university in the Netherlands |

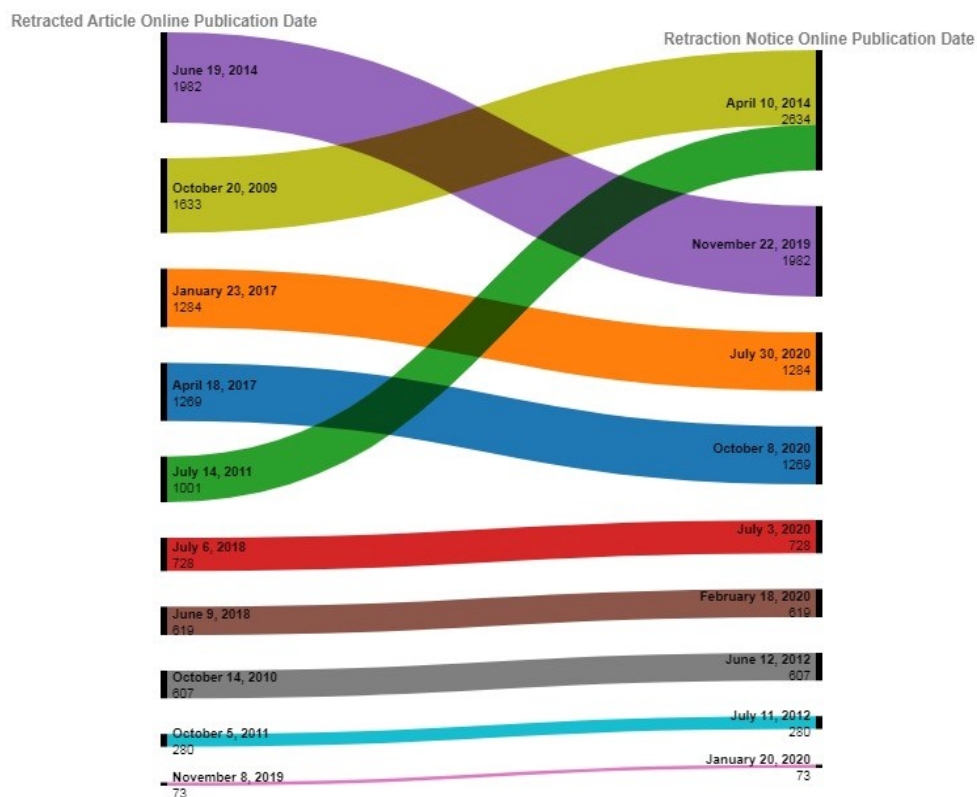
|    |   |                                  |                             |                              |                                                               |
|----|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4  | 3 | The Netherlands/Germany/U.S.     | Blameworthy inaccuracies    | "We" (not clearly indicated) | Investigation commissioned by a university in the Netherlands |
| 5  | 3 | China/Canada/China (Hong Kong)   | Data and analysis anomalies | The first and third authors  | The first and third authors                                   |
| 6  | 2 | China/Canada                     | Duplicate publication       | The editors                  | The editors                                                   |
| 7  | 3 | Singapore/U.S./China (Hong Kong) | Data and analysis anomalies | The first and third authors  | The first and third authors                                   |
| 8  | 3 | U.S.                             | Data and analysis anomalies | The authors                  | The authors                                                   |
| 9  | 4 | U.S.                             | Data and analysis anomalies | The authors                  | The authors                                                   |
| 10 | 2 | U.S./Canada                      | Data and analysis anomalies | The second author            | Anonymous researcher                                          |

Source: The author

*JCR*'s reasons for retraction, according to Bar-Ilan and Halevi's (2018) categorization, fall into two major categories: (1) scientific distortion (with eight occurrences); and (2) ethical misconduct (e.g., one occurrence). Covering 18 marketing journals, the study by Moussa (2022, p.18) has shown that the three most prevalent reasons for retraction were, in order, duplicate publication, data inaccuracy, and data fabrication.

### Time-to-retraction

An alluvial diagram is depicted in Figure 1. It shows the relationship between the dates of the online publication of *JCR*'s RAs and the corresponding RNs.



Source: The author

**Figure 1.** Time-to-retraction of *JCR* retracted articles.

The time-to-retraction determines the size of a beam. A number beneath the beam represents the time-to-retraction in days. Once the data were analyzed, it was found that the average RA took 947.6 days (or 2.6 years) to be retracted. The median time-to-retraction is  $Mdn=864.5$  days, or 2.37 years (Min.—Max.: 73 — 1,982 days). In Chen et al.'s (2013, p.242) large-scale study of RAs, the mean and median times-to-retraction were  $M=2.57$  and  $Mdn=2$ , respectively. The average and median times to retraction of *JCR* articles are relatively high.

### Retraction initiators and retractors

According to four of the ten RNs, the initiators were (subsets of) the authors of the retracted articles. The findings in Table 4 indicate that retractions are not always initiated by *JCR* editors, but also by the authors themselves. Despite knowing the stigma associated with a retracted article, these “heroic souls” (Vuong, 2020b) willingly made that request and even provided reasons why they believe their findings (along with their articles) should be removed from the consumer behavior literature. *JCR*'s editors (and/or policy board members) have decided to retract articles three times based on findings from investigations led by a university or a group of universities. In one instance, the retraction appears to have been initiated by an anonymous researcher (i.e., a whistleblower) who contacted, in August 2019, *JCR*'s editors.

In the oldest four *JCR*'s RNs, there were no explicit markers that clearly indicated who authored them. While an apology is expressed in each of the four cases, it is unclear who is/are apologizing. In fact, it is unclear whether the published *JCR* articles were retracted by the authors, editors, policy board members, and/or other parties (Hu, 2017). Three RNs (i.e., RNs Nos.1, 3, and 4) used the phrase “We are therefore informing our readers that this article has been retracted” without revealing the retractors' identities. RN No.2 simply reads, “The article [...], has been retracted. We apologize for any problems that the publication of this article may have caused”. An RN should “state who is retracting the article”, according to COPE (2019, p.2). Remember that RN No.2 has the highest AAS.

As Table 4 shows, only six of the ten RNs clearly identified the retractors. In five of these six cases, the retractors were (subsets of) the authors of the *JCR* articles. The duplicate *JCR* article was retracted by the editors.

### Authors of the retracted *JCR* articles

The ten RAs were all co-authored (see Table 4). There is no single-authored article on the list of *JCR*'s RAs. These articles had an average of 2.9 co-authors (Min.—Max.: 2—4). Six of these ten RAs are knowledge products of international collaborations. They were co-authored by researchers who were then affiliated with institutions in different, and sometimes very distant, countries. The names of 19 researchers made 29 appearances in the author byline of the ten RAs. These researchers were then affiliated with institutions based in the U.S. (11 occurrences), The Netherlands (nine occurrences), China (four occurrences), Canada (three occurrences), Germany, and Singapore (see Table 5).

Following a review of the authors' notes, it was found that the authors of the RAs were from all academic titles (i.e., from doctoral student to full professor). As shown in Table 5, the academic title “Assistant Professor” is overrepresented among the author credits, with 11 occurrences. The titles “Associate Professor” and “Professor” have an equal number of occurrences, with eight each. The titles “Doctoral Student” and “Research Associate” have one occurrence each. Of the 19 authors, 11 are females.

An examination of publicly available information, at the time of writing, revealed that: (1) four of the 19 authors (two men and two women) have resigned as a result of research misconduct investigations conducted by their institutions of affiliation. (i.e., Author A resigned in 2019, Author B in 2012, Author C in 2020, and Author N in 2011); (2) fifteen of the 19 authors are still active researchers; (3) one of these 15 authors (i.e., Author J) is currently serving as a member of *JCR*'s editorial review board<sup>1</sup>; and (4) two other authors (Authors I and P) are presently ad hoc reviewers for *JCR* (see *JCR*'s Volume 48, Issue 6, Pages 936-938).

**Table 5**

Anonymized authors of retracted *JCR* articles

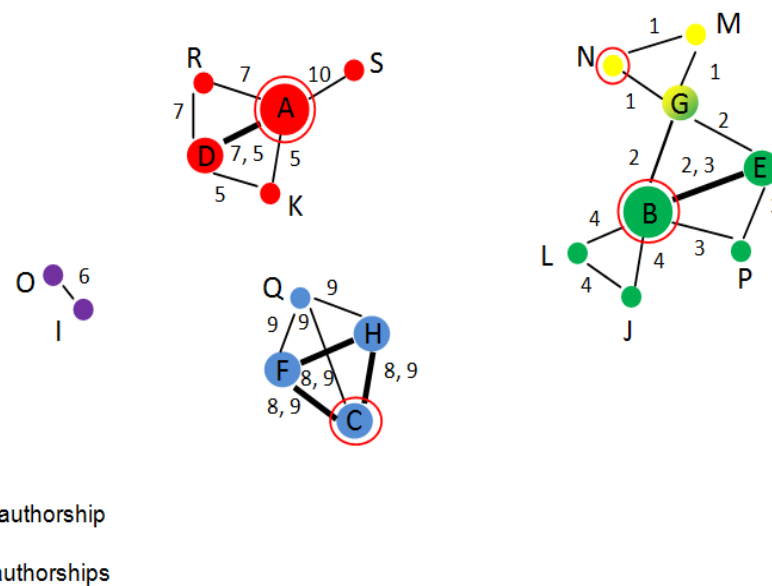
| Anonymized Author | Number of Co-authored Retracted <i>JCR</i> Article | Academic Title(s) as per Retracted Article(s)             | County/countries of Affiliation as per Retracted Article(s) | Gender | Retractor and/or Initiator |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------|----------------------------|
| <i>Author A</i>   | 3                                                  | Doctoral student/assistant professor/ Assistant professor | Canada/U.S.                                                 | Female | No cooperation             |
| <i>Author B</i>   | 3                                                  | Associate professor/Professor/Professor                   | The Netherlands                                             | Male   | No information             |
| <i>Author C</i>   | 2                                                  | Assistant professor/ Assistant professor/                 | U.S.                                                        | Female | Initiator/retractor        |
| Author D          | 2                                                  | Assistant professor/ Assistant professor/                 | China/Singapore                                             | Female | Initiator/retractor        |
| Author E          | 2                                                  | Assistant professor/ Assistant professor                  | The Netherlands                                             | Female | No information             |
| Author F          | 2                                                  | Professor/Professor                                       | U.S.                                                        | Female | Initiator/retractor        |
| Author G          | 2                                                  | Assistant professor/ Assistant professor/                 | The Netherlands                                             | Female | No information             |
| Author H          | 2                                                  | Associate professor/ Associate professor                  | U.S.                                                        | Female | Initiator/retractor        |
| <b>Author I</b>   | 1                                                  | Associate professor                                       | Canada                                                      | Male   | Not applicable             |
| <b>Author J</b>   | 1                                                  | Associate professor                                       | U.S.                                                        | Female | No information             |
| Author K          | 1                                                  | Associate professor                                       | China (Hong Kong)                                           | Male   | Initiator/retractor        |
| Author L          | 1                                                  | Professor                                                 | Germany                                                     | Male   | No information.            |
| Author M          | 1                                                  | Associate professor                                       | The Netherlands                                             | Male   | No information             |
| <i>Author N</i>   | 1                                                  | Professor                                                 | The Netherlands                                             | Male   | No information             |
| Author O          | 1                                                  | Assistant professor                                       | China                                                       | Female | Not applicable             |
| <b>Author P</b>   | 1                                                  | Professor                                                 | U.S.                                                        | Female | No information             |
| Author Q          | 1                                                  | Research associate                                        | U.S.                                                        | Male   | Initiator/retractor        |
| Author R          | 1                                                  | Professor                                                 | China (Hong Kong)                                           | Female | Initiator/retractor        |
| Author S          | 1                                                  | Associate professor                                       | Canada                                                      | Male   | Retractor                  |

Source: The author

Notes: Authors are listed by the number of co-authored retracted articles and then by name initials. Author J is a *JCR*'s editorial board member. Authors I and P are *JCR*'s ad hoc reviewers. Authors A, B, C, and N have resigned from their positions. The authors' full names are available upon request.

What lessons have authors I, J, and P learned from their retraction experiences? How could these editorial board members and reviewers have missed the fact that the manuscripts they co-authored contained scientific distortion and ethical misconduct? Aren't they now less credible *JCR*'s referees? Such questions can only be answered by these three authors. Remember that sharing retraction stories is part of the process of celebrating failure (see e.g., Kullgren & Carter, 2015).

The anonymized co-authorship network of the 19 authors of the ten *JCR* retracted articles is depicted in Figure 2. According to VOSviewer, this network has five distinct clusters of co-authors. Author G, despite being assigned to the yellow cluster by VOSviewer, has co-authored one *JCR* article with two green cluster scholars (i.e., Authors B and E). Author G worked on two *JCR* articles with two scholars who have since resigned (i.e., Authors B and N). Author B has the most links (six), followed by Authors A, C, F, and H, whom each has five links.



Source: The author

Notes: Vertices (or nodes) represent authors and edges represent co-authorships. Letters are used instead of authors' full names. Authors who have resigned from their positions are represented by vertices inside red circles. Numbers represent retracted article numbers.

**Figure 2.** Anonymized co-authorship network of the 19 authors of the ten retracted *JCR* articles

## LEARNED LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The retraction of a published article is an exceptional event. In its entire history (i.e., from 1974 to April 11, 2022), the *JCR* has retracted only ten of its articles. According to OUP (i.e., the current publisher of *JCR*), the journal has published, up to the writing of this paper, 2,519 articles (with 2,496 research articles and 23 review articles). *JCR*'s RAs represent hence a negligible portion (i.e., 0.397%) of what has been published in it.

Having said that, it was critical to thoroughly investigate these retractions in order to learn lessons from them. A "failure should be celebrated only if it results in learning", wrote Pisano (2019, p.6). The ten lessons learned from *JCR*'s retractions are listed below, along with some of the author's recommendations.

### For consumer researchers

*Lesson 1: Consumer researchers should focus on research integrity and not productivity.* It should be noted that three of the ten RAs' 19 authors (i.e., Authors J, K, and P) are also featured among the top 26 researchers who published the most in *JCR* between 2004 and 2014 (see Wang et al., 2015, p.16). Only author K was both an initiator and a retractor among these three authors. There was no information in the RNs about the behavior of authors J and P. Whether it is because of the "publish or perish" precept or not, consumer researchers who are focused on productivity and publication scores (and the money that comes with them) will pay little or no attention to the data collected and the analyses completed. It is unavoidable then that their research has errors and that it may be retracted under certain conditions. It is also worth indicating that author C is a 2014 Ferber Award co-winner for the best dissertation-based *JCR* article. Author J is currently a member of the *JCR* editorial review board. Authors I and P are now serving as ad hoc reviewers for *JCR*. So, these "elite" consumer researchers have misbehaved, either by faking data, consenting to it, or being naïve enough to place their names in the author's byline of publications of doubtful integrity.

*Lesson 2: Sharing responsibility for data collection and analysis.* The issue of data and analysis errors is clear, as is the problem of multiple authors. Eight of the ten RNs indicate reasons for retraction related to data and their analysis. In one of these RNs (i.e., RN No.8), it was stated that the

data were the sole responsibility of one of the co-authors. It is therefore recommended that multiple authors share responsibility, particularly for data collection and analysis.

*Lesson 3: Authorship means accountability.* Authorship is neither an honor nor an acknowledgment. It's a responsibility. While some "heroic souls" have retracted their articles, others have never accepted responsibility. Author A has never collaborated with *JCR*'s editors on the retraction of the three articles s/he co-authored, according to three of the ten RNs examined. *JCR*'s editors were unable to contact him/her or obtain responses regarding data and analysis anomalies. The point is that each author should accept public and complete responsibility for the content of the articles on which s/he collaborated. It is argued here that the time has come for *JCR* and other consumer behavior journals to adopt the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT), which allows authors to share an accurate and complete description of their different contributions to the published work (Larivière, Pontille, and Sugimoto, 2021).

*Lesson 4: Consumer researchers must be taught research/publishing ethics.* Some consumer researchers (e.g., Author B) have no ethical qualms about falsifying and manipulating their data, as RN No.1 indicates. According to RN No.6, Author O "misunderstood the duplication policy". Author I, Author O's co-author, claimed to be "unaware of the existence of the previously published article" though s/he is listed in the author byline. If Author O is to be believed, s/he received a "gift authorship" for the previously published article. Gift authorship is perhaps the most common unethical behavior seen in academic publishing (Reisig et al., 2020). The Retraction Watch blog featured a post (dated January 27, 2020) in which Authors O and I debated, with Author O concluding: "As a junior scholar, I feel very regret about the retraction and have learned from this". In some countries, junior researchers (i.e., assistant professors) are instructed, if not forced, to target top-tier, elite journals (like *JCR*) to maximize their publication scores (or pay-per-publication) and secure tenure and promotion (Moussa, 2022). Instead, (junior) consumer researchers should be told not to engage in questionable or unethical research/publishing practices.

## **For the *JCR***

*Lesson 5: More transparent and informative retraction notices.* Over time, *JCR*'s RNs have become more transparent and informative. Contrast RN No.2 (which has the highest AAS) with RN No.9 (which has the highest numbers of pageviews and PDF downloads). The five most recent RNs are the clearest and most informative of the ten. It is no coincidence that they have received the most views and downloads although they were issued in 2020. Transparency and more information are also required to disentangle the inadvertent from the fraudulent error. A clear and informative RN can also help to de-stigmatize honest authors (Xu & Hu, 2022).

*Lesson 6: Data integrity is key.* Given this study's findings, it is easy to see why the *JCR* started, in 2014, to require prospect authors to submit a "Data Collection Paragraph" (Inman et al., 2018). Because eight of *JCR*'s retracted articles were withdrawn due to data issues, it is also comprehensible why the *JCR* has implemented, in October 2020 (and revised in March 2022), several data policies (Schmitt et al., 2021). One of these policies requires that every empirical paper revised and resubmitted to *JCR* should include its raw data<sup>2</sup>. The data file is to be made anonymously available to *JCR* editors and reviewers through data repositories such as Harvard Dataverse (<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/>), Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/>), the Qualitative Data Repository (<https://data.qdr.syr.edu/>), or ResearchBox (<https://researchbox.org/>). Such a data availability policy is aimed to deter data fabricators from submitting their gibberish and unreliable manuscripts to *JCR*. Only honest authors will willingly deposit their data. Provided with raw data, *JCR* editors, associate editors, and ad hoc reviewers have to detect unintentional data errors. To prevent data-related retractions, *JCR*'s editorial team and reviewers have to exercise vigilance and vigilantism. They have to double-check the data, procedures, and/or analysis methods of empirical papers submitted to *JCR*. Making raw data available to *JCR*'s readership and the entire consumer behavior community would also encourage replications. A data availability policy would eventually resurrect *JCR*'s defunct Re-Inquiries section (Mick, 2001).

Letters to the Editor are not published in the *JCR*. Such documents are common in other journals and can be a valuable venue for academic debate (Teixeira da Silva, 2021). Letters to the Editor can be used as a backup plan to flag any questionable article published in *JCR* very early on. This suggestion is also consistent with COPE's recommendations<sup>3</sup>.

*Lesson 7: "Doing the right thing".* The *JCR* and the then-editorial team should be applauded for not being afraid to retract five *JCR* articles in a single year (i.e., 2020). That was a brave act. The author could only imagine how hard the then-editors worked to handle a constant flow of new submissions to the *JCR*, as well as the retraction of five *JCR* articles. That was a distressing experience and a valuable lesson. The *JCR* editorial team should be celebrated because some editors-in-chief will think twice before retracting even a single article. Some reputable journals, like the *Journal of Marketing*, have, for example, failed to retract at least two problematic papers. One of these is co-authored by author A. The *Journal of Marketing* "fixed" it by removing author A's name and enabling his/her two co-authors to: re-run the analyses, revise the manuscript, and republish it along with a corrigendum (see Volume 84, Issue 6, Pages 130-143). The second *Journal of Marketing* paper, despite warranting an expression of concern almost a year ago (on August 20, 2021), has yet to be retracted (see Volume 83, Issue 4, Pages 121-138).

### For Oxford University Press and Journal of Consumer Research Inc.

*Lesson 8: Celebrating retracted articles just the same as award-winning articles.* *JCR*'s RAs are left online to maintain the scholarly record. They are forever *JCR* articles. At the time of writing, on *JCR*'s page on the OUP website, there was an electronic link leading to award-winning *JCR* articles. A similar link should have been dedicated to *JCR*'s RAs. The *JCR*, the non-profit organization that owns it (i.e., Journal of Consumer Research Inc.), and OUP should make readers aware of these articles to avoid their continuous use and citations (see Moussa, 2022, pp.25-28). This is also in line with the idea of celebrating failure.

### For the Association for Consumer Research

*Lesson 9: The double-blind peer review shouldn't be compromised.* As mentioned in the Results and Discussion section, four of *JCR*'s RAs evolved from ACR presentations. Examining the dates of online publication of these four RAs and the dates the corresponding ACR presentations took place, it is safe to speculate that the peer review processes for RAs Nos. 1, 4, 8, and 10 were single-blind processes. The fact that the titles of the four RAs and the four ACR presentations are (almost) identical may have jeopardized the double-blind peer-review process. Bias and favoritism risks should not be dismissed with a compromised double-blind peer-review process. The author's query is here: Shouldn't the titles of these manuscripts/presentations have been changed before they were submitted to *JCR*?

Further investigation revealed that the four extended abstracts of these four ACR presentations are freely available to readers and citers. The author's concern is: Shouldn't the ACR retract the conference papers from which these articles evolved along with their extended abstracts now that the *JCR* has done so?

### For *JCR* Readership

*Lesson 10: Aware and proactive readership.* Scientific articles are co-created knowledge products. A *JCR* article, except a manuscript accepted as is, is published after multiple rounds of revisions. The authors make changes to the previously submitted version of a manuscript based on the recommendations of the associate editors and ad hoc reviewers. As readers, we are consumers of these co-created knowledge products (i.e., articles). Readers (whether academics or practitioners) now have all of the tools they need to become active rather than passive readers. Academics or practitioners who have concerns about a journal article can contact the editors of that journal, just as the brave anonymous researcher who initiated the retraction of RA No.10 did. They can also leave comments and share them on (academic) social media. Moderated post-publication peer review sites

(such as PubPeer) have transformed passive readers into active readers and knowledge co-creators. By being proactive readers, the time it takes for questionable or corrupt articles to be retracted, as well as their influence, will be significantly reduced.

## **CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

The *JCR* has completed five decades as a top-tier multidisciplinary journal and *the* premier outlet for consumer behavior research. It is currently on the FT50 list<sup>4</sup>. The *JCR* is also, and has been since 1990, one of the 29 journals used by the University of Texas at Dallas to provide its ranking of the top 100 business schools<sup>5</sup>. The *JCR* is listed as a four-star (4\*) journal with the designation “Journal of Distinction” in the 2021 edition of the Academic Journal Guide by the UK-based Chartered Association of Business Schools. The *JCR* is an A\* journal in the 2019 version of the Journal Quality List by the Australian Business Deans Council, with the mention “The best or leading journal in its field”. According to data from the 2021 version of Clarivate’s Journal Citation Reports (released in 28 June 2022), the *JCR* has a JIF of 8.612 placing it 32<sup>nd</sup> out of 155 business journals included in the Social Sciences Citation Index. This elite status, on the other hand, comes with risks and responsibilities. In a context where the precept “Publish or Perish” has been replaced by “Publish in elite journals or Perish” (Moussa, 2022), “serial fabricateurs” (as Aaron Charlton calls them) will not hesitate to target *JCR* with their crooked manuscripts. Consumer researchers who are preoccupied with productivity and publication scores (and the money that comes with them) will pay little to no attention to the collected data and the performed analyses. *JCR*’s editors, associate editors, ad hoc reviewers, authors, and readers must be alert and attentive. Retractions are collective failures that require collective vigilance to remedy.

Although this study offers several intriguing insights into *JCR* retractions, it has limitations. Some of these limitations, however, raise concerns that could be addressed in future research. First, this research focused on the *JCR*. Other consumer behavior journals, such as the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* (see, e.g., Volume 25, Issue 3, Pages 504-511) and the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* (see, e.g., Volume 3, Issue 2, Pages 202-215), have also issued retraction notices. One thing to note is that these two retracted articles were co-authored by some of the 19 authors listed in Table 5 (Authors C, F, and H, to be more precise). So, the co-authorship network depicted in Figure 2 appears to be the visible tip of the iceberg. Second, five of the ten *JCR* retracted articles contain information indicating that the reported studies were (in part or entirely) funded by granting organizations and award-giving foundations. Articles Nos. 1, 5, 6, 7, and 10 are the five in question. How many sparse financial resources were used to fund faulty and fraudulent consumer research? This is a question that was not addressed in this paper and needs to be looked into further (Stern et al., 2014). Third, in addition to financial costs, retracted articles have epistemic costs (Fanelli et al., 2021). To which extent these retracted *JCR* articles might require the revision of extant consumer behavior knowledge? How many articles have based their hypotheses on the findings of these articles? How many meta-analyses included them in their estimates? The author leaves these here raised yet left unanswered questions for future researchers.

### **Research ethic statement**

This paper has not been published elsewhere in any form. It has not been submitted simultaneously to any other publication outlet.

### **Author contribution statement**

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation/revision.

### **Declaration of conflicting interests**

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest regarding this paper.

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To the next section, the reference list does not include the retracted *JCR* articles investigated in this study. The goal in so doing is to avoid their continuous citations.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See <https://web.archive.org/web/20220424225529/https://consumerresearcher.com/editorial-team/editorial-review-board>
- <sup>2</sup> See <https://web.archive.org/web/20220424230141/https://consumerresearcher.com/research-ethics>
- <sup>3</sup> See <https://publicationethics.org/postpublication> (Last accessed April 13, 2022).
- <sup>4</sup> See <https://www.ft.com/content/3405a512-5cbb-11e1-8f1f-00144feabdc0> (Last accessed April 13, 2022).
- <sup>5</sup> See <https://jsom.utdallas.edu/the-utd-top-100-business-school-research-rankings/> (Last accessed April 13, 2022).