

Reimagining Consumer Psychology through Open Science Principles.

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Consumer psychology is facing various challenges, including a lack of research integrity and unethical publishing practices. This commentary lists pivotal events and discusses related findings that point to the field's need for reform. Open Science principles are proposed as a transformative solution to promote transparency in data, methodology, access, and peer review. Consumer psychology can only be revitalized and regain credibility if it fully embraces these four pillars. Academic and professional associations with an impact on consumer psychology must set a good example by cultivating a culture of integrity and accountability in research and publishing. Consumer psychologists must educate future generations of researchers not solely on research methodology but also research ethics.

Keywords: Consumer psychology; research integrity; publication ethics; Open Science principles

Introduction

Consumer psychology, defined as “the utilization of distinctively psychological concepts and methods to understand (explain and predict) the dynamics underlying, influencing, and determining consumer behavior” (Jacoby, 1976, p.332), is a vibrant and multidisciplinary research field that has been in existence for more than 60 years (see Malter et al., 2020 for a comprehensive historical account). A decade ago, Michel Tuan Pham, the 2012 President of the Society for Consumer Psychology (SCP or Division 23 of the American Psychological Association) lauded the field and wrote: “In a number of respects, the field of consumer psychology is doing very well” (Pham, 2013, p.412). However, in the intervening years, the field has weathered storms of research integrity and publishing scandals, several retractions, and illuminating meta-science studies, all pointing to a compelling need for reform. This commentary follows a chronological order of events, beginning with a somber tableau depicting the challenges that have cast shadows over consumer psychology. It culminates with a forward-looking perspective, proffering Open Science principles as a transformative remedy to address the prevailing concerns and pave the way for a revitalized future..

Coercive citations and Journal Impact Factor manipulation

Academic journals are essential for disseminating knowledge and keeping up with the most recent re-

search in any field. As a scientific field, consumer psychology has been shaped by four major publication outlets: the *Journal of Consumer Research* (JCR was established in 1974), *Psychology & Marketing* (P&M was first published in 1984), the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* (JCP was launched in 1992), and the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* (JACR was created in 2016). Two of these four journals (i.e., JCR and JCP) are listed in the prestigious, yet controversial, list of the top 50 business and management journals compiled by the Financial Times (or FT50 for short).

In the early 2010s, Clarivate removed the JCP (SCP's flagship publication outlet) from the 2011 and 2012 editions of its Journal Citation Reports. In other words, JCP has not received Journal Impact Factor (JIF) scores for 2011 and 2012. The reason for the suppression was excessive journal self-citation (Moussa, 2021).

In the supporting online material of their *Science* article on coercive citation in academic publishing Wilhite and Fong (2012, p.40) place JCP as the 9th most coercive journal. Coercive journal self-citations are unethical academic publishing practices in which journals, either through their editors-in-chief or reviewers, pressurize, if not force, the author(s) to add frivolous recent journal self-citations to a manuscript before the journal will agree to accept/publish it.

Clarivate's suppression decision along with Wilhite and Fong's (2012) findings indicate that the then-editor-in-chief (whose editorship lasted from 2008 to 2012) and/or JCP reviewers manipulated the JIF citation metric. The motivation for this unethical publishing prac-

tice is unknown, but it could have been driven by a desire to make the 2010 FT list. Indeed, JCP's highest JIF score to date was 5.352 for 2009.

Recurring research integrity scandals and questionable research practices

The year 2012 was a shadowy year for the field of consumer psychology. The field was marred by two major research integrity scandals involving two prominent figures. A Dutch social psychologist was at the center of the first scandal where he was found to have falsified/fabricated data for numerous publications, impacting 58 papers two of which were published in consumer psychology journals (i.e., a 2010 JCR article and a 2010 P&M article). The second research integrity scandal involved another Dutch social psychologist who was found to have committed scientific fraud, including data manipulation and massaging, which resulted in the retraction of seven of his articles, three of which were published in JCR (Moussa & Charlton, 2024).

In late 2019, a third research integrity scandal out broke. It involved a psychology researcher at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. Three JCR articles co-authored by that psychologist were retracted, two in 2019 and one in 2020 (Moussa, 2022).

A fourth research integrity scandal shook down consumer psychology in July 2020. It involved the co-winner of the 2014 Ferber award (for best dissertation-based JCR article). Four articles co-authored by the Ferber award co-winner were retracted (two from JCR, one from JCP and another from JACR). The Ferber award co-winner has collaborated with the 2020 SCP president and one of the ongoing four JCR co-editors (2021-2024). This scandal shows how deep fraud and questionable research practices (QRP) in consumer psychology run.

A fifth research integrity scandal is still unfolding, involving a famous Harvard Business School professor. A 1,300-page unsealed report by a three-member investigation committee found that the Harvard Business School professor violated accepted research practices and committed research misconduct in multiple studies. The report, which was made public on March 14th, 2024, indicates that the unnamed professor intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly falsified and fabricated data in several studies, resulting in a recommendation for termination and an audit of their other published studies. The Harvard Business School professor has co-authored at least four articles published in consumer psychology journals.

It should be noted that most of these research integrity scandals and retractions were instigated by a

healthy and laudable whistleblowing movement. For instance, Uri Simonsohn, a data sleuth behavioral scientist, discovered the second Dutch social psychologist's misconduct first (Moussa & Charlton, 2024). Simonsohn, together with Joe Simmons and Leif Nelson, identified data anomalies in articles co-authored by the famous Harvard Business School professor and raised their concerns in a four-part series of posts on their blog Data Colada.¹ After failing to replicate studies in one of the then Northwestern University researcher's articles, psychological scientists Gregory Francis and Evelina Thunell were the first to highlight the "excessive success" or "too good to be true" nature of their research findings (Francis & Thunell, 2019).

Retractions are on the rise

Because of these and other research integrity scandals, retractions of consumer psychology articles are on the rise. For example, JCR retracted up to five articles in 2020 alone (Moussa, 2022). Another JCR article was withdrawn in 2023. JCR has issued 11 retractions thus far. JCP also retracted one of its articles in 2020. JACR retracted two, one in 2020 and the other in 2022. In total, 15 articles were retracted from JCR (with 11 articles), JACR (two articles), JCP (one article), and P&M (one article).

Figure 1 depicts the reasons for retractions of these 15 articles, as per retractions notices. The reasons for retractions include data and analysis anomalies (with six occurrences), fraudulent/fabricated/manipulated data (two occurrences), blameworthy inaccuracies (two occurrences), statistical errors (two occurrences), unavailable data (one occurrence), and duplicate publication (one occurrence).

It must be mentioned that the (co)authors of these 15 retracted articles include a Ferber award winner, a JCR associate editor, an SCP's former president, and some of the most prolific consumer psychology scholars (Moussa, 2022).

Replication failures

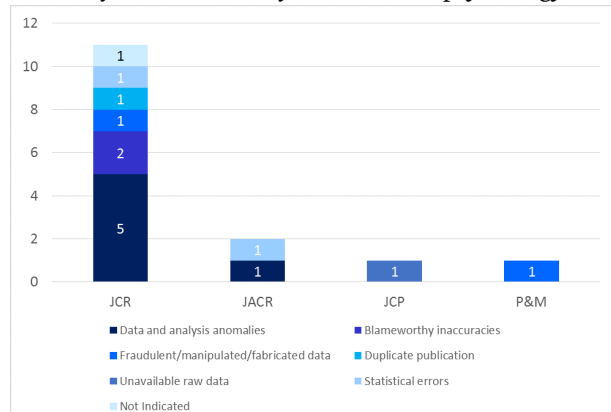
Most consumer psychology journals have a positivistic ethos and publish primarily hypothetical-deductive quantitative and/or experimental studies. Achieving replicability is thus important for moving scientific research in consumer psychology forward (Schimmack, 2021).²

¹<https://datacolada.org/109> - (Last accessed 10 November 2024)

²<https://replicationindex.com/2021/02/21/if-consumer-psychology-wants-to-be-a-science-it-has-to-behave-like-a-science/> (Last accessed 10 November 2024)

Figure 1

Reasons for retractions of 15 consumer psychology articles



So far, and according to Aaron Charlton's replication tracker, only one of 33 high-powered, direct replications of studies published in three major consumer psychology journals (i.e., JCR, JCP, and JACR) has been successful,³ with a successful replication defined as having significant results in the same direction as the original ones and free of obvious confounds. This is an abysmal success rate of 3.030%.

In Schimmack's 2022 Replicability Rankings of 121 Psychology Journals, P&M, JCR, and JCP placed 83rd, 96th, and 112th, respectively.⁴ These rankings were based on Schimmack's Replicability Index, which measures the likelihood that studies published in these journals can be successfully replicated. Schimmack's methodology evaluates how statistical significance (often in the form of *p*-values) is reported in the journals and assesses the extent to which findings are likely to be replicable.

Worse, replication studies are not publishable in (i.e., welcomed by) prestigious consumer psychology journals. For instance, JCP publishes research reports, research articles, conceptual reviews, and research dialogues, but not replications.⁵ The same applies to P&M.⁶ Even JCR's Re-inquiries section is now history (Mick, 2001).

Fortunately, there are other publication venues for replication studies in the larger fields of marketing and psychology. For example, *Marketing Letters* has a "Replication Corner" section that focuses on (conceptual) replication studies (Labroo, Mizik, & Winer, 2022). Five replication studies⁷ have been published in that section since 2021. *Meta-Psychology* has published studies that replicate those found in consumer psychology journals (e.g., Francis and Thunell, 2020).

Consumer research is plagued by *p*-value hacking

P-value hacking, also known as *p*-hacking, data dredging or data fishing, is a QRP in which researchers repeatedly perform statistical tests on their data until they obtain a result that is considered significant (Ziliak, 2016). This can be done by manipulating the data, selecting only certain variables/sample members, or using different statistical methods until a desired outcome is achieved.

The problem with *p*-hacking is that it can lead to false conclusions, as the significance of the result is based on the number of tests performed, rather than on the strength of the underlying evidence. This can result in a "false positive" result, where a significant effect is found when there is actually no effect in the population being studied.

Peterson and Umesh (2018) describe *p*-hacking as one of the barriers of the advance of the science of consumer psychology. Krefeld-Schwalb and Scheibehenne (2023) offer an alarming account on how *p*-hacking is widespread in consumer research. Dougherty and Horne (2022) found that the field of consumer psychology fared very poorly, again in terms of *p*-values, compared to every field of psychology. And not only are the *p*-values much worse than other fields, but they found a negative relationship between the JIF and quality of reported *p*-values.

In a blog post,⁸ Aaron Charlton (an independent meta-science and marketing researcher) scrutinized consumer psychology's version of Bem's (2011) infamous "feeling the future" paper through the lens of the ongoing debate around QRPs like *p*-hacking. The article in question was published in 2012 in the JCR and was co-authored by Michel Tuan Pham (the 2012 SCP's President), Leonard Lee (a 2007 Ferber award nominee and winner of the Outstanding Reviewer Award from JCR in 2013 and JCP in 2017), and Andrew T. Stephen (JCR's current co-editor) (see Pham et al., 2012). The article presented findings that Charlton suggested aligned

³See <https://openmkt.org/research/replications-of-marketing-studies/> (Last accessed 10 November 2024)

⁴<https://replicationindex.com/2022/01/26/rr21/> (Last accessed 10 November 2024)

⁵<https://myscp.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/hub/journal/15327663/forauthors.html> (last accessed 10 November 2024)

⁶<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/15206793/homepage/forauthors.html> (last accessed 10 November 2024)

⁷See <https://link.springer.com/collections/fadijefbcb> (Last accessed 10 November 2024)

⁸<https://openmkt.org/blog/2023/reviewing-phams-feeling-the-future-paper-to-illustrate-how-easy-it-is-to-unintentionally-p-hack/> (Last accessed 10 November 2024)

with patterns often associated with QRPs. Specifically, Charlton pointed to the distribution of p -values and the choice of dependent variables, noting that these characteristics could either reflect an incredible stroke of luck or raise concerns about p -hacking. Moreover, the clustering of p -values close to the .05 threshold is often associated with lower replicability, a point echoed in broader discussions on the reliability of research findings.

Questionable publishing practices

The peer review process for some consumer psychology journals is opaque and lacks transparency. For instance, not all consumer psychology journals provide acceptance and reception dates for their published articles. As an example, and despite being a journal member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), JCR does not provide such dates for its articles. This contradicts Principle #8 of the 16 Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (The Committee on Publication Ethics/Directory of Open Access Journals/Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association/World Association of Medical Editors (2022) (COPE), which states that “[s]tatements of peer review times should be supported by published timeframes on accepted papers [...] The date of publication should be published with all published research. Dates of submission and acceptance are preferred as well.” For the sake of information, JCR is published, since 2015, by Oxford University Press, a COPE publisher member.

Another questionable publishing practice (QPP) employed by JCR is the publication of invitation-only review articles. These are published in the “Research Curations” section. As of November 2024, 28 Research Curations have been published in that section. An invitation-only publishing model is questionable because not all authors can contribute to this section. Upon closer examination, these Research Curations are nothing more than review articles of JCR articles. More interestingly, JCR’s Research Curations began in 2012 as virtual (i.e., online-only) curations. Those published after 2018 are printed as articles, with each given a Digital Object Identifier, volume, issue, and pagination information. They are also available to readers for free.⁹ If truth be told, these curations appear to be “ingeniously” devised to boost JCR’s JIF in two ways: (1) journal self-citations, as Research Curations are review articles of JCR articles and thus exclusively cite JCR articles, and (2) review articles (that are freely available to readers) receive more citations than (fee-walled) research articles (Moussa, 2021).

Unfortunately, SCP’s JCP has followed the same QPP, publishing six invited research reviews between 2018 and 2024.¹⁰ In 2018, SCP launched the *Consumer Psy-*

chology Review (CPR) as an annual journal. “All articles [in CPR] are invited by the editors, in consultation with the Scientific Advisory Committee”.¹¹ So, according to its stated aims and scope, not all authors are allowed to submit and get finally published in CPR. While papers published in that journal are probably peer-reviewed, the exclusivity of the invitation-only model raises questions about transparency, inclusivity, and potential bias.

According to a search query in Clarivate’s Web of Science (accessed on November 10, 2024 via an institutional subscription), P&M published 65 review articles between 2021 and 2024. According to the same scholarly database, P&M has published 131 review papers since 1999. In other words, approximately 50% of P&M’s review papers have been published within the last four years. Publishing more review articles is one of the most effective ways to improve the JIF metric, as review papers receive more citations than research papers (Hickman et al., 2019). Consumer psychology journals should not adopt deliberate editorial policies that favor review articles. They should leave this for the “market” and wait for authors to submit review articles rather than soliciting them (e.g., using call for papers for review articles or creating review article sections within journals) (Moussa, 2021).

In addition to not providing acceptance and reception dates for published articles, the JACR employs another QPP: all JACR issues are special issues. A special issue of an academic journal is a collection of articles on a specific research topic or theme, guest-edited by experts in the field. COPE provides guidelines for its members (of which the JACR is not one) highlighting the potential risks and ethical issues associated with the guest-editing of special issues. This publishing practice is questionable for at least three reasons: (1) Special issues are often managed by guest editors, who may invite contributors they know or have worked with before. This can lead to potential favoritism or a lack of critical objectivity in the selection process; (2) The peer review process in special issues might be less rigorous than for regular issues. In some cases, invited papers could receive lenient reviews or bypass standard procedures altogether, undermining the quality and credibil-

⁹https://academic.oup.com/jcr/pages/research_curations (Last accessed 10 November 2024)

¹⁰<https://myscp.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/action/doSearch?AfterYear=2020&AllField=invited+review&BeforeYear=2024&SeriesKey=15327663&content=articlesChapters&startPage=2&target=default&pageSize=20> (Last accessed 10 November 2024)

¹¹See <https://myscp.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/hub/journal/24761281/productinformation.html> (Last accessed 10 November 2024)

ity of the research; (3) The topics of special issues may be trendy but not necessarily of long-term significance, leading to a burst of publications that quickly lose relevance (Moussa, 2023).

Open Science principles are a remedy

Is the field of consumer psychology in need of reform? As readers may already have gleaned, the answer to that question is a yes. The author believes that this reform should include the four pillars of Open Science:

1. Open data: Most of the retractions in consumer psychology journals are due to data issues (Moussa, 2022). For instance, 10 out of the 11 JCR's retractions were because of data anomalies. Making data available for peer reviewers and associate editors would have prevented the publication of these questionable articles and then their retraction. Making data available to the larger consumer psychology community and the general public allows for reanalysis and confirmation of results, increase transparency, and trust in consumer psychology research. In 2023, JCR and JCP updated their data availability policies in May and July, respectively. However, these policies only request data for peer review and provide it to the associate editor and peer reviewer (if requested). Supposedly less prestigious (marketing) journals (like *Marketing Letters*) have a data availability policy that states that papers will be published only if the data used in the analysis are clearly and precisely documented, and access to the data is not exclusive to the authors (Labroo, Mizik, Winer, et al., 2022). Consumer psychology journals should adopt a data availability policy similar to that of *Marketing Letters*.
2. Open methodology: The term "open methodology" refers to a research approach that is transparent and detailed enough for other researchers to replicate and apply in their own studies. There are two procedures for ensuring transparency and trustworthiness in hypothetical-deductive empirical research: (1) preregistration and (2) registered reports. A pre-registered study is a type of study in which the researchers publicly register their research design, methods, and analyzes before they collect the data. This means that the researchers have to specify their research questions, hypotheses, sample size, experiments, statistical methods, and other important aspects of the study before they conduct the research (Simmons et al., 2021). Interestingly, JCP's author guidelines state

that "authors may choose to preregister their research with an analysis plan".¹² To assess preregistration prevalence in JCR, Simonsohn (2023) examined all articles published during 2022. He found that 30% of the papers published had at least one preregistered study.¹³ A registered report is a unique publishing format that emphasizes the importance of the research question and methodological quality by requiring peer review prior to conducting the research. It is a two-stage peer review process in which the methods and proposed analyzes are reviewed before data collection and analysis (Stage 1). Protocols that meet stringent standards are provisionally accepted for publication. After the study is completed, the authors finalize the article to include the results and discussion (Stage 2), ensuring that there is no unjustified deviation from the pre-registered protocol. This format aims to reduce publication and research bias, promoting transparency and reproducibility in scientific research (Briker & Gerpott, 2024). P&M is encouraging this publishing format and launched a section titled "Registered Reports" in 2023. Such an initiative is commendable, and other consumer psychology journals should follow suit.¹⁴

3. Open Access: All consumer psychology journals are currently hybrid journals. This means that authors of accepted manuscripts can choose between the traditional subscription-based, fee-walled publishing model and the authors-pay, Gold Open Access (OA) model. I recommend that consumer psychology journals adopt the diamond OA (also referred to as the platinum OA) publishing path. Diamond OA means permanent and free access to journal articles for readers with no publication fees for the authors. By making research publications freely available to readers, consumer psychology journals will increase the accessibility of research findings. For instance, a diamond OA model for JCR is feasible as it is sponsored by not one or two but 11 organizations. Diamond OA consumer psychology journals do exist (see *Consumer Behavior Review*).¹⁵

¹²<https://myscp.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/hub/journal/15327663/forauthors.html> (Last accessed 10 November 2024).

¹³<https://datacolada.org/115> (Last accessed 10 November 2024)

¹⁴<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/page/15206793/homepage/psychologyandmarketingregisteredreports> (Last accessed 10 November 2024).

¹⁵<https://periodicos.ufpe.br/revistas/cbr> (Last accessed 10 November 2024)

4. Open Peer Review: Transparent peer review processes are quintessential in order to increase engagement, accountability, and trust in consumer psychology research. Invitation-only papers (such as JCR's Research Curations or JCP's invited research reviews) and journals (such as CPR) have questionable peer review processes that fail to represent diverse perspectives. With open peer review, editors-in-chief and peer reviewers are held accountable for their actions, including citation coercion for JIF manipulation. To increase transparency, article submission and acceptance dates, as well as peer reviewer reports, must be made public. Unfortunately, none of the four major consumer psychology journals has adopted open peer review.

For meta-scientists, Open Science principles increase access to data, methodologies, and study materials, allowing for more rigorous and large-scale analyses of research findings and practices (see e.g., Eisend et al., 2024). Open Science empowers meta-scientists to support a more transparent, reproducible, and ethical research landscape (Deer et al., 2024).

Instilling these open science principles in the next generation of consumer psychologists is critical to creating a research culture that values transparency, reproducibility, and integrity. For example, the Framework for Open and Reproducible Research Training (see <https://forrrt.org/>) provides a range of multidisciplinary open science training and educational resources. By teaching open science from the outset, educators can prepare future consumer researchers to engage thoughtfully with data, methodologies, and results, emphasizing the importance of sharing findings openly to benefit the larger consumer research community and the public. This education should extend beyond technical skills in research methodology to include a thorough understanding of research ethics, encouraging students to consider the larger implications of their work on consumers, industries, and public policy.

Conclusion

Pham (2023, p.376), commenting on Krefeld-Schwalb and Scheibehenne's (2023) article, stated the following:

I do believe that issues of transparency and reproducibility are critical for our field. There is no question that for consumer research to progress as a scholarly discipline, it must embrace strong scientific practices, which include concerns for transparency and reproducibility. However, unlike other advocates of Open Science, I do not believe that issues of transparency and reproducibility can

be examined independently of other epistemic ideals such as research relevance and usefulness.

Throughout this commentary, the author aimed to demonstrate that reducing fraud, QRP, and QPP in consumer psychology should be priority number one. The subjective nature of relevance and usefulness pushes them down the priority list (Hoyer et al., 2024). For the field of consumer psychology to thrive and regain credibility, we as a community must reconsider how we conduct and publish research (Pruschak et al., 2022). We should prioritize cultivating a research environment that values transparency, reproducibility, and integrity over citation-based metrics and benchmarking scholarship in consumer research (Pham et al., 2024).

As this commentary has shown, consumer psychologists are starting to preregister their studies. One journal, JCP, recommends preregistration, while another, P&M, encourages the registered reports publishing format. Therefore, it appears that, while we have made some progress toward one of the four Open Science principles (i.e., open methodology), we are still falling behind on the other three.

Consumer psychology journals should encourage and publish replications of empirical studies, particularly "direct" replications (i.e., close or very close replications according to LeBel et al., 2019 classification) rather than "conceptual" replications. Direct replications are a better test of the existence of an underlying phenomenon because they strive to keep as many factors as possible equal to the original, making their results less likely to be influenced by factors that differed from the original paper (e.g., an independent or dependent variable conceptualized differently).

Academic and professional associations (such as the SCP and the Association for Consumer Research) have played important roles in shaping the field as it exists today. These associations should set an example by implementing Open Science principles in the journals they sponsor (i.e., JCR, JCP, CPR, and JACR). They can also promote Open Science among their members and offer educational resources at their annual conferences.

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Author Contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for the entire content of the article.

Open Science Practices

This article is conceptual and is not eligible for Open Science badges. The entire editorial process, including the open reviews, is published in the online supplement.

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