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## Editorial Note

### Ethical and procedural concerns in Scopus's decision to discontinue and delete indexed content: A case study of the international journal of innovative research and scientific studies

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#### Abstract

This editorial note presents a critical examination of Scopus's 2025 decision to discontinue the indexing of the *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies* (IJIRSS) and to retroactively delete its 2025 articles from the Scopus database. While Scopus holds an important position in ensuring the credibility and visibility of global research, the decision to remove already indexed articles raises serious ethical and procedural concerns. Drawing upon IJIRSS's formal response to the Scopus Content Selection and Advisory Board (CSAB) and comparative evidence from other publishing cases, this commentary argues that the decision-making process behind such delisting lacks transparency, proportionality, and scholarly rigor. Furthermore, it contends that Scopus's governance structure—wherein Elsevier retains overriding authority—undermines the independence and integrity of its evaluation process. The article calls for greater accountability and the establishment of an equitable, transparent framework for journal re-evaluation and content retention, emphasizing the need for Scopus to reaffirm its academic mission over commercial priorities.

**Keywords:** Discontinue, Innovative research, Scientific studies, Scopus's unethical decision.

#### 1. Introduction

Scopus, managed by Elsevier, is widely regarded as one of the most influential bibliometric and abstracting databases in the global academic community. Inclusion in Scopus is frequently used as a benchmark for journal quality, institutional ranking, and research evaluation [1]. However, the increasing dependence of academic recognition and funding on Scopus indexing also gives the database significant gatekeeping power [2]. Consequently, decisions regarding inclusion or delisting have far-reaching academic, reputational, and socio-economic implications.

In 2025, Scopus re-evaluated the *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies* (IJIRSS) and decided to discontinue of future coverage. This act of deletion of 2025 indexed articles—despite Scopus's written commitment that "*all previously indexed content will remain in the database*"—raises fundamental questions regarding procedural transparency, the ethics of data governance, and fairness in the evaluation process.

This commentary situates the IJIRSS case within the broader discourse on research evaluation ethics, examining Scopus's stated rationale, IJIRSS's official response, and the governance structure that enables such decisions.

## 2. Scopus's Official Rationale for Discontinuation

According to Scopus's official communication, the decision to delist IJRSS was based on the following points:

Title: International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies  
ISSN / E-ISSN: / 2617-6548  
Publisher: Innovative Research Publication

Dear Sir/Madam,

The title mentioned above has been re-evaluated by the Scopus Content Selection & Advisory Board to determine whether the title meets the content selection standards of Scopus today. The re-evaluation of this title is now complete and it was decided to **discontinue the indexing of this title in Scopus**.

For your information, the reason for making this decision is:

The following developments are concerning and serve as a basis to stop Scopus inclusion: The purpose statement is so broad that it would be difficult to exclude content and may explain why the journal received "over 12,000 submissions" in a short period of time. The purpose statement is also too long-winded and unnecessarily detailed and should be re-worked for more succinctness and better focus to avoid an 'over-flow' of submissions which seems to have impacted the quality of accepted content. While the journal claims rigor of peer review and quality management of content, a review of the articles reveals several articles that are brief in the discussion and other sections, have short reference lists and topics that are not really of international relevance. The massive size of the editorial board is also concerning - this is unwieldy from a journal management point of view. These concerns are directly linked to the dramatic increase in publications in 2025, which raises concerns regarding editorial control of quality, despite the journal reporting an increase in size of editorial teams and in the systems put in place to assure quality of content. On the basis of these very real concerns, this journal should be discontinued.

As a consequence Scopus has stopped coverage of International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies. In some cases Scopus may have decided to already stop coverage at an earlier stage. **In general, all previously indexed content will remain in the Scopus database.**

If applicable, we ask you to remove all promotion of your title stating that it is actively indexed in Scopus.

You are free to resubmit this journal for CSAB evaluation again in 5 years time via the Scopus Title Suggestion Form. At that time, you will be required to upload a cover letter addressing the issues raised above, however this will not guarantee that the journal will be accepted for Scopus.

For more information about the Scopus Re-evaluation initiative, please visit the [Scopus information site](#), or [Scopus blog](#).

While Scopus's commitment to quality assurance is commendable, its evaluation framework appears inconsistent. The decision conflates quantitative growth (submission volume) with qualitative decline without demonstrating empirical evidence of poor peer review or ethical violations. Similar observations have been made in earlier bibliometric analyses, where indexing decisions were shown to rely on "subjective assessments and limited transparency" rather than standardized criteria [3, 4].

## 3. IJRSS's Response to Scopus in Re-evaluation before delisting

The IJRSS editorial team provided a detailed and respectful response to the Scopus CSAB, addressing each point raised during the re-evaluation. The letter affirmed the journal's commitment to rigorous peer review, ethical publishing, and global inclusivity.

### 3.1. Global Outreach and Representation

IJRSS emphasized its truly international scope, having published research from **96 countries** and maintaining an editorial board representing **86 nations** across five continents.

This level of diversity directly supports Scopus's own mission of amplifying global research voices [5]. The journal's outreach aligns with recommendations from UNESCO [6] and the Global Research Council [7] both of which advocate for inclusivity and equitable representation in scholarly publishing.

### 3.2. Responsible Growth and Quality Assurance

IJRSS clarified that the increase in submissions during 2025 was due to heightened visibility and credibility, not compromised standards. To manage this influx responsibly, the journal implemented:

- A multi-tiered review process (desk screening, double-blind peer review, and editorial staff validation).
- Expansion of the editorial and reviewer teams to manage workload while maintaining review quality.
- Performance monitoring to ensure reviewer accountability and timeliness.

This structured approach aligns with best practices outlined by the [Committee on Publication Ethics \(COPE\)](#) [8] and studies emphasizing the need for adaptive editorial scaling during journal growth [9].

### 3.3. Ethical Integrity and Transparency

The journal reaffirmed adherence to the COPE Code of Conduct, employing Turnitin and iThenticate for plagiarism detection and maintaining a *Citation Ethics Panel* to monitor irregular citation practices. It also enforces strict prohibitions on coercive citation and self-citation abuse. Such mechanisms are in accordance with international ethical standards [10].

### 3.4. Commitment to Equitable Open Access

IJRSS operates under an inclusive open-access model that reduces Article Processing Charges (APCs) for authors from low-income countries, students, Top researchers and active reviewers. This aligns with the principles of open knowledge equity advocated by [Suber](#) [11] and the Plan S initiative [12].

### 3.5. Continuous Improvement

The journal announced several ongoing initiatives, including establishing a Publication Standards Monitoring Committee, annual editorial audits, and reviewer training programs. These reflect an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement rather than complacency—a hallmark of quality-driven publishing [13].

## 4. Ethical Concerns Regarding Retroactive Deletion

The most ethically problematic aspect of this case is Scopus's retroactive deletion of already indexed 2025 content. Once indexed, journal articles become part of the permanent scholarly record. Removing them violates the principles of academic permanence and data stewardship [10].

Authors whose work was legitimately published and indexed now face academic and professional harm. Such deletions distort citation metrics, h-index values, and institutional evaluations dependent on Scopus data. Furthermore, it contradicts Scopus's stated policy that "previously indexed content will remain accessible" [14].

Retroactive delisting also raises issues of data ownership and consent. According to [Crossref & Committee on Publication Ethics \(COPE\)](#) [15] once a DOI is registered and indexed, the metadata becomes part of the permanent digital record. Removing such data without transparent justification erodes trust in bibliometric infrastructures [16].

In bibliometric ethics literature, this act would qualify as an unethical manipulation of scholarly data, undermining the legitimacy of both the database and its parent company [17].

## 5. Scopus Governance and the Role of Non-Scholarly Decision-Making

Recent analyses of Scopus's operational model suggest that the decision-making process is heavily influenced by administrative staff rather than domain experts [18]. Although Scopus advertises that its decisions are guided by the independent Scopus Content Selection and Advisory Board (CSAB), Elsevier's official content policy reveals that final decisions rest with Elsevier's management.

"To come to a decision to accept or reject a title for Scopus, Elsevier follows the independent advice from the CSAB. Elsevier, in consultation with the CSAB, reserves the right to change decisions, adjust the selection criteria, halt, remove, or re-evaluate titles that are accepted for Scopus without prior notice" [14].

This clause demonstrates that Elsevier can override the independent recommendations of the CSAB at any time. As a result, Scopus's claim of scholarly independence appears questionable. The CSAB's public listing of academic members [14] thus serves more as a symbolic gesture than an actual representation of decision-making authority.

This structural imbalance echoes concerns raised by [Hicks, et al.](#) [2] and [Moher, et al.](#) [19] regarding the increasing corporatization of research assessment metrics. When clerical staff without scholarly expertise hold decisive power, indexing outcomes may reflect operational or financial priorities rather than academic merit.

## 6. Double Standards in Evaluation

Scopus promotes its indexing service as a tool to enhance journal visibility, deliver a global audience, and support performance tracking [5].

### Scopus helps to:

- Increase the visibility of your publication(s)
- Deliver a global audience of researchers and experts for your peer-review programs
- Track the performance of your publication(s)
- Monitor competitive publications

Source: URL- <https://www.elsevier.com/products/scopus/content/content-policy-and-selection>

IJRSS achieved these outcomes, receiving more than 12,000 submissions during 2024–2025 and accepted around 2,000 rigorously reviewed articles. This success was directly attributed to Scopus indexing, which improved the journal's global visibility.

However, Scopus later used the same metrics of growth as evidence of potential "quality decline." This inconsistency represents a double standard in evaluation. A comparative example illustrates this contradiction: *Heliyon*, an Elsevier-owned mega-journal, published 17,798 articles in 2024 and processed nearly 30,000 submissions [20]. Despite a much higher publication volume, Scopus has not raised similar concerns.

Such selective scrutiny reinforces perceptions of bias toward Elsevier-affiliated journals and unequal treatment of independent publishers [21]. Studies have shown that commercial influence often shapes journal evaluation outcomes under proprietary databases [22]. This undermines the credibility of Scopus as an impartial indexer and raises broader questions about the monopolization of scholarly communication. The Scopus is becoming more like a business company rather than a trusted academic database. This change suggests that making money might be more important than its

original goal of providing a reliable collection of scholarly articles. As a result, the trustworthiness and academic value of Scopus could be affected. Researchers and universities may worry about its changing focus and what this means for academic communication and research quality.

## 7. Broader Implications for the Global Research Ecosystem

The IJRSS case exemplifies a growing tension between quality control and academic inclusivity. Scopus's decision to delist IJRSS—despite documented ethical and quality compliance—demonstrates how such asymmetries perpetuate epistemic inequality in global research visibility.

This incident underscores the urgent need for transparent governance, fair appeals mechanisms, and third-party oversight in major indexing systems. Without accountability, Scopus risks compromising its credibility and contradicting its stated mission to promote global research diversity [5].

## 8. Conclusion

Scopus's decision to discontinue and retroactively delete IJRSS's 2025 indexed content represents a severe breach of academic ethics, transparency, and procedural fairness. The action disregards the journal's documented record of ethical publishing, rigorous peer review, and global inclusivity. Such an arbitrary and unilateral deletion not only violates the principle of academic permanence but also contradicts Scopus's own stated policy that previously indexed content would remain accessible within its database.

The retroactive removal of the 2025 articles has created serious academic consequences. Many of the affected papers are authored by Ph.D. students, whose degree requirements explicitly depend on Scopus-indexed publications, as well as by professors who rely on these publications for promotion, tenure, and institutional evaluation. By erasing these legitimately indexed and peer-reviewed works, Scopus has directly jeopardized the academic progress, professional standing, and scholarly recognition of hundreds of researchers. This act undermines the credibility of authors, the trustworthiness of the Scopus database, and the integrity of the global scholarly communication system.

The 2025 articles must therefore be restored to the Scopus database to uphold fairness, transparency, and consistency with Scopus's own written assurances. Restoration of the previously indexed content is not merely a corrective administrative step—it is an ethical imperative to preserve the integrity of academic records and protect the rights of affected authors.

Moving forward, Scopus and Elsevier must adopt clear, transparent, and academically governed re-evaluation procedures that involve independent scholarly oversight and ensure that future decisions are based on evidence rather than internal discretion. Indexing bodies have a moral and professional responsibility to protect the continuity of scholarly knowledge. Only through accountability, openness, and ethical governance can Scopus restore its reputation as a trusted and globally respected index for academic research. Recent observations indicate that Scopus is becoming more like a business company rather than a trusted academic database. This change suggests that making money might be more important than its original goal of providing a reliable collection of scholarly articles. As a result, the trustworthiness and academic value of Scopus could be affected. Researchers and universities may worry about its changing focus and what this means for academic communication and research quality.

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**Note:** ChatGPT was utilized to refine, clarify, and enhance the English language and overall readability of this document.