

VERSION 1: July 2019

CITATION MANIPULATION

Citation manipulation refers to the following types of behaviour:

- Excessive citation of an author's research by the author (ie, self-citation by authors) as a means solely of increasing the number of citations of the author's work;
- Excessive citation of articles from the journal in which the author is publishing a research article as a means solely of increasing the number of citations of the journal; or
- Excessive citation of the work of another author or journal, sometimes referred to as 'honorary' citations (eg, the editor-in-chief of the journal to which one is submitting a manuscript or a well-known scholar in the field of the researcher) or 'citation stacking' solely to contribute to the citations of the author(s)/ journal(s) in question.

Citation manipulation is not a new phenomenon. As early as 1955, when Garfield originally wrote about a Journal Citation Index that he subsequently developed in 1963, he warned about its potential abuse. The purpose of citation indexes is intended to be a measure of scientific innovation and quality.ⁱ However, citation manipulation can occur in ways identified above which distort its original purpose.ⁱⁱ When articles are found to contain references that do not contribute to the scholarly content of the article and have been included solely as a mechanism of increasing citations, the result misrepresents the importance of the specific work and the journal in which it appears. The ability of citations to be manipulated has resulted in a more cautious approach to accepting the legitimacy of citation indexes as the most important indicator of the impact of scholarly publications. Citations are still, however, deemed to be an important and legitimate indicator of productivity by authors, editors, publishers, and institutions more generally and particularly within some disciplines, such as, the sciences. Further, researchers who publish in high impact factor journals (ie, with high citation rates) are rewarded in their careers through promotion and through success with granting agencies.

Citation manipulation is considered **coercive citation manipulation** when it is made a condition for having an article accepted in a journal. Coercive citation manipulation can come from reviewers who recommend the requirement that their articles be cited and where the editor accepts the recommendation as a requirement; where editors or editorial board members require citation of their published research or published research from the journal; or, where a journal requires citations to articles within that journal as a condition of publication, independent of their relevance to the subject at hand. A **citation manipulation cartel** occurs when more than one journal collaborates to boost the impact factor of the respective journals by mutually increasing citations from each, independent of their relevance and importance to the quality of the published articles.

Remedies

Editors who practice citation manipulation are deemed to have violated norms of best practice in publishing and may be removed from their positions after investigations confirm practices of citation manipulation. Some citation indexes have also responded to the issue of citation manipulation by adding an impact factor calculation that takes the additional action of removing self-citations entirely. In addition, citation indexes have rejected inclusion of journals in their indexes, or removed already indexed titles, where evidence has supported clearly intentional self-citation as a mechanism for boosting scores.

LEGITIMATE REASONS FOR SELF-CITATION

Author Self-Citation

While authors who self-cite their own work may be attempting to increase their citation rate artificially, there are good scholarly reasons for citing one's own previous work. The current manuscript which is under review may be on a continuum of a long-term programme of research and previous publications are relevant to understanding the history of the accumulated record. Further, not citing relevant previous work may result in allegations of self-plagiarism or redundant publications. The problem of the blunt tool of automatic calculation of excluding self-citations is that it doesn't permit a nuanced understanding of when self-citation makes good scholarly sense.^{iii,iv}

Editor Self-Citation Requirements

Editors are academic leaders and specialised experts in their own right and may be correct in their assessment of the relevance of their own work to the author's; however, due to the apparent conflict of interest requests for additional citations to the editors own work should be independent of acceptance/rejection of the article. If the editor feels their work is too closely related to the author's work, they may wish to recuse themselves from handling the submission and ask another editor to take over.

Journal Self-Citation Requirements

Similar to editor self-citation requirements, the editor is more aware of the relevant literature in their own journal and the requirement to read and reference material from that journal may be legitimate, reasonable and in the interest of improving the article. The editor should again be careful about requiring as opposed to merely suggesting possible citation additions.

Reviewer Self-Citation Requirements

Reviewers are chosen because they have specialist knowledge in the field and as such can be legitimately recommending important research which they conducted, the inclusion of which may improve the author's article. If the editor accepts the recommendation and requires the additional citations, it may be based on solid knowledge of the field.

Illegitimate Reasons

When any of the above parties, editors, board members, reviewers, or authors add or request to add citations where the motivations are merely self promotional this aim violates publication ethics and is unethical. Additionally, whether or not they are requested, citations to the editor's work should not be added in the belief that this will increase the likelihood of the publication being accepted.

Recommendations

Journals should consider policies about appropriate levels of self-citation for authors and reviewers, even in broad terms about acceptable self-citation. Additionally, journals and publishers should provide education for editors about appropriate times and ways to request citations to the editors' or journal's publications. When inappropriate requests or occurrences of citation manipulation arise, journals should have clear procedures to address these issues with the parties involved.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualisation:

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