



Citation Manipulation: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

A COPE Perspective

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- COPE is currently revising its position on Citation Manipulation
- Over the years, COPE has held two forums and produced one discussion document
- COPE also held a one day seminar in Brussels on citation's close cousin, Impact Factors
- COPE will be circulating a new discussion paper on citation manipulation

COPE's Previous focus

- Focus has been on self-citations in journals imposed by editors and by publishers – not surprisingly as these are our members
- More recently we have turned a lens on authorship self-citation issues as well
- Going forward COPE is addressing in particular differences in different disciplines, most notably in the Humanities and in various types of Social Science not only with respect to citation manipulation but all forms of publication ethics

Transparency in all Matters: This year's theme for COPE

- COPE encourages all of its members to have a clear and readily available statement on citation manipulation and a reported process for dealing with the consequences of excessive self-citation by authors
- Members should also state publicly on their website the position of the journal on self-citation by editors and editorial board members as part of best practices

Forms of Citation Manipulation and Questions About Legitimacy

Coercive Citation by Editors/Reviewers

1. pressure or requirement by journal to cite articles in the journal by the editor (including issues of the relevance of the articles to the current submission)
2. strong recommendation by reviewer to cite articles by the reviewer (this clearly cannot be a requirement unless imposed as well by the EIC)

Legitimacy Questions

- Editors are more aware of relevant literature in their own journal, the reading and citing of which is legitimate, reasonable and can improve the article
- Reviewers are chosen because they have specialist knowledge in the field and as such can legitimately be recommending important research which they have conducted and published on material that can improve the author's product

Conclusion:

The ethical issue is/should be based on relevant recommendations for salient and related material which may improve the article without a conditional requirement of inclusion for acceptance and publication

COPE As COP

- Periodically, members attending COPE forums or seminars recommend that COPE identify journals and/or editors/publishers who appear to practice coercive citation practices (including citation cartels) and come up with a naming and shaming list of violators to be published and maintained on the COPE website.
- COPE's position has been and continues to be that our primary function as a member organization is to educate and provide advice for our members and the community at large, that is, to provide best advice on best ethical practices for publication ethics. This shaming and blaming function is more appropriately a function of investigatory and disciplinary practices among institutions and research funding agencies.

Citation Manipulation by Authors and Legitimacy Questions

Two distinct types of issues here:

1. Citation to flatter, influence, curry favour (hopefully, to increase likelihood that article will be accepted (these include honorific citations to important people in the field, citations to articles in the journal, citations of the work of editors or editorial board members))
2. Self-citation to one's own previously published articles.

Legitimacy Questions with Respect to 1.

- As with editors and reviewers, the key germane question is relevance. If the citations in questions, independent of who they reference, are relevant to the topic and quality of the article, it is moot whatever the intention of the author may be in citing them. If they not, it is reasonable to question the presence of the citations.
- Related to this is the problem of citation indexes which automatically discount all citations which reference articles that have appeared in the journal. Particularly, with niche journals, it may make perfect sense and be very relevant to the topic in question to cite articles from the journal to which an author submits an article.

Legitimacy Questions with Respect to 2.

- As pointed out in a recent COPE forum, when authors do not cite their own relevant publications, they may end up charged with another publication violation, namely, redundant publication or attempting to claim more originality for the current article than is warranted.
- If self-citations are exhaustive to the author's research, independent to the relevance to the current submission

Once again, relevance appears to be a key criterion for evaluation of the legitimacy in self-citation.

A Word About Different Disciplines

- As noted earlier, COPE is engaged in evaluating the appropriateness or lack thereof of considerations of examples of publication ethics which may make sense in the sciences and biomedical sciences but not in the Humanities, for example.
- In the coming year, we will be assessing the extent to which new and independent ethical guidelines may be important to some disciplines but not to others.
- For example, for many Humanities disciplines, monographs are far more important than journal articles and the status of a monograph may be evaluated through the status of a university academic press and the peer review process and independent subvention review process of the press. Impact Factors and Citations may have very little value or relevance to the journal or the press.

Lobbying Efforts

- An example of other efforts to manipulate a journal's status independent of impact factors or citations.

Thanks for your attention

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