

EDITORIAL

About the overplayed role of citation indicators

The last 20 years has seen the relationship between scientists and scientific publications change dramatically. In this editorial, I will address the expanding and overplayed role of the citation indicators on the publication system. I do not speak of the journals impact factor, because they deserve an editorial of their own, but I will focus on the impact of an individual paper's citations index and the challenge this presents to editors.

Authors have all been affected by the change in value of publications, far from the genuine and simple goal of sharing scientific knowledge. We are now much more conditioned by citation indexes than we have ever been. When asking myself, as an author, which paper(s) I feel proudest of and which are the most important for me, several of them do not match those that are most cited. I presume that this situation is also the case for other authors and their papers. Often, authors assessing their own papers do not focus only on their potential impact in the field. They assess also the quality and completeness of the scientific approach developed. Authors take into account how the work evolved from the intuition of the hypotheses to the final demonstration of their validity.

Citation indicators basically and simply assess the visibility of a paper, which is far from being a perfect evaluation of the paper's influence or impact in the field. Notwithstanding, today more than ever, we all look at our paper citations as a form of quality indicator of our work. In addition, our careers are partly evaluated and fundamentally influenced by these citation indicators. Consequently, we allow citation indicators to influence the way authors write papers and the way reviewers evaluate them. As authors, we have (consciously or unconsciously) the tendency to over-cite our previous papers when we write a new one. As reviewers, we may have the tendency to be more favorable toward a paper that cites our articles, or even recommend authors to cite our articles. But is this unethical or a conflict of interest?

Conflict of interest is defined by the potential benefit evaluators can get from their evaluation. The strong role played today by citation indicators in career development has significantly increased the benefit we can expect from citations. As both authors and reviewers, it is our personal responsibility to assess where ethics and conflict of interest stands when assessing and/or recommending citations. For journals, it is impossible to avoid using reviewers cited in the manuscripts if we want to get reviews from the closest experts in the field. To address this issue at the European Journal of Mineralogy (EJM), we have recently put, in our recommendation to referees, more emphasis on the relevance of the citations than their comprehensiveness. We are now asking reviewers to assess explicitly "relevance and up-to-date of the references". Editors also play an essential role in monitoring and regulating potential over-citation by an author and bias from a reviewer. Editors play a fundamental role in safeguarding fairness in the evaluation of manuscripts. Ultimately, editors are the gatekeepers of the ethical standard of a journal.

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