

EASE-Forum Digest: March to June 2012

You can join the forum by sending the one-line message "subscribe ease-forum" (without the quotation marks) to majordomo@helsinki.fi. Be sure to send messages in plain text format; the forum software does not recognize HTML-formatted messages. More information can be found on the EASE web site (www.ease.org.uk). When you first subscribe, you will be able to receive messages, but you won't be able to post messages until your address has been added manually to the file. This prevents spam being sent by outsiders, so please be patient.

Calls to kill P-or-P following outrage at new citation gaming

One of the most interesting debates I have reported on the forum over the last 9 years began when Eric Lichtfouse asked for references to papers on elements that increase journal impact factors (IFs). He was also interested in papers on the increasing number of science journals.

Reme Melero cited a paper which focuses on Open Access journals but also refers to journal growth in general.¹ Helle Goldman suggested that anyone interested in how Open Access may influence citations should search Alma Swan or her unpublished paper "The open access citation advantage" (2010), which has a table listing numerous references on the topic. Judy Holoviak provided a link to a study conducted by the International Mathematical Union.² She noted that the report shows data from a number of fields and demonstrates mathematically difficulties with some of the indices that have been derived from the impact data, such as the *H* index.

But the debate gathered momentum when Will Huges expressed his concern about the practice of cartel citation reported in the Scholarly Kitchen³. Cartel citation was uncovered by Phil Davis in an admirable and painstaking investigation. He starts his report in 'the kitchen' by pointing out that self-citation is the easiest method by which authors can boost citations to their papers, and editors have also been known to increase their journal's IF by coercing authors into self-citing the journal. Some editors have also manipulated their journal's IF by publishing editorial "reviews" in which they just cite papers published in their journals over the preceding two years - the period Thomson Reuters uses for compiling their annual Journal Citation Report. These wheezes are relatively easy for Thomson Reuters to detect and can lead to journals being placed on "time-out" for self-citation.

The citation gaming uncovered by Davis, however, is more pernicious and difficult to detect. He discovered that *Cell Transplantation*'s IF had almost doubled between 2006 and 2010. Most of the citations in the journal were to papers in *Medical Science Monitor* and *The Scientific World Journal*, neither of which had cited *Cell Transplantation* until 2010. In that year the editors of *Cell Transplantation* published a

purpose other than to make the initiators and signers feel good about themselves. Furthermore it was sheer arrogance to tell university selection committees how to do their job. In any event most institutions and even funding agencies already ask applicants to send them their most significant papers.

Back at the EASE forum Eric Lichtfouse suggested raising awareness of the idiocy of the IF system among young researchers in the hope that they would introduce sane politics when they were later appointed to influential positions. This idea appealed to Ravi Mirugesan, who is an AuthorAID training coordinator and conducts workshops in developing countries, especially Africa. He thought a lot of researchers fail to understand or care about how their research can translate into real impact, which he said was particularly important in Africa where funding is scarce and the concept of research is still being established.⁶ He put forward a concept of influence-or-perish whereby the long-term goal would be to influence policy by working with science journalists and public administrators.

Ed Hull was encouraged to open a discussion among his PhD students. Their feelings about the topic were heartfelt and passionate. He summarised the main messages from the discussion for the forum including "Our supervisors pressure us to publish in high IF journals". Another student said that they had to complete their research within a short time and that data-based research, eg epidemiology studies or literature reviews, can be written and published quicker than experimental and prospective studies. The significance of this for Ed was that it could open the door for conclusions based on biased/fraudulent data as illustrated by the "Staple case" in the Netherlands.

Eric, who also teaches scientific writing to PhD students, said he had received similar comments to those reported by Ed from his students. He advised his students to publish review articles and meta-analyses (another example of data-based research). He also made the interesting point that the average time for reading an article is now 24 minutes (down from 38 minutes 10 years ago). Taking this into account and that all sections of an article can be accessed directly in the article of the future,⁷ he advised his students that each part of an article should be "almost" understandable without reading the other parts.

Jim Hartley pointed out that Eric had originally asked how to increase journal IFs not for ways of increasing them by cheating. He however felt that there were so many objections to IFs that they are rendered useless for evaluating a person's contribution to research for promotion purposes or the value of a journal. He listed a sample of nine evidence-based objections (available on request). He thought scientists on promotion committees should be ashamed of themselves if they took IFs as read. A link to an upcoming article by Anne-Wil Harzing dealing with misapplying evaluation systems developed for "experimental" or "hard" sciences to social sciences was also provided to the forum⁸. The conclusion of the research on 27 social science and science disciplines was that promotion and grant committees might award fewer points to review or proceedings articles than to original research articles, which might act as a promotion or funding barrier

to people in social sciences.

Retraction Watch

The Retraction Watch blog (<http://retractionwatch.wordpress.com/>) was set up in August 2010 by two American medical reporters Adam Marcus and Ivan Oramsky. The blog provides regular information about retractions and the fate of authors whose articles are retracted. It's reader friendly and even entertaining. But retraction is a serious matter and Karen Shashok drew the forum's attention to the comments following one posting that took a frank look at the reasons why fraudulent research gets published and what could be done to stop this.⁹

Karen also alerted the forum to another interesting posting where an author successfully demanded a retraction of his article from a journal because he was unhappy with its change of policy.¹⁰ Although the journal had been open access when his article was published it was subsequently bought by a publisher that does not offer open access, and his article was put behind a paywall. The author retracted the article because he wanted to publish it in another journal that offered open access. Karen recommended a Website,¹¹ which helps authors find their way through the mire of what the publisher does and does not allow authors to do. John Hilton thought that the handling and status of retractions is problematic enough when it's due to misconduct or error without adding a new category of 'disgruntled/economic/political' retractions.

Elise Langdon-Neuner (compiler)
a.a.neuner@gmail.com

Discussion initiators

Eric Lichtfouse; Eric.Lichtfouse@dion.inra.fr
Karen Shashok; kshashok@kshashok.com

References

- 1 Laakso M, Welling P, Bukvova H, Nyman L, Björk B-C, et al. 2011. The Development of Open Access Journal Publishing from 1993 to 2009. *PLoS ONE* 6(6): e20961. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0020961
- 2 <http://www.mathunion.org/fileadmin/IMU/Report/CitationStatistics.pdf>. Accessed 1 July 2012.
- 3 <http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2012/04/10/emergence-of-a-citation-cartel>. Accessed 1 July 2012.
- 4 <http://www.ease.org.uk/publications/impact-factor-statement>. Accessed 1 July 2012.
- 5 <http://www.waame.org/resources/waame-listserve-discussions>. Accessed 1 July 2012.
- 6 <http://www.nature.com/news/2011/110629/full/474556a.html>. Accessed 1 July 2012.
- 7 <http://www.articleofthefuture.com/about>. Accessed 1 July 2012.
- 8 <http://www.harzing.com/download/isi.pdf>. Accessed 1 July 2012.
- 9 <http://retractionwatch.wordpress.com/2012/04/09/endocrinologist-shigeki-kato-resigns-amidst-university-of-tokyo-misconduct-investigation/#comment-12977>. Accessed 1 July 2012.
- 10 <http://retractionwatch.wordpress.com/2012/06/21/ski-resort-paper-hits-a-media-mogul-and-gets-retracted/#more-8259>. Accessed 1 July 2012.
- 11 <http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/>. Accessed 1 July 2012.