

## Is it Ethical for Journals to Request Self-citation?

Omid Mahian · Somchai Wongwises

Received: 18 March 2014 / Accepted: 24 March 2014 / Published online: 13 April 2014  
© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2014

**Abstract** By following the recently published paper in *Science* titled “Coercive Citation in Academic Publishing”, in this paper, we aim to discuss the demand of some journals that request authors to cite recently published papers in that journal to increase the impact factor of that journal. It will be mentioned that some of these demands are not ethical and consequently will diminish the reputation of the journal.

**Keywords** Journal · Impact factor · Citation · Reputation · Ethical

### Introduction

Recently, a paper was published by *Science* about the requests of some journals for self-citation (Wilhite and Fong 2012). Now, we want to follow this paper and discuss more about this issue and classify the type of demands for self-citation. Here, we give some instances of these demands so that readers can judge this issue for themselves. It should be mentioned that we do not pay attention to the journals with bogus impact factors as was discussed in Jalalian and Mahboobi (2013), but we confine ourselves to the journals that are printed by well-known publishers.

---

O. Mahian (✉)

Young Researchers and Elite Club, Mashhad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Mashhad, Iran  
e-mail: [omid.mahian@gmail.com](mailto:omid.mahian@gmail.com)

S. Wongwises

Fluid Mechanics, Thermal Engineering and Multiphase Flow Research Laboratory (FUTURE),  
Department of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, King Mongkut's University  
of Technology Thonburi, Bangmod, Bangkok 10140, Thailand

### **Cite Our Papers: Optional**

First, let us discuss about the journals that request authors cite recently published papers in that journal optionally. For example, a paper is submitted to a journal and after the first round of reviewing, the editor wants the authors to cite their papers with such a request “Please expand your literature review to include and cite the similar works that have been published in recent years.” They mention that the aim of this demand is to give a sense of continuity to the readers. It seems that this demand is reasonable, although their goal is increasing the impact factor, but it is not mandatory to cite their papers. Of course, it should be mentioned that the authors try to cite the recent papers published in that journal to make the editor happy and maybe to obtain a faster acceptance. In this case, one cannot argue about the quality or diminishing the reputation of the journal.

### **Cite Our Papers: Semi-mandatory**

In the second group, when the authors submit their papers to a journal, they get rejected before the review process. In such cases, the editor says that your paper is not in the scope of our journal, or our journal is not interested in this subject. Their reason is this “There is not a reference (or a considerable number of references) of our journal in your reference list which shows we are not interested in this subject”. In some of these cases, the authors have to cite some recent papers published in the journal, although the subjects are not very close but the subject can be related. The authors have to make a relationship between their work and the published papers in that journal so that their paper goes under review. We called this type of demand “semi-mandatory” because the editors do not state directly their demands about self-citation.

### **Cite Our Papers: Mandatory**

In the third group, some authors face an unreasonable demand. On submitting a paper to one of the Institute of Science Index journals in the field of Nanotechnology the editor required the citation of some papers from two other journals. The two other journals were in the field of physics and not related to Nanotechnology. The editor suggested that two papers unrelated to our subject be cited. The citations that were suggested referred to three journals with the same editor. The editor was apparently seeking to increase the impact factor of other journals edited by him although the subjects of the journals were completely different. This type of demand is not reasonable and will diminish the prestige and reputation of this journal in future years.

### **Conclusion**

This letter focuses on the requirement of some journals to cite their recently published papers to increase the impact factor of their journals. We classified these

demands into three groups: optional, semi-mandatory, and mandatory. It was concluded that it is reasonable for a journal to direct authors to cite related works published in the journal to increase the impact factor. However, when a journal requires the citation of some papers that are not related to the subject of the submitted manuscript, it is not ethical and it will eventually and inevitably diminish the reputation of the journal.

**Acknowledgments** Somchai Wongwises would like to thank the support provided by the National Science and Technology Development Agency.

## References

- Jalalian, M., & Mahboobi, H. (2013). New corruption detected: Bogus impact factors compiled by fake organizations. *Electronic Physician*, 5, 685–686.
- Wilhite, A. W., & Fong, E. A. (2012). Coercive citation in academic publishing. *Science*, 335, 542–543.