

The Follies of Citation Indices and Academic Ranking Lists

A Brief Commentary to ‘*Bibliometrics as Weapons of Mass Citation*’

Richard R. Ernst*

The account by Antoinette Molinié and Geoffrey Bodenhausen on ‘Bibliometrics as Weapons of Mass Citation’ presents a lucid indictment on the current misuse of citation numbers and of science rankings. In the face of ratings and rankings by merely counting citations like nit-picking, the outcry of two concerned researchers necessitates no corollary or further supporting arguments. The present hype of bibliometry made it plainly obvious that judging the quality of science publications and science projects by bibliometric measures alone is inadequate, and reflects the inadequacy of science management regimes staffed by non-scientific administrators or by pseudo-scientists who failed to develop their own personal judgment.

Today, an erroneous conviction prevails that institutions and individuals of ‘value’ can be measured ultimately in terms of a single number that may form part of a competitive ‘ranking list’! Only nobodies and nameless institutions never ever appear in a ranking! Today, an uncountable number of granting and promotional decisions are taken based on such superficial and misleading lists. – The absurdity of such a craze may best be enlightened by a comparison with non-scientific fields: Who would ever select top musical performers just by the number of references in newspapers, irrespective whether the reviews are favourable or not? Who would ever qualify renowned painters based on the number of ‘quotes’ in the form of plagiary borrowings by less creative artists or by plain copyists? Who knows, soon also Nobel Laureates in literature will be selected based on citation indices! – Fortunately, very fortunately, most of the great human minds of the past had not yet to wor-

ry about the mediocrity of rating agencies. Otherwise, human history would have taken a different course; and many of the greatest human achievements would never have been made. Our pride of being the most creative species ever living on earth would then be plainly ridiculous.

The only question that remains to be answered, after having read the pertinent account by Molinié and Bodenhausen, is how can we stop this degrading bureaucratic regime of ranking and citation agencies and their mindless fan community? – In the following, I would like to propose a number of remedies to save the dignity and creativity of scientists and researchers.

- i) Let us formulate a creed of scientists and researchers of all kind: Never ever use, quote, or even consult science citation indices! Let us appeal to the pride and honesty of researchers to derive their judgments exclusively by careful studies of the literature and other scientific evidence. It is better refuse to comply with requests than to base your judgment on numeric bibliometric indicators! Let us incorporate this creed into our teaching, discrediting ‘number games’ as incompatible with our goals of objectivity, credibility, fairness, and social responsibility, as researchers.
- ii) Let us establish, on the Internet, a generally accessible Webpage to list agencies, journals, and individuals who regularly use and misuse bibliometric measures in their judgements. Let us encourage researchers to add their critical commentaries to this database to identify notorious violators of the above creed. We may call this database ‘Bibliometric Discredibility Pillory’ or BDP. It could be that an enthusiastic bibliometrics fan might even be inclined to apply the standard bibliometric evaluation tools to this database to establish a ‘Bibliometric Discredibility Index’ or BDI to identify the worst offenders of academic credibility.
- iii) Let us discredit specifically rating agencies and their managers that have es-

tablished and regularly publish science citation indices and university ranking lists; agencies that enrich themselves on the account of science quality, and cause more harm than good. Let us urge funding agencies to never ever support projects that intend to further extend bibliometrics based on merely counting citations.

It is only by this kind of active resistance to the follies of bibliometrics that our scientific self-respect and credibility can be saved. We should liberate our minds again to enable true creativity in view of long-term social benefits. We certainly do not want to convert our precious universities into bureaucratic training centres for mindless citation hunters! Our institutions shall remain for ever unbiased resorts of limitless human dignity and foresight.

We are deeply convinced that human ingenuity and creativity are beyond all conceivable quantitative measures. We know that human beings are singular in their qualities (and their deficiencies). In order to apply justice to them, we have to respect them as individuals, each with his own particular gifts. Let us try to understand researchers and their creative output, but not attempt to compare or rank them! Whenever ill-conceived bibliometric measures are being applied, it means that non-quantifiable extraordinary achievements are cropped such that they become commensurable with the mediocrity of routine research. In this way, science loses all its outstanding features that could justify also outstanding supporting efforts. Bibliometrics may indeed turn out to become the ultimate tombstone of veritable science.

And as an ultimate plea, the personal wish of the author remains to send all bibliometrics and its diligent servants to the darkest omnivoric black hole that is known in the entire universe, in order to liberate academia forever from this pestilence. – And there is indeed an alternative: Very simply, start reading papers instead of merely rating them by counting citations!

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*Correspondence: Prof. Dr. R. R. Ernst
Laboratorium für Physikalische Chemie
ETH Zürich
Wolfgang-Pauli-Str. 10
CH-8093 Zürich
E-mail: Richard.Ernst@nmr.phys.chem.ethz.ch