

## Citation Frequency and Ethical Issue

Nader Ale Ebrahim

Ph.D. of Technology Management, Visiting Research Fellow, Research Support Unit, Centre of Research Services, Institute of Research Management and Monitoring (IPPP), University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

### Corresponding Author:

Dr. Nader Ale Ebrahim, Research Support Unit, Centre of Research Services, Institute of Research Management and Monitoring (IPPP), University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Tel: +60.37967 7812, Fax: +60.37967 7813, Email: [aalebrahim@um.edu.my](mailto:aalebrahim@um.edu.my)

**Keywords:** citation, impact, ethics

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### Additional Information for citing this article:

Title of Journal: Electronic physician; Abbreviated title of journal: Electron. Physician  
doi: 10.14661/2014.814-815

### Editorial information:

Type of article: Letter

Received: May.02.2014

Revised: 1<sup>st</sup> Revision: May.04.2014; 2<sup>nd</sup> Revision: May.09.2014

Accepted: May.09.2014

Published: May.10. 2014

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Dear Editor:

I read your publication ethics issue on “bogus impact factors” with great interest (1). I would like to initiate a new trend in manipulating the citation counts. There are several ethical approaches to increase the number of citations for a published paper (2). However, it is apparent that some manipulation of the number of citations is occurring (3, 4). Self-citations, “those in which the authors cite their own works” account for a significant portion of all citations (5). With the advent of information technology, it is easy to identify unusual trends for citations in a paper or a journal. A web application to calculate the single publication h-index based on (6) is available online (7, 8). A tool developed by Francisco Couto (9) can measure authors’ citation impact by excluding the self-citations. Self-citation is ethical when it is a necessity. Nevertheless, there is a threshold for self-citations. Thomson Reuters’ resource, known as the Web of Science (WoS) and currently lists journal impact factors, considers self-citation to be acceptable up to a rate of 20%; anything over that is considered suspect (10). In some journals, even 5% is considered to be a high rate of self-citations. The ‘Journal Citation Report’ is a reliable source for checking the acceptable level of self-citation in any field of study. The Public Policy Group of the London School of Economics (LSE) published a handbook for “Maximizing the Impacts of Your Research” and described self-citation rates across different groups of disciplines, indicating that they vary up to 40% (11).

Unfortunately, there is no significant penalty for the most frequent self-citers, and the effect of self-citation remains positive even for very high rates of self-citation (5). However, WoS has dropped some journals from its database because of untrue trends in the citations (4). The same policy also should be applied for the most frequent self-citers. The ethics of publications should be adhered to by those who wish to conduct research and publish their findings.

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