

Copy paste reviewers
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Editorial corner – a personal view

Copy paste reviewers

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There are more and more different rankings in the world, showing the difference between people, companies, organizations, goods, journals, sportspeople etc. Science and higher education are no exception either; numerous well-known and lesser known rankings are published almost weekly. Often the fate of people, grants, supports of institutions etc. are decided based on these and institutes can even be closed because of rankings. It is a serious mistake, however, to assign too much importance to these, because rankings are often made based on incorrectly defined, invalid or contradictory indicators. Of course, those that achieve a high rank defend the ranking system, while those having a low rank question its validity. Nevertheless, everybody strives to get a high ranking because rankings are media products based on which more financial support, greater recognition, more references, more students etc. can be expected.

Lately more and more websites have been created where journal reviewers can upload their reviews and their numbers are recorded. Those making rankings are under pressure to measure scientific performance not only in the impact factor achieved or h-index or references but also in the amount of reviewed articles and books; writing good reviews can advance science and helps differentiate between good, average and weak performance. In essence, this is acceptable because writing a decent review takes much time and really contributes to developing the given field, and increases the knowledge of both the author and the reviewer.

However, when a new indicator appears, people invest a considerable amount of energy into achieving

better scores with that indicator and unfortunately, often unethical means are used as well. The amount of reviews is a similar problem; it is unacceptable that more and more people review hundreds of articles a month. As a journal editor, I have to read many reviews and in the past year the number of reviews I just call ‘copy paste reject’ or ‘copy paste accept without any correction’ has increased exponentially. Writing such reviews takes about 1 minute. The reviewer copies a few sentences from the abstract or the conclusion (so that the number of characters is sufficient for the review) and then writes a standard sentence after it (many people write exactly the same sentence!). Either that the article does not contain any new information and therefore it should be rejected, or that it is excellent and so it should be accepted without any correction. I consider this is a negative consequence of the introduction of a new indicator, which increases the number of reviews without any professional effort. The problem is that journals have ‘copy paste’ reviews in such great numbers that they threaten the timely process of reviewing because they give no information and decisions cannot be made based on these.

A solution could be if the editors of journals approved the work of individual reviewers (they would give the ‘credit’), because in the present situation, the work of those who really take reviewing seriously is not recognized or acknowledged. This would stop the spread of ‘copy-paste’ reviews, and reviewers that review hundreds of articles a month would also realize that what they do is useless and harmful.

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