SELF-CITATION: THE RISKS AND BENEFITS

Yurko N. A.
Senior Lecturer at the Department of Ukrainian and Foreign Languages
Lviv State University of Physical Culture named after Ivan Boberskyi, Ukraine

Styfanyshyn I. M.
Senior Lecturer at the Department of Ukrainian and Foreign Languages
Lviv State University of Physical Culture named after Ivan Boberskyi, Ukraine

Protsenko U. M.
PhD (Pedagogy)
Associate Professor at the Department of Ukrainian and Foreign Languages
Lviv State University of Physical Culture named after Ivan Boberskyi, Ukraine

Summary. Self-reference is inevitable in scientific environment, and it is impossible to do without self-citations at all. It is common practice in the scientific world when an author refers to his previous works. It is acceptable in moderation, without indulging in excessive self-citation. Much debate have been initiated about the role, benefits and risks of self-citation, thus becoming the purpose of our article. The findings suggest self-citation to be neither good nor bad in its nature, with effect much depending on the author's final incentive.

Keywords: reference; self-citation; research; bibliometric indicators; publication; scholar; citation index.

Introduction. It is regular and ordinary practice in the scientific world when an author’s refers to the previous works written by him alone or in co-authorship and cites them. Academic work is inherently cumulative, and often in tracing the evolution of ideas, methods or evidence an author or research team should cite their own previous work. Self-citations account for a significant portion of all references.

A self-citation is usually defined as a citation in which the citing and the cited paper have at least one author in common. In a more restricted version, only publications having identical first authors are included as author self-citations [1].

However, the term is sometimes used for other kinds of citation. The three main types of self-citations are known as the journal, author and co-author self-citations. The journal self-citation refers to when one article cites anonymous papers of the journal where this article is itself published. The author level self-citation happens when one researcher cites his own published paper. However, whenever one researcher cites a published paper of his co-author, it is called co-author self-
Most researchers naturally want to cite their previous works, especially when writing about a topic that draws upon conclusions they formerly established. It is an acceptable academic practice in moderation, without indulging in excessive self-citation. The research community, though, is facing the question of when self-citation crosses the threshold from normal to excessive and what can be done to handle the problem. Much debate have been initiated about the role, benefits and risks of self-citation, thus becoming the purpose of our article.

Main material. Self-reference is inevitable in scientific environment, it is impossible to do without self-citations at all. Self-reference is unescapable when the scientist is studying a unique problem, which has not been explored by anyone else yet. In this case, he has no one to refer to except for himself.

Self-cites are often used to compare current results of the research with earlier findings when continuing to study the same subject. A new publication is often a continuation of previous studies, but not all the readers may be familiar with the author’s previous works and sometimes even cannot have access to them for a number of reasons. Therefore, it is quite obvious that the author wants to refer to his previous works on the subject in a new article.

Ultimately, some self-citation is simply necessary. Science always builds upon itself, and it is not uncommon for researchers to devote an entire career to a single investigation. It is natural, therefore, for some scientists to draw from previous works to inform future papers [3]. The authors do this in order not to wander from the main subject and to meet the reader’s curiosity in case the reader wants to go deeper into the matter.

Given the cumulative nature of individual research, citing oneself may be considered as a natural and acceptable procedure. On the other hand, scientists also tend to cite themselves for establishing their own scientific authority or to make their former works visible. Particularly when citations are used as indicators for assessing scientific impact, these citations are often treated as problematic [1].

It is often the case when an author cites his previous publications to artificially raise the citation index, the academic authority and his rating in the scientific environment. Naturally, when a person’s career or reputation depends on citation counts, there is always a temptation of self-citation abuse, which is the easiest way for self-promoting.

For these reasons, official bodies often ask for citations data to be adjusted so to exclude self-citations, as if these were somehow illegitimate when measuring academic performance. Some bibliometric scholars also agree that self-citation should be excluded from citation counts, at least in undertaking comparative analyses of the research performance of individual scientists, research groups, departments and universities.

In this view self-citations are not as important as citations from other academics when determining how much of an authority an academic is within a field [4]. To meet this demand to filter out self-cites some producers of bibliometric indicators have begun to identify and publish the proportion of self-citations in order to compare them with the number of citations to other authors.

Self-references may result from the cumulative nature of individual research,
the need for personal gratification, or the value of self-citation as a tactical tool in the struggle for visibility and scientific authority [4]. The only reasonable solution here is to limit the amount of self-cites. There is a common opinion that self-citation level should not be above 25% for authors and 35% for co-authors. Some researchers also suggest that self-citations up to 10-20% are perceived as normal and above this average is considered offensive [2].

However, it is equally not a good idea to unnaturally suppress referencing of your own previous work. There are also good grounds for recognizing self-citations a perfectly legitimate and relevant aspect of disciplinary practices in different parts of academia. Some research has tested whether citing one's own work tends to encourage other people to cite it as well.

After controlling for different factors, Fowler and Aksnes [4] found that each additional self-citation increases the number of citations from others by about one citation after one year, and by about three after five years. Other scholars have also found that self-citations can be a useful promotion mechanism to increase citations from others, as it can enhance the visibility of someone's work.

Therefore, it is recommended that academics do not actively avoid or minimise self-citations. Self-reference may be useful to promote relevant original work that may otherwise pass unnoticed by others.

Self-citation is also observed to tend for growing with the scholar's age. Early-career scientists generally have higher self-citation rates, as older researchers have a greater corpus of work to reference, they also have had more time to collect citations from other researchers [3].

Older researchers may do more self-citing, because they are more experienced and can legitimately draw more on their own earlier work than new researchers. They may do more applied work than younger staff focusing on PhDs or post docs, generating the reasons to cite their own corpus of work.

For senior academics, citing their own applied research works, such as research reports, news articles, blog posts, etc., makes sense because such works are often missed in standard academic sources.

For young researchers and academics, who are less known in their field and have a smaller corpus of work to draw on, self-citations need to be handled carefully. They can be legitimately used to get visibility for key or supportive works, such as research reports, or developed papers under review etc. However, self-cites must only ever be used where they are genuinely needed and relevant for the articles in which they are included.

Conclusions. Summing up, it is possible to conclude that self-promotion is neither good nor bad when considering the needs of the reader. The following simple suggestions may be useful for those involved in academic research. When it is necessary to cite the work you have already published, cite it. If more than one of your previous works support your new study, cite the best one. Use self-citations to support your arguments, not to demonstrate your research. Self-cites should not be added to a paper solely for self-promotion. Meanwhile, they should not be avoided in fear of appearing self-promoting and inappropriate. By focusing on the reader and trying to be descent, you can easily avoid most problems concerning citations.
References:


