

Citation and the Hidden Authority

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Received: September 27, 2016

Accepted: October 11, 2016

Available online: October 31, 2016

doi:10.11114/ijsss.v4i12.1956

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v4i12.1956>

Abstract

The aim of this article is to critically investigate a trend that has been escalating during the last 15 years to evaluate scientific work by quantitative measurements called bibliometrics. These large-scale measurements either substitute or supplement evaluation performed by colleagues qualified as specialists in a certain field of research. The so-called citation indexes count as one among other measurements. The whole idea is that our scientific work is evaluated in accordance with the amount of citations you get from other writers or from the citation impact ascribed to the journals of your written text. After a short presentation of the growing field of bibliometric devices with special focus on citation indexes, the author will examine some ideas of the political and economic reasons for these changes in academia.

To strengthen the critical stance towards bibliometrics the question will be raised of what counts as good scientific practice including citations contrasting this with the use of citation in bibliometrics. As part of this concluding discussion the question of authority will be raised and it will be argued that we may look at these new tendencies in scientific practice as a new kind of authority. Taking the word *liquid* from Zygmunt Baumann's term *liquid modernity* the term *liquid authority* will be introduced.

Keywords: citation, bibliometrics, authority

1. Introduction

This article undertakes a critical investigation of a trend that has escalated during the last 15 years or so to evaluate scientific work by quantitative measurements called bibliometrics (See also Verhaeghe, 2014). These large-scale measurements either substitute or supplement evaluation performed by colleagues qualified as specialists in a certain field of research. The so-called citation-indexes count as one among other measurements. And to say it very shortly, the whole idea is that your scientific work is evaluated in accordance with the amount of citations you get from other writers, or in accordance with the citation-impact of the journals in which you publish.

This might at first glance seem rather harmless – it might indeed be defended on the ground that it is more objective than the subjective evaluation by peer-reviewers. It is, however, not that harmless. Firstly, because these measurements seem to turn quality into quantity and secondly, because the measurements are used as basis for allocating resources in form of annual budget to an Institute, as well as assigning rewards and securing foundation-money. Thirdly, this development in scientific evaluation may have grave consequences when applied especially to the humanities where in most cases it does not give meaning to evaluate research on a quantitative basis.

Bibliometry is not an isolated academic issue; it is part of a society which has undergone radical changes during this same span of years, turning universities and our works of research in directions which we hitherto know from marketing and effective economic calculations in private business. Inside academia this automatized measure of “good research” has grave and comprehensive implications for the process of writing texts for publication.

The following contribution to why and how we use citation will start by shortly presenting this growing field of bibliometric devices focusing especially on citation-indexes. Following this will be presented some ideas of the political and economic reasons for these changes in the academia.

At last the use of citation in what is called good scientific practice will be set against the use of citation we notice in the wake of bibliometry. As part of this concluding discussion the question of authority will be taken up and it will be argued that we may look at these new tendencies in scientific writing as expression of a new kind of authority. Taking the word *liquid* from Zygmunt Baumann's term *liquid modernity* (Baumann, 2000) the term *liquid authority* will be introduced.

2. Citation-indexes and Other Bibliometric Measurements

During the last two decades academics are no longer employed due to qualities and efforts but through a system in which their production or output is literally measured and counted. Academic publications have become the unit of measurement, and demands on productivity have been raised to a considerable degree. Articles and especially books no longer count if written in our native languages. To be qualified they have to be written in international journals of a certain standard. The term international, moreover, has become a flourishing rhetoric, signaling the ambitions of a competitive University policy. In fact, the term when all is said and done, is nothing but a paraphrase of English. This means that in the academic world people speak in one and the same language, with the result that the diverse semantic and local differences tend to disappear (Verhaeghe, op.cit.).

With the introduction of the ranking systems of journals into A and B levels the demands and rewards for publications in top journals have of course been raised to a considerable degree. Soon this way of measurement was supplemented with citation-indexes and gradually qualitative criteria were neglected in favor of quantity, to the degree that what cannot be measured doesn't count. The current rule is that an academic is supposed to publish in journals with the highest impact-factor measured by the ranking of the international ranking system and diverse citation-indexes. This, however, turned out to be not enough. The so-called "best and brightest" academic must nowadays in addition be the one, who can secure the most international funding. And so we see the proliferation of academic qualifications and economic calculation. Before we look more detailed into this coalescence, we shall take a look at what citation-index means and what function it has.

Quantitative data are increasingly being used as measurement for good scientific work. Research that traditionally has been evaluated by peers now relies on metrics that has become automatized and has proliferated. Before 2000 there was the Citation-Index from the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI) used by experts for specialized analysis. In 2002 Thomson Reuters launched an integrated web platform making the Web of Science database widely accessible. Competing citation indices were created. Elsevier's Scopus was released in 2004 and so was Google Scholar. The basic principle in calculating the citation-impact consists in counting citations divided with the amount of publication to get the average mean. The impact factor is a measure reflecting the average number of citations to a recent article used as a proxy for the importance of that article. While citation impact is measured by a routine and automatized calculation, the ranking of journals in A and B categories rests on a political decision.

In 2005 Jorge Hirsch, a physician at the University of California, San Diego proposed the *h*-index, popularizing citation counting for individual researchers. The *h*-index attempts to measure both productivity and citation impact for every single scientist. In short, the *h*-index is a measurement at a personal level and promises you quick information about your success on the scientific market. Nowadays scientists may present their *h*-factor as part of their personal presentation on their home-page.

No doubt – automatized citation indexing has changed the function and use of citation. We will return to this problem after having discussed, what may be seen in a broader context as background for this expanding use of bibliometry as measurement of what is called excellent research.

The most astonishing thing about this entire industry of bibliometry is not its methods per se, but the expectations it arouses and moreover the fact that it is not met with resistance, not to say criticism. Rare protests receive very little attention; for two reasons we may suppose. The one being that bibliometry is defended on the ground that it is objective compared to the subjective judgments of peer-reviewers. The second reason must probably be found in the growing focus on measurable productivity and fundraising which is accompanied by a strong competitive struggle that has become part of a new role University plays in the global neo-liberal economy. This development goes hand in hand with the increasing tendency to favor a science using measureable data and empirical-based methods of investigation, with serious consequences for a good part of especially humanistic science.

3. From Meritocracy to Strategic Marketing Policy

Projecting himself into the year of 2034 Michael Young (2008) coined the term *meritocracy* in a satirical essay aimed to dramatize a society, where a small amount of qualified and skilled people take the lead of the whole society. With his formula $IQ + \text{Effort} = \text{Merit}$, Young could point to the benign effect of meritocracy, meaning that your success in society did no longer result from heritage but from one's own effort combined with a good portion of intelligence. Taking England as his chosen example, he could point to how, aristocracy of birth by imperceptible degree turned into an aristocracy of talent forwarded by a radical transformation in the whole educational system; a change that was due to merit becoming progressively more measureable to the degree that today we have a battery of tests in primary school and the Pisa examinations to secure competitiveness at an international scale. Further, we have got a marking scale encompassing the whole educational system from primary school to University based once more on quality being turned into quantity. What counts is only the amount of failures, to the effect that it is up to every single individual to

secure high mark by avoiding failures. And because this is absolutely within reach, we see among school children as well as among university students an obsession with high marks at the expense of engagement and curiosity in subjects they study. The child and young person no longer fear physical punishment or remarks for not fulfilling the demands of the educational system. They find themselves under continuous pressure because of the ongoing process of being evaluated.

Today, the eminent knows that success is just reward for his/her own capacity, for his/her own efforts and undeniable achievement. He/she deserves to belong to the superior class and is trained in science, and scientists have inherited the earth according to the controversial literary critic Edward Said (2004). Said has called attention to the fact that the term “the best and brightest” was introduced at the time The Soviet Union launched its Sputnik in 1957, and Americans, gripped by competitive anxiety began advertising for the best and the brightest. Since then the best and brightest has become a prevalent rhetoric in the academic world.

With the development of the neo-liberal economy, University lost its relatively independency, in order that it might serve the neo-liberal crisis-management which gradually has infiltrated all spheres in society. And so we witness the broadening of knowledge-based management rationality in what we above has described as the bureaucracy of bibliometric measurements.

The result has been a transformation in academic education and training, in the way of academic thinking and in the identity and psychic climate among staff members. Personal frustration, fear and envy spread among especially young people and creativity is effectively stifled. As anything which does not fit into rigid parameters do not count, and as requirements of productivity has been given priority, academics are not given time enough to concentrate and to consider issues properly and in depth (Verhaeghe, op. cit.). The result is that academics however clever they may be are so in an identical way.

The bureaucracy of measurement has, as Richard Sennett (2004) said, created a cage for ability, but this cage has turned out to be a cell of solitary confinement. The worst outcome is, however, that this automatized-ranking system has produced fraud and a bulk of research findings that are false.

4. What is Good Academic Work

There is one term, “excellence” that besides “the best and brightest” keeps returning in the university rhetoric with the endeavor to define the elite researcher. Good scientific work is marked as excellent work. It turns out that the term has an interesting etymological history. It is taken from the greek word *arête* which means something quite different from extraordinary or outstanding which is the way it is used in academia. To understand the term *arête*, as it was used by classical Greek philosophers by, for instance Plato and Aristotle, it is necessary to add, that a person deserving the predicate *arête* was not only an intellectual, but a man of virtue. To the Greek philosophers *logos* referred not only to reason but to virtue as well, while nowadays the term is too readily reduced to reason that can be calculated and based on empirical measurable data. It is not coincidental that Aristotle elaborated his view on knowledge in two essays on ethics, as he saw knowledge as subservient to morality. In Ethics, Aristotle says about *arête*, that “it is attached to function and if the function of man is to perform a series of activities implying a rational principle *arête* is to perform these well and in accordance with virtue.” (Aristotle, 1986).

Plato puts the idea of *arête* into the mouth of Socrates in his dialogue with Menon. The young self-confident and aristocratic Menon asks Socrates, whether it is possible to teach someone to be good (*arête*) at something. Socrates refuses to give an answer to the question, for the simple reason that he does not know, what it means to be good at something, and he takes a critical stance towards those “lovers of wisdom”, who freely and easily answer any kind of question, being certain about everything, when somebody asks. *Arête* is obviously not to be identified or better reduced to absolute knowledge. Thus, Socrates takes the position of knot-knowing, echoing Keats (1899) “negative capability”, a term which became significant for the psychoanalytic attitude towards truth and knowledge through the work of especially the British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion, who underlines the importance of tolerating uncertainty and not-knowing (See for instance Bion, 1977).

This, however, is not all. We must in addition bear in mind that there are two ways of acquiring knowledge. To illustrate both the not-knowing position and the different ways of acquiring knowledge, Socrates talks about how you may find your way to Larissa, Menon’s home town. To get to Larissa and take good care to lead others in that direction knowledge may help you. But you may just as well find the way to Larissa if you let your self be led by another kind of knowledge, which Socrates ends up by calling a divine gift.

Thus, *arête*, Socrates concludes, is something you cannot learn, but neither is it something given from nature. It has nothing to do with reason, but is rather a divine gift (*theia moira*) and if you are gifted with this you have the obligation to refine and develop it in a good way. *Arête*, in short, cannot be disseminated for the simple reason that it is not pure and simple knowledge.

This short extract from Socrates dialogue with Menon has served to illustrate how the term excellence has been transformed from the ambiguous meaning, Plato put into the mouth of Socrates to the use we make of it when evaluating research on the bases of bibliometric measurements.

It has also served, however, as a kind of platform for a critical reflection on what is a good way of using quotations when writing, and what may be the consequence of the expanding use of citation-indexes.

5. Citation in Academic Work

Let us start with a quotation from the Danish philosopher Soeren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard honors the book of Job saying that he reads it, not in the way he reads other books but with the eye of the heart. But though he makes many transcriptions he dare not quote him. "That would be wanting to put in my own pittance, wanting to make his words mine" (Kierkegaard, VI, 1983).

Kierkegaard displays humility and deep respect for the authority of the holy book to a degree that he hesitates to quote the book. However, he also seems to mean, that the respect we have for the authority of a writer means that when we quote him, we must start by making him our own. Kierkegaard did that by transcribing the book of Job.

There is a long tradition in the academic world for paying due reverence to those we quote when publishing results of our scientific work in journals, books etc. even to an extent that the notes sometimes tend to exceed the written text. The reason for doing so is, of course, that research seldom starts from scratch but builds on a long tradition to which we hope to make our own and hopefully original contribution. The why and how we quote and prepare our list of references is surrounded with the gravity of strict rules, and so is considered to be a serious matter in teaching students how to prepare a written work at a properly scientific level.

To secure this level of scientific work we have been accustomed to the mandatory practice of peer-review as a precondition for having papers published in well-recommended journals.

In principle these longstanding tradition surrounding academic work rests on what we may call a sound culture of craftsmanship, which Richard Sennett (op.cit.) describes as doing something good for its *own sake*, based moreover on sound self-discipline and self-criticism.

If this sounds as some old-fashion virtues it is not coincidental. These virtues depend on what we might call the-Name-of-the-Father, or the cultural norms that are internalized as the ego-ideal sanctioned by the super-ego. It depends even on a certain ethics which we follow when demanding of ourselves that the work we do should be measured by a standard of excellence which is achieved through self-care, including self-critique. Let us try to fathom what this could mean for our use of citation in scientific work. I imagine myself writing a text and feel I am making some progress when all of a sudden I find myself citing for instance Freud starting by saying "Freud said" etc. The citation in this case has the function of inviting my reader to accept the solid support, connected to the name of the one who created psychoanalysis. In my act of citation I, so to say, hand the authority back to my reader. The citation, however, should not be taken as a statement, but rather as an ongoing and unfinished speculation. The citation only makes meaning if my reader is already acquainted with the corpus of Freudian writings. In other words, the reader takes part in the structured discourse of psychoanalysis. The quotation has nothing to do with the authority of Freud himself, but aims to substantiate the logic of thinking that is expressed in the progress of my argumentation and supported by the statement of Freud. Not until I have made Freud's text part of my own thinking will he be introduced in my text as kind of support or qualification (Lacan, 2007). This is the ideal case, and of course this ideal may be punctured by someone demonstrating that many other motives mingle with this noble scientific aim of quoting Freud.

The focus on bibliometry and especially citation-indexes has changed not only the motives for citation; it has also weakened the quality of scientific writings. Citation statistics is blind to the difference between someone, who creatively develops a research agenda – and is likely to do that in ten years – and someone, who grinds out papers in a narrow fashionable subfield.

As the tyranny of bibliometry tightens its grip, it is having a disastrous effect on the model of science presented, especially to young scientists, to the effect that if PH-D- students cannot write up to the standard of journals with high impact factor, they better do not bother. This, of course, introduces not only an extrinsic motivation, but also some not very honorable reasons for citation, which could be stuffing the introduction with irrelevant citations, often recycled from earlier papers. When we believe we are being judged by silly criteria we will adapt and behave in silly ways. (Werner, 2015)

6. Liquid Authority

The proliferating of metrics not only point to the effect the neo-liberal marketing-strategy has had on society as a whole. It also points to a new form of authority hidden in the discourse of knowing how to survive in this world.

Zygmunt Bauman (2000) has introduced the term liquid modernity to signal the transition to a new form of capitalism –

the light one in contrast to the solid one, dating back to the birth of modern industrialism. The term not only points to economy, but signals a way of life conditioned by mobility, flexibility, out-sourcing and at a psychological level of insecurity, uncertainty and precariousness. There are no leaders to tell you what to do and free you from responsibility. In today's individualized world there are only other individuals who may serve, not as authorities, but at most as models or ideals. People are linked together not as a group, but as a crowding together of ego's, and the combination of a de-stabilizing policy and a life-politician means that human bonds and communities wither and fall apart. Life-long obligations turn into "rolling contracts" which are temporary. The consumer society implies that postponing drive satisfaction is no longer a virtue. It has been deprived of its ethical and protecting function and has been substituted by a demand for immediate satisfaction. Žižek (2005) has described the perverting of the super-ego which, instead of serving the creative efforts by postponing satisfaction, has only one demand, that of enjoying. We may, paraphrasing Bauman, talk of a liquid authority. A cultural war against postponement, says Bauman, has no room for distancing, for reflection, continuity and tradition. One parameter of tremendous importance in liquid modernity is time. Everything including speech, traveling, and catching up new information has speeded up. Time and space that earlier served to worship lost time, as the poet said, have lost worth. Only the present has worth, as if time has committed suicide after having killed space, as Bauman says.

To return to Plato, we may regret that we no longer can afford ourselves the experience of walking to Larissa led by a good opinion of how to reach our goal, even if it takes us into unforeseen areas and teach us the lesson that it is not until we have reached the goal that we can be sure of the way to arrive there. The question, however, is whether we can afford letting go of this kind of search for true knowledge.

7. Conclusion

No doubt, bibliometrics has come to stay and may be defended on the ground that it serves a fair and objective evaluation of scientific evaluation. It has been argued, however, that we need a sound and critical examination of a method of evaluation based on an exclusive quantitative basis especially when used in humanities and social science. To undertake a critical stance towards this quantified measurements of science we need to take a broader perspective looking at changes in academia as part of a change in society as a whole; i.e. at the neo-liberal market, the changes in the educational system. We also need a critical discussion what we may call good scientific practice. The conclusion drawn from this paper is that we need to look at the negative consequences of the use of bibliometrics as well as to supplement quantitative methods of evaluation with qualitative ones while recognizing that there are different ways of being excellent.

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