

# Mandatory and Self-citation; Types, Reasons, Their Benefits and Disadvantages

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**Abstract** This paper defines and discusses two important types of citations, self-citation and mandatory citation, in engineering journals. Citation can be classified in three categories: optional; semi-mandatory; and mandatory. There are some negative and positive impacts for the authors' paper and journals' reputation if mandatory citation of a paper or set of papers is requested. These effects can be different based on the recommended papers for citing in the new research. Mandatory citation has various types discussed in this paper. Self-citation and its reasons and impacts are also discussed in the present study.

**Keywords** Self citation · Mandatory citation · Journal · Impact factor

## Introduction

Most well-known journals, especially those in engineering, use special techniques to increase their impact. These methods enhance the articles' quality, making the papers specific, enhancing accuracy as well as rejecting papers with repetitive

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concepts and insisting on providing new content, and are appropriate methods which have impact in the short and long term that lead to the enhancement of the journals' scientific reputation and reliability. Increasing the scientific level of the journals as well as attracting the readers' and researchers' attention and the published subjects in the journals can be enhanced by citation and as a result improve the impact factor of the journals.

Aside from these techniques, some of the journals request citing a paper or papers in the same realm of their research. Such requests lead to improving their impact factor and may result in the weakness or strength of the submitted papers. If the cited papers have the same subject and content as the submitted paper and the submitted paper follows their research, mandatory citation of such papers may lead to improvement of the submitted paper. Also, such mandatory citation can prove the accuracy of the research. If papers with a lack of related concepts are cited in new research, it reveals the irrelevancy of the research. Hence, mandatory citation can be discussed for its positive and negative aspects.

Recently, a paper was published by Mahian and Wongwises (2014) in connection with self-citation in "*Science and Engineering Ethics*". This paper follows the research of Wilhite and Fong (2012) in the journal "*Science*". Mahian and Wongwises classified self-citation into three categories: optional; semi-mandatory; and mandatory, and presented a brief explanation about them. In the present study, we are going to continue Mahian and Wongwises's research and present a thorough discussion about mandatory self-citation. Also, it must be pointed out that the journals with little impact are not the subject of scrutiny in the present paper as was discussed in Jalalian and Mahboobi (2013). Only the journals printed by well-known publishers are the subject of our research. Self-citation's reasons and pros and cons are also discussed.

## Discussion

Requesting authors for mandatory citation takes place at different stages of submitting the paper. This request can take place before the process of revision, while presenting the revision, or at the final stage of accepting a paper. When mandatory citation is asked needs to be studied separately and is outside the scope of this paper. This issue can be an important subject for the field of ethics in research.

Mandatory Citation can be Classified as Follows.

### Mandatory Citation: Citing Papers from their Journal

In this type of mandatory citation, the journal's referees ask the authors to cite a paper or some papers published recently in their journal in their new paper. The editor or the referee explains the reasons for such a request as expanding the literature review, improving the accordance of the subject of the research with the scope of the journal, and other reasons. In some cases, the editors or referees ask the authors to cite five new articles which have been published in their journal. It should

be kept in mind that while the related paper with the authors' research is cited in new paper, it shows that the subject of the new paper is in harmony with the scope of the journal. On the other hand, citing the papers of the journal in the new article increases the scientific reputation of the journal considerably.

#### Mandatory Citation: Citing Papers from Our Publisher

Some journals select another method to enhance their impact. They ask authors to cite some articles published in other journals by their publisher. By using this method, the authors find themselves in a compulsory situation to get acceptance for their new research. This policy increases the impact of the publisher's journals and consequently the publisher achieves a high scientific level and becomes well-known.

#### Mandatory Citation: Citing Papers from Another Specific Publisher

The authors in some journals are faced with specific requests by the editor and referee. For instance, "You have to cite one or more papers from related journals of other publishers (except from the journal which the paper is submitted) in your paper." This type of request is complicated and to some extent reveals cooperation between two or more publishers to enhance their impact. It should be pointed out that well-known publishers usually do not use such a method. This type of citation does not take into account self-citation and shows subtle planning to increase scientific reputation. These types of citation request are taken into account as an odd mandatory citation.

#### Mandatory Citation: Citing Papers from Specific Journals

Rarely, some journals base their request for mandatory citation of papers from some other special journals. It means that they require the authors to cite some papers of other specific journals in their new research. To increase their impact or H-index, referees in these journals ask the authors to cite some other papers in their new research.

#### Mandatory Citation: Citing Papers from Specific Papers

In this type of the mandatory citation, the referees ask the authors to cite some special papers in their new research, especially in the literature review or introduction. Generally, this type of request is followed by mentioning the titles of some articles which are mentioned in the context of their letter. They say it can be helpful to help readers understand and expand the literature review. It is more convenient if these recommended articles are related to the authors' research and also they have published recently. Besides, it can be beneficial to enrich the submitted paper and pave the way for improving its influence. If the recommended articles have a true connection with the new paper, this referee's recommendation

shows their experience and proficiency and also it is not fair to look for its causes in personal and non-scientific issues.

However, in some cases, the recommended articles have no scientific connection with the new research. In this situation, the authors must reply to the comment of the referee by citing the recommended articles in their manuscript. Such a request from the authors mostly comes from personal reasons and is not related to increasing the impact and scientific reputation of the journal. Some of the referees make such an unfair and unethical request to enhance their articles' citation and H-index. In this type of mandatory citation, personal motives play an important role to oblige the authors to cite some special articles. Also, it should be kept in mind that it might not come from the general policy of the journal.

### Self-Citation

Another measure some authors use publication is self-citation. It can be discussed from positive and negative points of view.

#### *Positive Point of View*

It is possible that a researcher has a special scientific major and plans a series of continuing research. It means that each of his/her studies follows the previous one to achieve new results. Thus, all of the previous papers and research of an author are prerequisites of his/her new article. In such a situation, it is necessary to cite all of the pervious articles in the introduction or other parts of the new paper to make a better background and understanding for the readers. Without citing these articles, the readers may be confused.

#### *Negative Point of View*

Occasionally, authors cite their previous articles at length. In such cases, most of the authors' published papers are irrelevant. But they are cited and use frequent citation for the authors of the papers. For example, in a paper about heat transfer in nanofluids, the author cited his previous papers which are irrelevant to the current subject. This practice is outside scientific practice and it is done just to increase their H-index.

### Conclusion

In the current paper, the unethical issue of mandatory citation and description of all its types are investigated. Mandatory citation is classified into five categories

1. Cite papers from our journal
2. Cite papers from our publisher
3. Cite papers from another specific publisher
4. Cite papers from specific journals
5. Cite papers from specific papers

The reasons for and causes of each type of mandatory citation were discussed. Furthermore, the subject of self-citation and its pros and cons were discussed from two points of view.

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