Citation Cartels in Medical and Dental Journals

Syed Jaffar Abbas Zaidi¹ and Muhammad Taqi²

¹Department of Oral Biology, Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi, Pakistan
²Department of Community Dentistry, Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi, Pakistan

ABSTRACT
Citation cartels are groups of researchers who excessively cite each other's work to artificially inflate their citation counts and enhance their reputation. The practice of the citation cartel involves journals agreeing to cite each other's publications to boost their own impact factors. The citation cartel has been criticised for distorting the impact factors of participating journals and undermining the integrity of the scientific process. Citation cartels can take many forms, including reciprocal citing, where researchers agree to cite each other's work in exchange for citations. Citation cartels often involve a small group of researchers who are closely connected and who may be deliberately hiding their activities. To combat citation cartels, journals should use software tools to identify patterns of suspicious citing behaviour and should implement policies that encourage transparency and discourage self-citation. Journals should be held accountable for unethical citation practices, and researchers should carefully evaluate before submission.

Key Words: Citation, Citation index, Self-citation, Impact factor.

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The citation cartel has been criticised for undermining the integrity of the scientific process and for distorting the impact factors of participating journals. It is considered unethical because it involves the manipulation of data to create a false impression of the importance or influence of a journal. In response to the citation cartel, many scientific organisations have adopted stricter policies to prevent such practices and to ensure the integrity of the peer review process. These measures include increased transparency in the review process and stricter guidelines for the acceptance of articles for publication.

One well-known example of the citation cartel is the SCIgen cartel, which was uncovered in 2005 by researchers. This group of journals, which included several prominent medical and dental journals, was found to have published hundreds of fake scientific papers generated by SCIgen, a computer program designed to randomly generate scientific papers with meaningless content. These fake papers were then cited by other journals in the cartel to boost their own impact factors. Another example of the citation cartel is the Beall's list of predatory journals, compiled by the librarian Jeffrey Beall. This list included numerous medical and dental journals that were found to engage in unethical citation practices, including self-citation and citing articles from other predatory journals to boost their own impact factors.

Citation cartels can be difficult to detect, as they often involve a small group of researchers who are closely connected and who may be deliberately hiding their activities. However, there are several red flags that can indicate the presence of a citation cartel, including a large number of self-citations, a high proportion of citations to a small group of researchers, and a large number of citations to papers that have received few or no cita-

Correspondence to: Dr. Syed Jaffar Abbas Zaidi, Department of Oral Biology, Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi, Pakistan
E-mail: jaffar.zaidi@duhs.edu.pk

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tions from other sources. The impact of citation cartels on the scientific community can be significant. By artificially inflating citation counts, these cartels can distort the impact of research and undermine the credibility of the scientific literature. They can also create an uneven playing field for researchers, as those who are not part of the cartel may be at a disadvantage when it comes to competing for funding or promotions. The modus operandi of a typical citation mafia and their consequences is shown in Figure 1.

The citation cartel is a serious problem in the scientific community, as it undermines the credibility and integrity of scientific research. It is important for researchers to carefully evaluate the journals in which they publish their work, and for the scientific community to hold journals accountable for unethical citation practices.

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