



A Matter of Citation

I confess to never having been very interested in scientific and engineering citations in the statistical sense, although I am, of course, very interested in the papers that are cited in the technical articles that I read, because they are an important part of the information that is transferred by the writer. The references provided by the author lead to further reading and further relevant knowledge.

In some fields and some technical cultures it is the norm to collect and quote citations, and a number of citation indices are available. In my former role as the chief academic officer of The University of Rochester (i.e., Provost), I read a large number of promotion cases. In addition, I am often called upon to review files for other institutions for promotion, nominations, etc. Some of this documentation puts great stock in the number of times that an individual's work has been cited (some papers are of course designated as "citation classics"). It is a useful measure that determines if the author's work has had an impact in the eyes (or words) of their colleagues. Of course, it should be remembered that a citation can be positive, neutral, or negative. You will recall that the first meaning of the word *citation* is an official summons to appear in court! Nevertheless, citation indices and counts create the impression that all citations are positive—that there really is no such thing as bad publicity. However, I recall on one occasion having to check the actual citations for one particular candidate and finding that none of them were actually positive, but were either neutral or negative about the person's contribution.

Eric Pepper, SPIE's Director of Publications, called me recently to ask about the citing of SPIE Proceedings papers that are not part of the inventory used by producers of the professional citation indices. As far as the literature itself is concerned, conference proceedings papers are often cited in

major refereed journals. Many conference proceedings are, of course, one-time or occasional publications. By comparison, the SPIE Proceedings are published as a series with sequential volume numbers. These volumes constitute a valuable source of knowledge and information, albeit unreviewed, so it is not surprising that they are frequently cited. To confirm that impression, I looked at a recent issue of our journal *Optical Engineering*. In that particular issue, chosen at random, there were 37 refereed papers published; of these papers, 22 cited one or more SPIE Proceedings papers for a total of 46 citations. While this represented only 6.7% of the total number of citations, it represented the second highest total of citations to a single source. The largest number of citations was to the journal *Applied Optics* (58). The SPIE Proceedings was followed by *The Journal of the Optical Society of America* (29) and *Optical Engineering* (26). A quick review of a recent issue of *Applied Optics* revealed that 50% of the 22 papers published had at least one citation to an SPIE Proceedings paper.

When I get a little spare time, I hope to do a little more study of what is cited in *Optical Engineering*. In the meantime, I issue you all a citation to appear in print in *Optical Engineering*.

Editor's Anecdote

I get called a lot of things and addressed in many ways. What happens most often is the misspelling of my first name, when two vowels are transposed so that it comes out "BRAIN" (is that a compliment?).

Brian J. Thompson
Editor

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