

Working Group 5: Facilitate dialogue between stakeholders



Terminologies related to paper mills

Effective communication between the multitude of stakeholder groups across the research community is reliant on a common vocabulary and a shared understanding of terms. As part of our efforts to facilitate dialogue between stakeholder groups we have defined key terms associated with paper mill activity. All definitions in the table below are in the context of the systematic manipulation of the publication process through paper mills.

COPE defines [systematic manipulation of the publication process](#) as where an individual or a group of individuals aim to guarantee publication by repeatedly using dishonest or fraudulent practices to:

- prevent or inappropriately influence the independent assessment of a piece of scholarly work by an independent peer;
- inappropriately attribute authorship of a piece of scholarly work;
- publish fabricated or plagiarised research.

Feedback

We welcome feedback on this initial draft. Please email feedback to United2Act at contact@united2act.org. We will take this into consideration for a revised version to follow later in 2024.

Term	Definition
Paper mills	Organisations or individuals that aim to profit from the creation, sale, peer review and / or citation of manuscripts at scale which contain low value or fraudulent content and/ or authorship, with the aim of publication in scholarly journals.
Affiliation misrepresentation	Where an affiliation is deliberately misrepresented to benefit entities such as a researcher, institution or paper mill for personal, reputational or professional gain (e.g. receiving an APC discount/waiver; the belief the affiliation will lead to acceptance; researcher receives payment in order to improve institutional ranking etc).

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Term	Definition
<p>Authorship for sale</p>	<p>Where paper mills or authors have sold one or more author spots on a paper or manuscript, or where a researcher has bought one or more authorship spots on a paper or manuscript.</p>
<p>Citation manipulation</p>	<p>Artificially boosting citations to gain an advantage, where any party (e.g. authors, institutions, reviewers, journals, publishers, third party services) inappropriately and unethically influence citations by excessive or inappropriate self-citation or by entering into prearrangements to ensure the citation of specific articles, leading to an inappropriate inflation in citation levels for an article, an individual, an author group, an institution, a journal or a book.</p> <p>Citation manipulation may include the following behaviours:</p> <p>Coercive citation: Where journal Editorial team members coerce or require authors to cite papers from their own previously published articles, or from specific journals (including their own), or specific author groups, without due scholarly justification or relevance, often as a condition of acceptance.</p> <p>Citation stacking*: Where peer reviewers use their review reports on articles, or journal Editorial team members use decision letters to authors, to increase their own or specific colleagues' citations, or citations to their journals, by requesting authors cite articles without due scholarly justification or relevance.</p> <p>Excessive self-citation: Authors citing their own published articles without due scholarly justification or relevance.</p>

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*: Note that the term 'Citation Stacking' has a different established meaning in the context of Clarivate's Journal Citation Reports (JCR)TM where it is used to describe an unusually high rate of citation exchange between journals concentrated within the time period used to calculate the Journal Impact Factor (JIF)TM and can result in the JIF being suppressed for journals involved in the exchange.



Term	Definition
Citation manipulation	<p>Citation farming: Where citations to articles are added without due scholarly justification or relevance, where the citations are bought or sold or for another benefit related to the increase in citation. Different parties (e.g. authors, publishers, research institutions, third party services) may be involved in the coordination of citation farming.</p> <p>Over-citation: where multiple, unnecessary citations are added to support claims in an article, which would only require the most relevant and timely sources to be cited, leading to inappropriate inflation to the citation score of other researchers, journals or books.</p> <p>Miscitation: Where articles are inaccurately cited or deliberately not cited leading to misattribution and potential misinformation.</p> <p>Further information on citation manipulation from the Committee on Publication Ethics can be seen in the ‘COPE Discussion Document: Citation Manipulation’ (https://doi.org/10.24318/COPE.2019.3.1)</p>
Fictitious identities	<p>When identities are created for people or organisation(s) which do not exist. This is done to enable fraudulent activities (e.g. to create and build a researcher profile, or to manipulate the decision-making process during peer review).</p>
Ghost authorship	<p>Where an author(s) has substantially contributed to the work but kept their contribution intentionally hidden. This also impacts transparency as any competing interests pertaining to a ‘ghost author’ will not be declared, and so the ghost author cannot be held accountable for the content of the article.</p>
Gift authorship	<p>Where a listed author(s) has not contributed substantially, or at all, to the published work.</p>
Handling Editor misconduct	<p>Through their editorial handling, deliberately undermining journal peer review and editorial process in order to facilitate systematic manipulation of the publishing process.</p>

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Term	Definition
Identity theft	When a person(s)' or organisation(s)' details/ specific information is used or misrepresented to enable fraudulent activities (e.g. creating a false Guest Editor profile and account).
Image or data manipulation/fabrication	Where deliberate action has been taken to inappropriately manipulate or fabricate images or data.
Mass retractions	A form of retraction applied as an outcome to a batched investigation of published articles. As the articles are related, mass retraction notices are typically uniform in language across the batch of articles and intended to be published as a means of correcting the scholarly record quickly following a large-scale investigation.
Peer review manipulation	Where deliberate steps are taken to inappropriately influence the peer review process, including where editors knowingly make decisions based on faked or recycled peer review reports.
Research integrity sleuths	Individuals who, often based on specialist skill sets and subject matter expertise, proactively investigate and report research integrity or misconduct issues in published content or on trends in specific researcher/subject area outputs. In contrast to whistleblowers, claims by these individuals can be publicly verified.
Special issue manipulation	Special issues are also known as thematic issues and other related terms. These can be vulnerable to systematic misconduct, for example by Handling Guest Editors, if the handling of peer review and manuscript acceptance lies outside the usual journal workflows/editorial oversight.
Whistleblowers	Individuals who are or who have been inside the organisation, who make allegations about potential research or publication misconduct, which could be done privately or anonymously. In certain cases, whistleblowers may have legal protections.

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