

PHILOSOPHY

NEWS ABOUT THE H FACTOR

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Why (almost) everything we know about citations is wrong

Moreover, intensifying specialization has made it more difficult for both evaluators to judge the promise and progress of research investments ..., and for frontline researchers to select from the literature the prior knowledge upon which to build the next 'big idea' ... In this paper, we first distinguish two perspectives of citing decisions, the normative and the social constructivist.

Do we cite because we think a paper is of high quality? This is the normative approach. But we may cite papers for other reasons eg for rhetorical and strategic reasons – the social constructivist view.

We argue that the evidence is most consistent with a "citation decision function" that combines normative and social constructivist elements. Authors do not cite works they perceive to be below a minimum threshold value of quality, supporting the normative view. However, above this threshold, frequency of use is unrelated to quality.

So if Misha Teplitskiy, Eamon Duede, Michael Meniett and Karim Lakhani are correct, the H factor is nearly useless, being more the reflectance of social status than of scientific innovation.