

Bibliographies, Citations,
and Citation Abstracts

December 18, 1974

Number 51

Recently, we added a new feature to the *Source Index* section of our *Social Sciences Citation Index™ (SSCI™)*. The *Source Index* is the master author index that provides the full bibliographical data for every article indexed during the year. Each entry provides the first and secondary authors, article title in English, and journal title/volume/issue/page/year. You are also given the address for the first author. Finally there is the number of references. Now we have added to all this the *references themselves*.

The items cited by the author are identified by what I call a 'condensed citation'. The condensed citation gives the first author, year, journal or book title, volume and page. The titles of cited journal articles are omitted--a practice I have condemned and still deplore.^{1,2} But condensed citations are at least better than none at all. Such condensed citations are used in journals like *Science*, *Nature*, and too many others.

I don't know when or where I first referred to this full set of citations as a 'citation abstract'. Lacking a more descriptive term, I'll use it here. The set of citations is an abstract, in that it can be used in some important ways as a surrogate for the original article.

The role and the value of abstracts has been discussed in the literature almost *ad infinitum*. Neither space nor time permits me to review the pros and cons. It would be foolish, however, to deny the importance of abstracts to many people. Their use as surrogates for original articles does, however, merit comment.

Chemical Abstracts, for example, has never been diffident in its claim that *CA* is often used as a substitute for journals. Even when larger libraries are accessible, an abstract may be convenient. On rare

occasions, I've used a *CA* abstract when a citation in the *Science Citation Index®* has directed me to an article in Japanese or some other 'exotic' language. The *CA* abstract isn't necessary if the journal has English abstracts, and if articles from it are accessible via our own *OATS® (Original Article Tear Sheet)* library service.

We at ISI® have never underestimated the value of abstracts. A decade ago we included them as source items in the *SCI®*. I even suggested that it would be useful to include the *CA* and *BA* abstract numbers as part of our source entries.³ The integrative use I had in mind then may be realized through on-line computer searching.

People have asked me if ISI will ever provide abstracts in our *Source Indexes*. The answer is primarily a matter of economics. Abstracts are expensive to produce and expensive to reproduce in print. The citation abstract, however, doesn't require the considerable expense of human analysis nor any further input expense. The citations are already processed daily for the *SCI* and *SSCI*. Adding the citation abstract to the *Source Index* section of the *SSCI* does represent an additional printing expense. It more than doubles the size of the *Source Index*. If it's determined that the benefits to users balance the cost, we will evaluate implementation for the *SCI*.

Some readers still may be puzzled by the concept of the citation abstract. If it is not clear by now why an author's references indicate content, I can only suggest you write me for some reprints. I can't bring myself to explain the reasons or cite the material again. The list of articles and books cited in a bibliography offers a special insight into the author's purpose for those with the background to under-

stand it. It frequently does so in a manner that no informative or indicative abstract can. If it tells you nothing else, the citation abstract tells you that another author has cited your work in preparing his own. Putting aside all facetious comment, discovery that your own work has been cited is a perfectly legitimate reason for pursuing an article that may have initially attracted your attention for some other reason. It's certainly one of the best ways of determining the impact of your work.

Surely I'm not alone in the practice of reading the bibliography of an article before I read the text itself. As a matter of fact, I should like to see the bibliography printed above the article, after the author's name, address and affiliation. What the title doesn't explain to me, an author's name often may. If I don't know the author, his affiliation may clarify or enlarge on the title. Titling is still unfortunately a far from perfected art, particularly in the social sciences. When none of these does the trick, the bibliography often does, again especially in the social sciences. For example, how are the author's sources divided between self-citation, textbooks, anonymous items, popular periodical material, newspapers, scholarly journals and monographs, etc. The mere distribution can be extremely suggestive and enlightening, and as good a preface to the article as the author might desire.

The citation abstract has more practical and less 'abstract' advantages. It lets you go further than you've gone before in using the *SSCI*. Now, when you look up your own or someone else's paper in the *Citation Index* you find, as before, who's

cited it. Then you can go to the *Source Index* to find not only full bibliographical data on the citing item, but also the condensed citations for all other works the author has cited in addition to your own.

The citation abstract immensely facilitates the process of *cycling*.⁴ It enables you, without consulting original papers, to cycle back into the *Citation Index* section to find other related papers that have cited other authors you identified in the first iteration of the process.

The provision and use of cited references is not entirely new to users of our *ASCA*® (*Automatic Subject Citation Alert*) system. An *ASCA* report frequently lists all cited references from selected papers, as the individual profiles require. Similarly, the complete list of cited references can be accessed through our on-line *SCISEARCH*® system.⁵

Some may find a distinct disadvantage in our improvement. A glance at a citation abstract tells you immediately whether the author is a heavy self-citer. The significance of that--good or bad--I'm not prepared to go into now. I'll comment on it in a future editorial. I am still reeling from a published observation that I am possibly the most self-cited author in the literature.⁶

Readers who don't as yet have access to the *Social Sciences Citation Index* and who wish to review the format of its new *Source Index* may request a copy of a sample page. We'll also send you a new wall poster that provides students brief instruction on use of the *SCI* and/or *SSCI*. Please specify your preference.

1. Garfield, E. Citations in popular and inter-pretive science writing. [Letter to the editor of] *Science* 141:392, 1963.

2. The value of article titles in bibliographical citations. *Current Contents*® (CC®) No. 45, 8 November 1968, p. 7-8.

3. "A unified index to science." In: *Proceedings of the international conference on scientific information, Washington, D.C., November 16-21, 1958*. 2 vols., 1635 pp., (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council, 1959). p. 461-74.

4. Cawkell, A.E. "Search strategies using the *Science Citation Index*." In: *Computer based information retrieval systems*, ed. by B. Houghton. (London: Clive Bingley Ltd., 1968); reprinted in: CC No. 44, 4 November 1969, p. 5.

5. Garfield, E. ISI's *SCISEARCH* time-shared system trades time for money; but are you ready for this? CC No. 40, 4 October 1972, p. 5-6.

6. Wiener, J. Footnote--or perish. *Dissent* 6. 1974(Fall):588-92.