

WHEN CITATION BECOMES WEAPONIZED

*Propaganda Triggers and the Crisis of
Integrity in Scholarly Publishing*

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A TRIANGULAR ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Three interconnected crises that go beyond individual misconduct

1. Attribution

What should replace or supplement citation?

Citation cartels, self-citation inflation, strategic ghosting

2. Integrity

How to preserve fidelity of the scholarly record?

Honesty of claims + respect for historical record and marginalized voices

3. Propaganda

How false consensus and silence are engineered?

Omission, institutional inertia, citation exclusion, editorial capture

VERTEX 1 · WHAT SHOULD REPLACE CITATION?

Citation metrics remain highly susceptible to manipulation

PROBLEMS

- Citation cartels & rings
- Self-citation inflation
- Strategic ghosting — deliberate omission of prior work to claim novelty
- Metric gaming by journals and institutions
- Monopoly of citation capital over intellectual credit

PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES

- Transparent provenance chains
- Version-controlled intellectual lineage tools
- Open peer commentary systems
- DREAM Principles & FAIR Metrics (the PORTAL-DOORS Project)
- CARE Principles (GIDA) + responsible research assessment

VERTEX 2 · INTEGRITY & RESPECT IN SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

INTEGRITY

Fidelity of the scholarly record and honesty of contribution claims. Protection against appropriation of foundational work without credit.

RESPECT

Recognition that researchers outside dominant hierarchies deserve fair treatment, acknowledgment, and protection from epistemic harm.

CONCRETE MECHANISMS

- Community governance of publishing infrastructure
- Fee-free non-profit models that benefit both authors and readers
- Fee-free public benefit models that support public good, health, and safety
- Participatory peer-review cultures and transparent decision-making

VERTEX 3 · PROPAGANDA TRIGGERS IN SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

Structural and rhetorical mechanisms that embed false consensus and suppress dissent

01

High-profile publication

A paper in a prominent venue consolidates a narrative

02

Marginalization by omission

Prior work is ignored rather than refuted

03

Institutional inertia

Complaints and corrections are blocked or ignored

04

Denial of platform

Citation exclusion + editorial gatekeeping + reputational attacks

HOW THE PATTERN MIRRORS CLASSIC PROPAGANDA

Repetition

Amplifies a contested claim into received wisdom through high-impact venues

Silence

Enforced via institutional capture of editorial boards and publishing infrastructure

Invisibility of dissent

Dissent is denied the citation capital needed to enter mainstream discourse

For-profit platforms face particular vulnerabilities: financial incentives may be misaligned with correction of the scholarly record.

UKRAINIAN SSH AS A CASE STUDY: STRUCTURAL PRESSURE & RESILIENCE

Bibliometric profile (WoS 2013–2025) as empirical proxy for integrity risks under adversarial conditions

STRUCTURAL PRESSURES

- Output rose from 1,089 (2013) to 4,703 (2021), then fell to 2,758 (2025) after the full-scale invasion
- Constrained funding + wartime scarcity + no consolidated fee-free open access financing
- Evaluative regime still rewards high-APC commercial journals
- Uneven internationalisation: largest producer (Taras Shevchenko University) at only 16% international co-authorship

RESILIENCE & EMERGING STRENGTH

High-impact thematic clusters with Ukrainian core participation:

- Mental health & resilience during war (50 UA pubs in 263-pub cluster)
- War, identity & democracy in contemporary Ukraine
- Legal & administrative regulation under martial law

These clusters show that internationally cited, high-visibility research can emerge even under extreme pressure — yet remains vulnerable without community-owned infrastructure

WHAT THE BIBLIOMETRIC SIGNAL TELLS US

The same structural conditions that produce output decline and uneven internationalisation also create fertile ground for the three crises we analyse:

Attribution

When volume drops and metrics dominate evaluation, the incentive for citation cartels, plagiarism cartels, inappropriate self-citation and strategic ghosting intensifies.

Integrity

War-time disruption, funding scarcity and reliance on high-APC venues weaken the capacity to protect the scholarly record and defend marginalised voices.

Propaganda triggers

High-visibility international clusters on contested topics (war, identity, democracy) become prime targets for narrative capture, omission of prior local work, and institutional inertia against corrections.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED GOVERNANCE

1

Reform attribution

Reduce the monopoly power of citation metrics through provenance tools and open commentary

2

Embed integrity protection

Build integrity-protective mechanisms directly into editorial workflows

3

Detect propaganda triggers

Develop community-supported tools for identifying and responding to propaganda dynamics

4

Support Fee-Free Open Access

Prioritise fee-free, community-governed infrastructures over high-APC commercial models

INTEGRITY IS STRUCTURAL

Community ownership of publishing infrastructure,
transparent decision-making, and participatory governance
are the strongest defenses against weaponized citation
and propaganda dynamics.

Thank you · Questions welcome · ctaswell@bhavi.us