

# ROLE OF INDEXING AGENCIES: AN EXTENSION OF NEO-LIBERALISM AND NEO-COLONIALISM

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## ABSTRACT

*The recent obsession of academia with SCOPUS and WOS indexed journals as a proof of quality of the articles published by scholars is extremely problematic. The analysis of the work of a researcher has become more mechanical with respect to the bibliometric method used by these indexing agencies. The emphasis has shifted from quality to quantity which the exact opposite of what was intended. The fetish of the indexing agencies is forcing the universities and institutions based in third world to pay hefty amounts of money to buy their subscriptions. The effect of this fascination is that these companies are making a lot of profits without the consequential increase in the 'quality' of academic articles. The researchers in this article would argue that this phenomenon is just another construct of neo-liberalism and neo-colonialism with which the third world countries are grappling. The underlying belief of 'what is western is good' is being reemphasized due to the fixation with SCOPUS and WOS. In fact, even the UGC has come up with a UGC CARE list wherein, journals indexed in SCOPUS and WOS are considered to be a part of its Group A list.*

**Keywords:** - SCOPUS, Web of Science, Indexing Agency, Neo-Liberalism, Neo-Colonialism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Evolution is not just a theory but a basic trait that binds the human beings as a community. We might be different in our features, forms and perspectives, but we all have the inherent desire to develop and grow. The intrinsic curiosity within humans has given rise to some of the greatest inventions in the world. To evolve as a collective community, it is pertinent that the knowledge acquired by a person is shared with the rest of the community. Dissemination of knowledge is vital for evolution. If the knowledge is not published then the utility of the knowledge creation would be negligible. There would have been no Austin without his book 'The Province of Jurisprudence Determined', no Plato without 'The Republic' and no Chanakya without 'Kautilya's Arthashastra'. Ideas can only be propagated through expression. Without expression, ideas would die with the person.

The world of academia sustains on the conception and dispersion of ideas. All the great academicians of the world are excellent researchers and they have acquired their much sought-after fame by widely publishing their research. There exists a direct proportion in the number and quality of publications and the ensuing reputation of the scholar. The publications can be in various forms, be it books, chapters in edited collections, journal articles, conference proceedings, blogs etc. However, most of the scholars prefer to publish their articles in renowned journals because of several reasons like ease of publishing short articles, wider reader base, less responsibility than getting a book published etc. Also, young scholars like to publish articles in good journals to make their mark known in the scholarly community.

In earlier times, the number of academicians were low and only the passionate ones joined the world of academia. Consequently, the quality of their articles used to be very good. In other words, the checks and balances to safeguard the excellence of their work was largely self-imposed. Conducting peer-review for quality check was comparatively easier because the number of articles were less. [1]

However, with changing times the number of academicians increased and people started conceiving it as a profession with good perks rather than as passion. As these academicians needed publications to sustain their jobs

and reputation, it created a lot of rush in the journal publishing industry. The surge in demand led to mushrooming of numerous journals. Many journals were created with the sole motive of earning profits from the scholars who would get their often-substandard research articles published in these 'predatory journals', without undergoing the rigorous process of peer-review. [2]

India is infamously considered to be a home of thousands of predatory journals. The fact that as a nation we are allowing countless numbers of academic research journals to sustain, is in itself an indicator of the low quality of research standards prevailing in the country's academia.

The outrageous surge of predatory journals made it possible for incompetent people to climb up the ladder of academia by showcasing a higher quantity of publication, all across the globe. The rise of online and open access publications contributed significantly in the rise of predatory journals. Many self-styled societies, individuals and group of individuals started publishing their own journals. All these developments led to the quality v. quantity debate among the scholars.[3]

Amidst these chaotic circumstances, the world of academia witnessed the drastic growth of indexing agencies like Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO, Pubmed etc. The scope of this article would be limited to two indexing agencies i.e. Scopus and Web of Science because they are the most popularly used indexing agencies across countries.

### **1.1 Working of SCOPUS and WEB OF SCIENCE**

SCOPUS and WEB OF SCIENCE work on the basis of bibliometrics method wherein the quality of a journal is measured through the number of citations that it receives. The calculation of both Impact Factor (WOS) and CiteScore (SCOPUS) involves the common element of number of citations. The concept is in itself flawed because a quantitative element is used to judge the qualitative aspect of an article.[4] There could be many reasons for a particular article to receive a lot of citations. If one article published in the journal is pathbreaking, it would increase the Impact Factor and Cite Score of the journal, irrespective of the quality of rest of the articles in the journal.[5] Moreover, it is impossible to judge the quality of an article (which is a subjective process) by applying a mechanical formula.

## **2. IDEA OF NEO – LIBERALISM**

The use of the term neo-liberalism may be linked to the Washington Conference where it was defined to mean a model that allows the market forces to control each other and that the involvement of the governments should be minimal.[6] It was stated that a capitalist world was the only solution to a constant and strategic development. Liberalism as a concept emerged during the era of industrial revolution. At that time economist like Adam Smith in his book "The Wealth of Nation" propounded that market forces were well equipped in controlling the economy.[7] Therefore, for the prosperous economic development the Laisses Faire model should be followed by states. In a Laisses Faire model, the intervention of the state would be limited to managing the affairs like administration and law and order within the state. The state should not interfere in the personal lives of people. This model was in line with the thoughts of libertarians like John Stuart Mill, [8] which led to a spirituous boom in the economy before the sudden collapse of 1930s, infamously called as the Great Depression.[9] The Great Depression coupled with the havocs created by the two world wars changed the perspectives of people towards liberalism. It was the time of rise of welfarism model which was given by a British economist John Keynes.[10] Welfarism model advocated that it was not possible for the market forces to immediately adapt with the increasing need for employment and social security in an economy. To balance these aspects, it was important for the state to pump in welfare measures. A welfare state ensured that the private entities are allowed to exist but not at the cost of common people. With the boom of welfarism, the States started investing more in the fields of education, health and other social security schemes. This worked very well in uplifting the standard of living of people and narrowing the wage gaps but soon it was realised by the states that they were investing more than their revenue which led to gross fiscal deficits.[11] Some States took the loans from world bank and other international institutions and they were unable to pay it back which created a vicious cycle of fiscal deficit and ultimately the economy collapsed.

In the 1990s the importance of a liberal model was again realised with newer economies moving towards liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. The turn towards liberalisation model can be assessed from the rise of large number of Bilateral Investment Treaties concluded between states. This phase of rise of liberalisation is termed as neo-liberalism.[12] However, the construct of neo-liberalism is plagued with rise of big business houses and a phenomenon called 'crony capitalism'. Crony capitalism is characterised by states and governments favouring certain businesses over the others rather than allowing the market forces to work on its own.[13]

Capitalism cloaked in the blanket of neo-liberalism, is based on active consumerism which is only concerned with profit making. Companies create a need for their products by manipulating the minds of the consumers to induce them to buy their products which generates profits for the companies. It does not take into account the welfare of the general public.

The rise of crony capitalism and neo-liberalism has generated a lot of backlash specially from the third world countries. This is because it is contended by the third world countries that in the name of globalisation and liberalisation, the rich businesses from the west are controlling the consumer choices of the third world countries. This has led the demise of the small sector enterprises within these countries which is further deepening the wage gaps. It is believed that the products endorsed by the west is better than the homegrown products. The idea is that anything that is associated with the west is considered to be the standard according to which the standard of other things should be determined.[14] The backlash against neo-liberalism can be perceived through the fall of the regime of Bilateral Investment Treaties. Recently, India scrapped 63 BITs with different countries around the world.[15]

Taking into account this backlash against neo-liberalism, the researchers would further relate how the obsession of scholars, universities and institutions, who are paying heavy amount of money to get the subscription of indexing agencies like SCOPUS and WOS is just another aspect of neo-liberalism.

### **3. IDEA OF NEO-COLONIALISM**

Neo-colonialism is a term which is used to describe the policies and the conducts of the former coloniser nations (western world) which is indirectly forcing the developing and the underdeveloped countries to act in accordance with their (western countries) strategies. The west has created several institutions at the international level to ensure that the third world nations who seek their help are finally forced to remain under their suzerainty. The prominent examples of such institutions are World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Security Council. The world Bank and the IMF give out loans to the Least Developed Countries (LDC) to help them in restructuring and rebuilding their economy but at the same time they impose certain conditions and restrictions on the way these countries are supposed to function. As the major contributors to these financial institutions, USA and European Union, dominantly determine the conditions that they impose on the countries borrowing loans. These terms are framed in such manners as to help the capitalistic agenda of the west. As per the core principle of the United Nations Charter each country of the world is considered to be sovereign and equal in its own rights.[16] UN Charter and international law prohibits any country along with the UN from interfering in the domestic matters of any nation.[17] However, indirect interventions are made by the powerful nations under the guise of international financial institutions.[18]

The western countries also interfere in the name of right to protect doctrine. The western nations give the argument that it is their duty to protect the human rights violations which happens within the territories of other nations. In the name of sending humanitarian help and to 'protect the people' these first world countries with the help of Security Council, send their military troops. It is difficult to understand how they intend to protect lives by sending their military troops in the disturbed countries. Prof. B.S.Chimni has observed that these interventions are selective in nature. They only intervene in places where they have their economic or strategic interests. This is also considered to be a facet of neo-colonialism because the underlying notion is 'civilised nations' helping the 'uncivilised' nation that needs to be 'civilised'. [19]

Another aspect of neo-colonialism is via the route of Foreign Direct Investment. It is contended by the third world scholars that historically the coloniser nations used to enter the countries in the name of trade and business. FDI and Globalisation is nothing but the same method used in the present era.[20] Therefore, the same mistake should not be repeated.

### **4. INDEXING AS AN ASPEST OF NEO-LIBERALISATION AND NEO – COLONIALISM**

Indexing agencies like SCOPUS and Web of Science, enlists the journals around the globe in their databases on the basis of certain criteria and algorithm. The journals which find a place in their featured list are considered to be of top-notch quality while the ones that do not find a mention are considered inferior in nature. However, the reality might differ. There are many journals that do not feature in the list because of reasons other than the quality issue. Some journals are dedicated to extremely specific areas in a discipline. As a result of which the readership is limited to a small section of academic society. The articles written in these journals are bound to not do get many citations.



Generally speaking, quantity-based criteria like citations cannot be a measure of quality. However, the number of citations is one of the major criteria that is used by these agencies in sorting the list.

Also, there is a hint of third world bias which can be perceived even by a preliminary research. For Example, in the field of law, most of the journals in the SCOPUS list of journals, are from US and Europe. Many reputed journals from India and other South Asian Countries do not feature in it. [21] If quality was an issue then why would the revered academicians whose articles are published by US and Europe based journals, publish their articles in Indian Journals? Is it possible that their works become substandard just because they are published in this part of the world? However, going by the ranking system of Impact Factor and Cite Score endorsed by these indexing agencies such questions are not answered. There is possibility that the indexing agencies might ignore some small countries, even if they are publishing high-quality journals, just because they are not published in the west. There is also a possibility that some substandard journal published in the west based in the west features in the list.

There are many journals which are considered to be of great quality and are revered and relied within the academic circle of a nation. Just because it does not feature in the lists prepared by indexing agencies, they cannot be deemed to be of inferior quality. It is also extremely problematic for old scholars and academicians who have always published in some trusted journals but now came to realise that their journals are not part of SCOPUS or WOS journal list. On the other hand, young scholars who came to know about the indexing agencies in early days of their careers, might become more relevant in the workplace because all their articles have been published in SCOPUS or WOS indexed journals.[22]

The problem of indexing agencies is getting graver because institutions in the third world countries are making big decisions about the quality of a journal or even that of a researcher and promotions on the basis of the parameters determined by SCOPUS and WOS. The focus is more on the article featuring in a SCOPUS listed journal over the actual quality. An active consumer base is being created in the form of universities and institutions buying the subscriptions of the indexing agencies and research prospects are being judged on the basis of quantity of publication in SCOPUS and WOS indexed journals. There is a possibility that the article written by the scholar is high in quality, although the same has not been published in a SCOPUS listed journal and vice versa. Following this trend, we are slowly becoming the slaves of these indexing agencies. Institutions are paying hefty sums only to get full access to the websites of these indexing agencies rather than focusing on quality research. The young scholars are focusing more on publishing in SCOPUS indexed journals, rather than publishing in local journals which have wider reading base and can create more impact at the ground level. Even the latest UGC CARE list, enlists SCOPUS and WOS indexed journals as part of its Group A list.[23]

Articles are written to be read by people. Increasing the reading base and dissemination of knowledge is the essence of evolution. We are getting more mechanical in the field of academia which is the opposite of evolution. This way we are getting devoured by the capitalistic western agenda of neo - liberalism and neo – colonialism.

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