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The citation culture

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$300,000 GRANT TO PROBE INFORMATION RETRIEVAL AWARDED TO INSTITUTE FOR SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION BY NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH AND NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION... THREE YEAR PROJECT TACKLES CITATION INDEX TECHNIQUES FOR SCIENCE

Research scientists will soon be consulting a more precise and specific literature index that links together subject material that would never be collated by usual indexing systems. Concerned with new starting points for scientific literature searches, the unique concept uncovers sometime-buried associations, relating important works and authors, yet keeps the researcher abreast of the masses of current published scientific information. This new approach to information retrieval is called the Citation Index.

A $300,000 grant extending over a three-year period has been awarded to the Institute for Scientific Information, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to study the practicability of citation indexes and to test their techniques of preparation. The project, under joint sponsorship of the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation, is aimed at producing a unified citation index for science including the publication of a genetics index.

Dr. Eugene Garfield, director of ISI, explains the simplified citation index this way. If this article you are now reading were processed for citation indexing, it would be called the "referant". All the items in the bibliography would be called "references". A list of these references, each of which is followed by its associated list of referants, becomes the citation index. By using a citation index, the researcher finds out what works have cited a particular reference following its publication.

By focussing on the individual citation rather than specific subjects, the citation index signifies a more sophisticated method of scientific documentation, as well as a growing bibliographical aid. Because the scientific researcher is generally aware of one or more particular papers already published in the area of his specialized interests, he will use the citation index as a starting point, rather than the specific topics found in conventional indexing.

Better scientist-to-scientist communication is expected, for authors can see at a glance what literature has been published since their works, in their own and related fields, that refer back to their own works.
By virtue of its different construction and purpose, the citation index complements indexes like Beilstein, Chemical Abstracts, Biological Abstracts and is not intended as a substitute.

‘‘Experimental studies on systems for extracting and processing citations will soon be completed’’, Dr. Garfield reports. It is estimated that approximately one million references will be processed during the next six months on a high speed magnetic tape computer. According to Dr. Garfield, ‘‘approximately three million citations, from scientific literature published in the five-year period 1959 to 1963, will be processed during the life of the project.’’

As a guide to the project and aid towards refining concepts of the methodology, an advisory committee of scientists has been established. Members of this board are Dr. Gordon Allen, National Institute of Mental Health; Dr. Joshua Lederberg, Stanford University; Dr. George LeFevre, Harvard University; Dr. Joseph Melnick, Baylor University; Dr. Sol Spiegelman, University of Illinois, Dr Luca Cavalli-Sforza, Institute di Genetica, Pavia.12

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12As published in ISI (1961). An undated version of this press release without the name of Dr. Cavalli-Sforza is present in Garfield’s Personal Archive in Philadelphia. The exact date the press release was sent out is unknown to me. It must have been on or shortly after 17 May 1961, because on that day Garfield received the signed contract from NSF (Garfield to Lederberg May 17, 1961). On 26 July 1961 Lederberg suggested Cavalli-Sforza as foreign geneticist on the Board (Lederberg to Garfield, July 26, 1961). Later Victor A. McKusick, M.D., Johns Hopkins University joined the advisory board (Garfield & Sher 1963, vi).