oestros №30 (2018)

Knowledge and metrics in a tolerant academia

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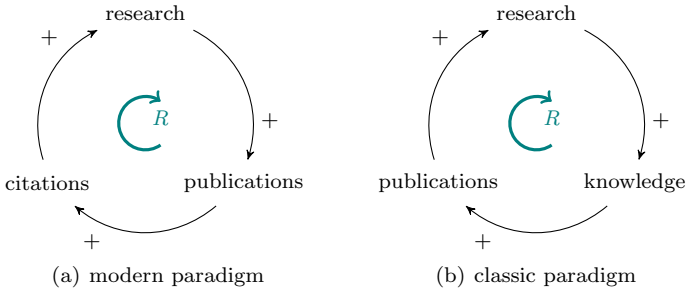
Abstract

Views on why academics research and publish demonstrate a significant shift in the 'metrics era', from knowledge to citation-based indices, but the older paradigm appears to be more resilient in environments subject to misconduct.

1 Introduction

Neophyte academics would be forgiven to think that they research in order to obtain citations, either directly or indirectly through the various popularity indices and rankings (Perdicoúlis, 2012), with publications being the means — Figure 1(a). In this context, positing that academics might be researching in order to obtain knowledge and publishing in order to share that knowledge (Figure 1(b)) probably looks 'old school', naïve, or disconnected from the current reality for career promotions (Perdicoúlis, 2018).



(a) modern paradigm (b) classic paradigm

FIGURE 1 Research and publications are key in the opposing paradigms

While academics may defend the advancement of knowledge or publication metrics as most pertinent to their reality (e.g. academic mission, employment contract, career assessment), they are often free to make the best of both worlds using a number of tactics in a relatively tolerant academia. Let us explore which of the two paradigms is the most resilient in such a context.

ISSN: 2182-8113

2 Advancement of knowledge

The classic research and publishing activities for the sake of knowledge are expected to suffer attacks from unscrupulous and/ or resourceful authors. Despite the damages by misconduct, the advancement of human knowledge is likely to survive — Figure 2.

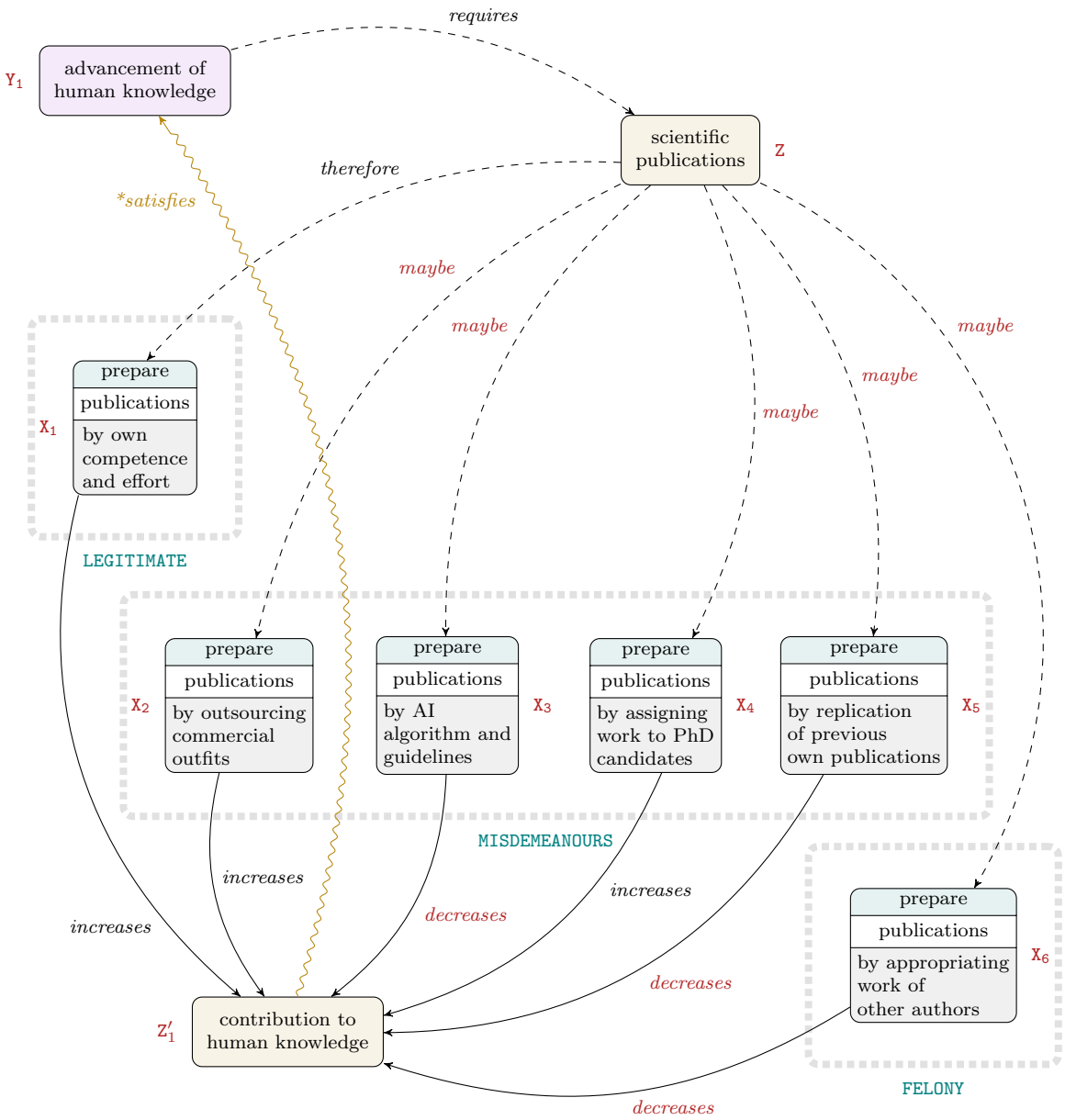


FIGURE 2 The advancement of human knowledge is damaged by misconduct, but generally survives

oestros №30 (2018)
Latest edition: March 23, 2019

3 Publication metrics

The current practice of assessing academic careers through publication metrics around citations and associated metadata (Perdicoúlis, 2015c) is in accord with the commercial interests of ancillary industries (Perdicoúlis, 2018), but ends up being untrustworthy due to extended damages by misconduct — Figure 3.

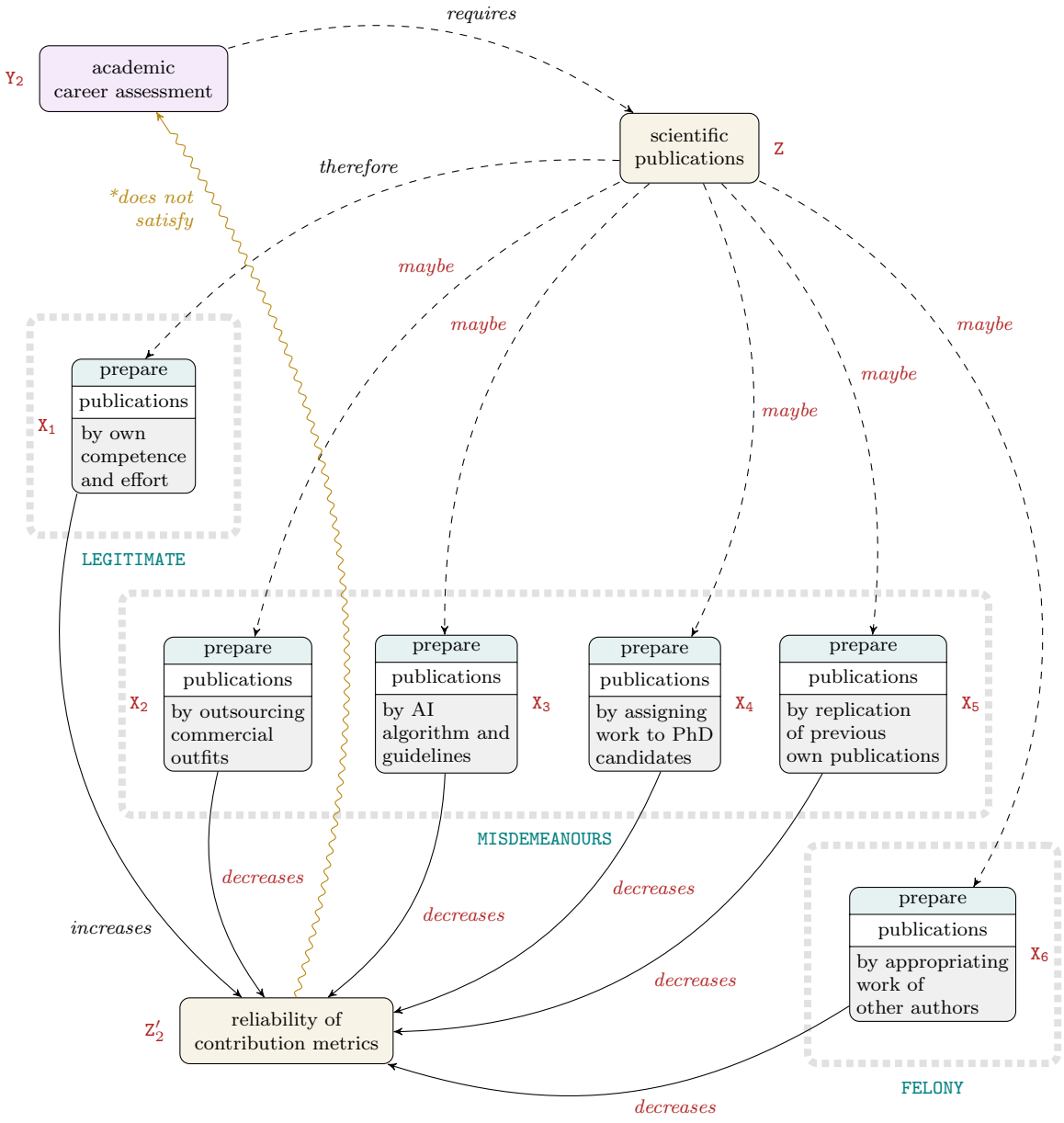


FIGURE 3 Academic assessment via publication metrics ends up being untrustworthy due to misconduct

4 Discussion

For a community concerned with advancing human knowledge under the rubric of *science* or *episteme* (Perdicoúlis, 2013), there is not much space for malicious conduct in academia — although there is ample space for careless conduct, leading to errors or misunderstandings. Nonetheless, coerced by unethical publishers, conniving institutions, and an endorsement system of indexing and ranking services (Perdicoúlis, 2014a,b, 2015a), academics may feel that motives such as *fame*, *career advancement* (Perdicoúlis, 2015b), and *money* (e.g. grants, remuneration) appear to be 'inviting' for some level of misconduct. At the same time, the generally tolerant spirit of the academic milieu may appear to be allowing the misconduct, or at least creating conditions for 'hushing' it. As a result, academia ends up being not exempt from misdemeanours such as the unauthorised replication of copyrighted material or the re-publication of already published material, or felonies such as plagiarism and human exploitation — albeit these rarely make it to the news.

5 Challenges

Breaking the trust of the tolerant academia is perhaps more grave than the misconduct itself. Naturally excluding the options of regulation or policing, the ideal situation would be that academics carry out their duties honourably, and this is a matter of principle and education.

An academia obsessed with measuring itself in every possible way[1] only disorients the researchers, and knowledge tends to fade into oblivion (Perdicoúlis, 2012). It would be nice to see academia genuinely question its mission, conduct, and associations (Perdicoúlis, 2018) before planning for a more meaningful future.

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[1] e.g. 'bibliometrics', 'infometrics', or 'scientometrics' (Cronin, 2001)