



Munich Personal RePEc Archive

Disseminating Scholarly Output: A Comment

Cebula, Richard and Koch, James

Jacksonville University, Old Dominion University

23 November 1994

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/53571/>
MPRA Paper No. 53571, posted 10 Feb 2014 15:14 UTC

Disseminating Scholarly Output:

A Comment

By RICHARD J. CEBULA and JAMES V. KOCH*

Imitation is the sincerest flattery.

Charles Caleb Holton {1825}

INTRODUCTION

If imitation is the sincerest flattery, then count us among the most flattered. In a recent issue of this Journal, July, (1994), Professor M. Szenberg provides a number of arguments in support of eliminating the so-called "equitable ban" on authors' submitting manuscripts simultaneously to more than one journal. We found his arguments compelling, not the least because we made most of them more than a decade ago in *The American Economist* (1982), a journal edited-then and now-by the very same Professor Szenberg. We now elaborate the nature of the flattery, although space prevents a comprehensive review of the parallel nature of our papers.

THE PARALLELS

Szenberg (307) argues that a policy against multiple submissions to journals prevents scholars from having their studies disseminated "speedily." In our 1982 paper (30), we similarly argued that a system recluding multiple submissions ". . . imposes costs upon the authors of articles" because, under the current system, ". . . authors are ordinarily subjected to substantial waiting periods before a review . . . is forthcoming." We also added that

. . . the substantial review times of journals, when coupled with the long lag between submission and publication, means that authors run the risk of obsolescence in the research (p. 30).

Szenberg (p. 307) argues that the ban on multiple submissions runs counter to the economic ideal of competition and merely acts to support ". . . the informal publishing cartel . . ." and that the basis for the current system ". . . is more one of convenience, power, and control than ethics." In our 1982 paper (31), we pointed out that "The ethical prohibition against multiple . . . submissions confers monopsony power on the journals . . ." and that

* (Richard J. Cebula, PhD, is professor of economics at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA 30332-0615 and James V. Koch is president and professor of economics at Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA 23529-1159.)

American Journal of Economics and Sociology, Vol. 55, No. 1, January, 1996.

Legislation which would grant...monopoly power would...be opposed by a thundering majority of economists. It is not clear why monopsony power granted by means of an "ethical" prescription is more acceptable.

Szenberg (307) argues that the ban on multiple submissions itself is unethical because it keeps "...the careers of young scientists on hold, too often because of tardy editorial work or refereeing." In 1982, we observed that because of delays in refereeing, "...the author's salary increments may be smaller, and the prospects of promotion and/or tenure less, as well" (p. 31).

Szenberg (308) observes that "...the book publishing industry broke with the practice of exclusive submission when...literary agents started submitting manuscripts to many publishers simultaneously and requesting open bids for them...the book publishing industry continues to be a healthy one despite the fact that it imposes no restrictive practice on potential authors." In 1982 (p.30), we observed that in the textbook market, "...economists have freely distributed information...individual textbook authors have often solicited and sometimes received, multiple contract offers..." while, of course, the industry remained healthy (p. 33).

Szenberg (309) argues that "...referees and editors do not read the submitted manuscripts/ that inter-referee agreement is low..." Furthermore, he (309) argues that the current refereeing system causes "...the timely loss of valuable research findings...", especially those that are empirical. Moreover, he (309) suggests that scholars "...repeal the exclusivity rule and thus make the review process more rapid and more equitable..." In 1982, we (31) had argued that manuscripts often are rejected "...because of poor judgment on the part of reviewers" and noted that the long review process in existence creates "The risk of obsolescence...especially...where empirical research is concerned" (30-31). We opined that a system of multiple submissions would be superior to the existing system because it would increase both equity and efficiency and it would lead "...journal editors to pressure referees for prompt reviews... [and] to compensate referees for their services." Moreover, we (pp. 30, 33) advocated the repeal of the current system.

Szenberg (310) sees a potential/probable need for increased submission fees: "journals should consider raising their submission fees..." He (310) also suggests that "...the increase in submission fees should be directed towards compensating partially the reviewers for their...services." In our study (33), we also forecast increased submission fees, noting "...the journal[s] could increase its...(their) submission fees, perhaps pricing such that the submission fee would cover the marginal cost of handling and receiving a manuscript." Furthermore, we championed using such fees "...to compensate referees for their services" (p. 33).

CLOSING OBSERVATIONS

We believed that our arguments were persuasive in 1982, and are flattered to see that a journal editor, Mr. Szenberg, still believes them to be correct almost 15 years later. Nonetheless, we are surprised to find that Mr. Szenberg fails to cite our original article in his own journal and instead chooses to cite only our subsequent "Reply" (1984) on a single fine point of discussion on this topic. Surely, the lineage of these ideas is more clearly defined than this. When Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes in the *Bible*, observed that "There is nothing new under the sun," he could not have anticipated how much support two millennia later Mr. Szenberg's (1994) paper would provide for his statement.

We are not by any means implying plagiarism but only inattention to properly crediting our article.

Note

1. However, the present episode demonstrates that Mr. Szenberg himself is an exception to his own dictum.

References

- Koch, J.V., and R.J. Cebula, "The Curious Case of the Journal Manuscript Market: Ethics Versus Efficiency in Academe," *The American Economist*, Spring, 1982, 30-34.
- Koch, J.V., and R.J. Cebula, "Reply," *The American Economist*, Fall, 1984, 80-82.
- Szenberg, M. "Disseminating Scholarly Output: The Case for Eliminating the Exclusivity of Journal Submissions," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, July, 1994, 303-315.