

Octopus affiliations

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Abstract

Although institutional affiliation is not mandatory in scholarly publishing, a new trend of multiple and simultaneous affiliations, which I'll call "octopus affiliations" or "octaffiliations" in short, is increasingly noticeable as a distorted consequence of academic ranking and evaluation systems. Institutions offer financial and/or technical supports to authors whose contributions in turn are used as a hallmark of productivity, influence, visibility and reputation of their institutions at national and international levels. While it is understandable that an author can be affiliated with one or two institutions at a time, multiple and simultaneous affiliations on the other hand are hardly realistic.

Keywords: author affiliation; institution affiliation; octopus affiliation; multiple affiliation; equal contribution; authorship; collaboration

Author affiliation is an organization where an author works or studies or where the most of an authored work/study has been performed. Author affiliation is relatively a recent ingredient of scholarly publishing. Its goal was to facilitate communication between journals and authors when communications have been occurring through print postal letters. A physical professional address was, therefore, required to inform authors about editorial decisions, peer-review reports and modifications to make in their manuscripts prior to publication. However, in the Internet era and easy communications tools (i.e., instant emails), the need for physical address for correspondence is much less important than previously.

After the introduction of university ranking systems and evaluation of academic institutions—mostly based on the number of publications produced by their staffs— authors' affiliations have

acquired other peculiarities than for pure correspondence or communication purposes. Although institutional affiliations are not -must not be- mandatory in scholarly publishing, authors use them to strengthen the position, rank and reputation of their institutions, which in turn use authors' contributions as a hallmark of productivity, visibility and ranking at national and international levels against the financial and/or technical supports they provide to authors. In some countries, first and/or corresponding authors get cash rewards from their institutions when they publish in journals with high impact factors. However, financial luring bonuses may unavoidably lead to fierce and unfair competitions, and unethical practices in the way studies are designed and performed or the way data are collected and interpreted. Such practices also transform science into a lottery game and a highly biased activity where some journals/editors lean to accept papers from "prestigious affiliations" over small ones, to privilege senior authors over juniors, and to favor positive results over null ones, etc.

While it is understandable that an author can be affiliated with one or two institutions at a time (for example, previous and current institutions where a work starts and ends, respectively), it is hardly conceivable- from a practical viewpoint- that an author can be affiliated with five, six or more institutions at the same time particularly when institutions are distant or located in different countries. In some disciplines, multiple affiliations have almost doubled over the past few years ([Hottenrott and Lawson 2017](#)). The number of multinational papers involving three or more countries has also grown substantially since the 90s ([Glänzel and de Lange 2002](#)). Sometimes there are many authors on a short manuscript of about 300 words with authors affiliated to multiple institutions, making the list of affiliations as almost long as, if not longer than, the text itself ([Moustafa 2016](#)). Multiple and simultaneous affiliations should, however, raise some important questions that need to be reconsidered such as; how an author can fulfill the responsibility of work and/or administrative roles in for example 5 or 6 different institutions at a time; how reliable and valid a ranking system based on such "octopus affiliations"; can grant by funding bodies or institutions be an objective reason to be listed as an affiliation; under high percentages of unemployment in graduated students, how is it professionally and ethically acceptable that some hold different positions at different institutions while others are unemployed, etc.

Octaffiliation phenomenon might be one of the many side effects of academic evaluation and ranking systems that put pressures on authors and institutions to boost their ranks, secure funding and uphold their influences. It may also be a symptom of the lack of institutional support that leads authors to seek resources outside their main institutions and would alter the traditional framework of academic employment and careers (Hottenrott and Lawson 2017). Multiple affiliations look like an octopus placing each of its feet and arms in a different direction (figure 1), hence the term "octopic/octopus affiliations" or in short "octaffiliation" or "octoffiliation" used here.

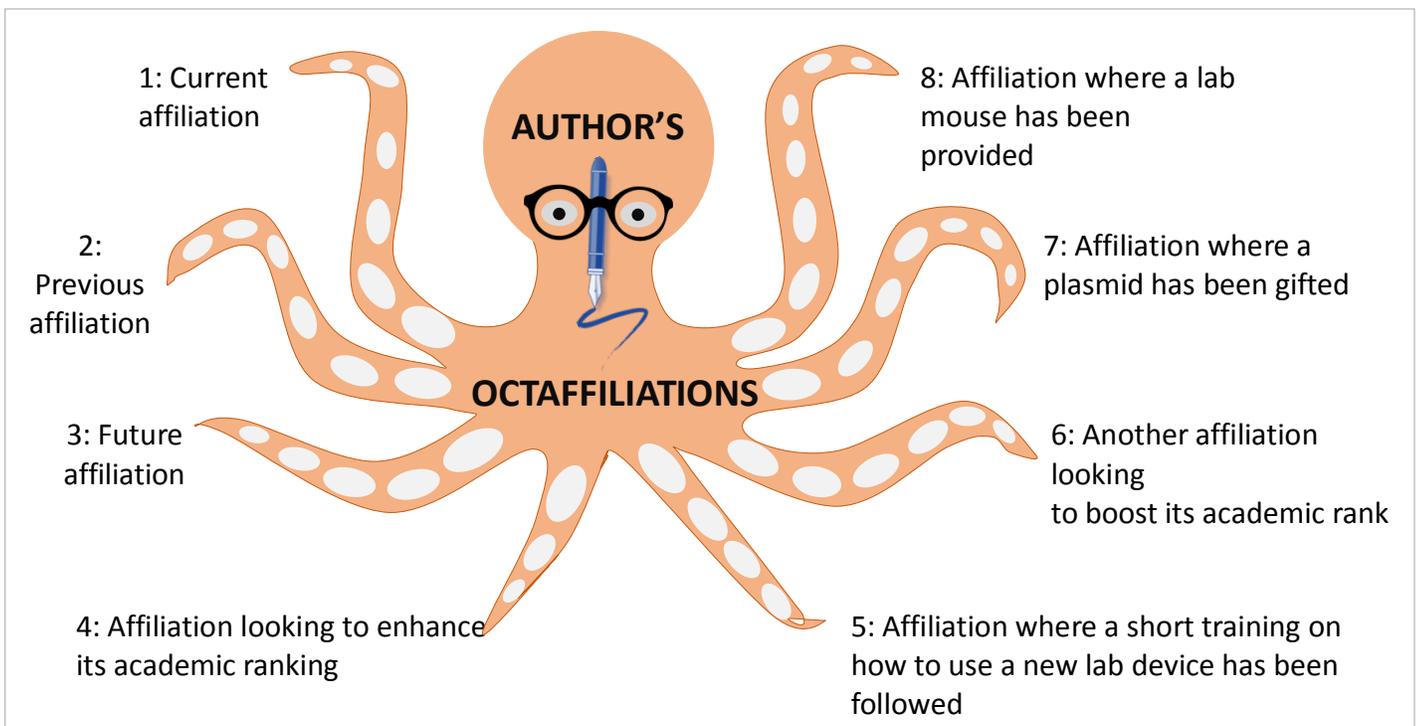


Fig. 1 Octopus affiliation (octaffiliation or octoffiliation).

While it is understandable that an author can be affiliated with one, two or three institutions at a time, some authors are affiliated with up to 6 institutions, if not more, at the same time. Such multiple and simultaneous affiliations look like an octopus placing each of his arms/feet in a direction. Multiple affiliations might only be a proxy for boosting academic ranks of the institutions in questions, much more than a real collaboration or involvement. It is somewhat difficult to fulfill work responsibilities in different affiliations particularly when they are in distant locations or countries.

It is time that scholarly publishing ends with such unlikely idiosyncrasies. It is not the affiliations— as many and as prestigious as it might be— that make authors genius or productive. Human brains work just fine without being affiliated or multi-affiliated to several institutions at a time, don't they? Even though scientists without affiliations have limited funding sources, but they enjoy greater work flexibility and independence in the way they perform and control their studies without bias or restrictions dictated by funding bodies ([Dance 2017](#)).

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