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Geographies of Underrecognition: Citation Disparities in Russian Studies

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the global inequalities in academic recognition within the field of Russian Studies, focusing on the geographical dimension of citation bias. Historically, Russian Studies has been shaped primarily by Western institutions, with limited contributions from local scholars during the communist era. Despite increased participation by Russian academics in international scholarship, citation disparities persist, reflecting broader systemic inequalities in global knowledge production. Using a large dataset of publications and citations, we analyze whether an author's country of affiliation influences citation rates, specifically examining whether papers by Russian-affiliated scholars are cited less frequently than those from other regions. Our findings align with previous research demonstrating that peripheral regions, including Russia, are consistently undercited compared to core academic hubs like North America and Europe.

Introduction

Citation bias has been extensively studied, primarily with a focus on gender and racial disparities (Dion et al., 2018). At the country level, citation bias manifests as a tendency among researchers to preferentially cite studies authored by Western scholars. This bias reinforces the overrepresentation of mainstream findings in the scientific literature as studies from non-Western or peripheral contexts may be neglected or underrepresented, perpetuating systemic inequalities in global knowledge production. Our study seeks to examine the factors that explain citation disparities, with a particular focus on the geographical dimension of citation bias. By emphasizing global inequalities in knowledge production, we aim to contribute to the understanding of how geographic factors shape the visibility and recognition of scholarly work (Qiu et al., 2025; Gomez et al., 2022).

Studies on citation inequality assume that all analyzed publications are from prestigious journals, meaning that there are no systematic variations in paper quality based on the author's country. This implies that factors beyond the quality of the paper, such as institutional or regional biases, influence citation patterns (Sin, 2011). However, arguments about citation inequality must also account for topic specialization, which can vary by country. Countries may specialize in topics with fewer active researchers, thereby influencing the number of citations their papers receive (Gomez et al., 2022). Using Russian Studies as a case, this paper seeks to account for topic specialization across different national contexts. Unequal recognition may stem from differences in the geographic focus of researchers based in core and peripheral countries. Scholars often gravitate toward familiar objects of study, and Western countries are privileged as the primary focus of academic research (Krause, 2021). As a result, studies focusing on peripheral regions are likely undercited, partly because fewer researchers engage with these topics. Moreover, when such studies are available, scholars often prefer to cite work with a geographic, economic, or social focus that aligns with their own research, bypassing studies on less familiar regions. In this study, we address this issue by investigating whether the country of an author's institutional affiliation affects the citation rate of manuscripts. We limit our scope to papers focused on a single geographic region—Russia—to eliminate variance in geographic scope as a factor influencing citation patterns.

This study relies on scientometric tools and a comprehensive bibliographic database—Web of Science (WoS)—to collect journal articles focusing on Russia in the social sciences over a 30-year period (1990–2020). While electronic databases provide access to extensive information for studying knowledge production, certain database-specific limitations can pose challenges for interdisciplinary fields like Russian Studies and post-Soviet area studies. To overcome these challenges, we developed a sophisticated search query designed to capture a broad range of relevant literature.

Material and methods

This study employs bibliometric analysis of publications in Russian Studies indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) database over a 30-year period (1990-2020). The dataset comprises 29,826 journal articles in the social sciences, identified using an advanced keyword search strategy. To create the main dataset, we employed diverse bibliometric methods for the identification of papers with a focus on Russia. The process of data collection included seeding a pilot dataset for keywords, selection of keywords, storing the primary dataset, selection of papers by experts and the cleaning of affiliation information. The use of around 1,271 keywords relevant to Russia resulted in 29,826 articles stored on the Web of Science database for the period 1990 – 2020 (the list is available in (Guba et al., 2024). We use the list of keywords to get all academic papers written in English during the period 1990 – 2020. To be stored, a paper has to contain at least one word from keywords in titles, abstracts or keywords. Our initial WoS query yielded in 55 709 (the database was queried in January, 2022), only article and review were taken into account. Since this list is likely to contain redundant papers, additional steps were needed to provide a corpus of articles appropriate for further analysis.

Our next stage was to resort to expert assessments once again to narrow down the dataset leaving only relevant publications. This step was necessary as querying articles by keywords might result in partially or completely unrelated documents. Since articles containing Russia in their title can be treated suitable with a substantial degree of certainty, such papers were not subject to expert assessment and immediately marked relevant. Thus, four experts received a shortened dataset of 40,647 papers to be checked for compliance with the topic. They read titles and examined keywords and abstracts. For the whole coded dataset, agreement and partial agreement constituted approximately 68.5% and 96.8%, respectively. Overall, an article was accepted if it contained the substring Russia in its title or if at least three out of four experts marked it as 1 (related). 29,826 papers (roughly 54% of the whole corpus) met this criterion.

For the citation analysis in this study, we selected only 15,078 publications indexed in the Social Sciences Citation Index, as citation analysis has significant challenges in the humanities.

Results

Given that the outcome variable, citations received, is not normally distributed, instead of using raw citation counts, we rely on the Mean Normalized Citation Score (MNCS), which represents the average number of citations for publications normalized by research field and publication year. This indicator reflects how a publication's citation performance compares with the global average. For the regression analysis, we binarize the variable, with 1 representing citations above the world average (MNCS > 1) and 0 representing citations below or equal to the world average (MNCS ≤ 1).

Our aim is to test whether the citations received are related to the author's geographic affiliation (in terms of the country), which is the main focus of this study. We coded authors' geographic affiliations using the information about their country of employment, as indicated by the correspondence address, rather than their nationality. This approach is widely used in scientometric research to draw conclusions about the country with which an author is affiliated. For authors with multiple affiliations, only the first affiliation was considered. For multi-authored papers, the total author counting method was employed, whereby data for all contributing authors were coded. Finally, we categorized the countries into several subregions based on the classification provided by the United Nations Statistics Division, with some adaptations to account for our focus on Russian scholars and the low number of articles in certain regions. The subregions include North America, Russia, Eastern Europe, Northern Europe, Southern Europe, Western Europe, Oceania, and Asia. North America accounting for the largest proportion of authors (40.75%), followed by Northern Europe (21.96%) and Russia (16.02%). Smaller contributions are observed from Asia (5.75%), Western Europe (8.71%), Eastern Europe (2.76%), Oceania (2.15%), and Southern Europe (1.90%), for a total of 17,284 articles.

The key step in studying the relationship between article citability and geographical factors is to control for the prestige level of the publishing journal (Abramo et al., 2024). In this study, we used SJR, or the SCImago Journal Rank indicator, as the

metric for journal impact. SJR ranks scholarly journals based on citation weighting schemes and eigenvector centrality accounting for the visibility of journals citing a given journal's set of papers. Based on findings from previous research, more variables were included to account for variance in citations received that are related to authorship patterns. Regarding, the coauthorship type, international collaborations tend to be cited more frequently, a trend confirmed by both cross-national analyses and case studies of specific countries (see Olechnicka et al. (2019) for a review). In addition, the number of authors is related to a larger number of citations (Sin, 2011). The year of publication was included, as articles that are published earlier tend to have more time to accumulate citations, but there may also be aging of older articles (Sin 2011). Regarding the document type, we limited our analysis only to journal articles.

In summary, this study tested seven variables: (1) author's subregion, (2) journal SJR, (3) authorship type (4) number of authors, and (5) publication year. This research does not aim to build a full model for citation count prediction given the complexity of phenomenon as researchers found a range possible factors (Abramo et al., 2024). Rather the current logistic regression analysis aims to test whether geographical factors are, indeed, related to significant different citation counts.

The value of MNCS for Northern American publications is 1.2; the MNCS score for the European articles is 1.1 in 1990-2020 with observed differences between different parts of European regions. The MNCS for Russia in 1990-2010 was 0.6, while for the period 2010-2020 the value was 0.9 meaning that Russian articles started to receive almost the same number of citations as on average in the world in the same research field and publication year.

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to test the relationships between the geographical factor and other variables with the likelihood of an article being cited above the world average (Table 1). The odds ratio (OR) was used to evaluate how each variable affected the outcome variable with an OR greater than 1 indicating that articles with a given characteristic are more likely to be cited above the world average.

Table 1. Logistic regression analysis.

Variables	*Odds Ratio*
Dependent variable: Citation above world average	
Journal citation metric SJR	1.988***
	(0.0538)
Collaboration (reference category – solo collaboration)	
International collaboration	1.821***
	(0.116)
National collaboration	1.441***
	(0.0805)
Number of authors	1.033
	(0.0206)

Region (reference category –North America)	
Asia	0.790***
	(0.0623)
Russia	0.630***
	(0.0363)
East Europe	0.742**
	(0.0886)
North Europe	1.067
	(0.0546)
South Europe	0.684***
	(0.0913)
Western Europe	0.713***
	(0.0512)
Oceania	1.089
	(0.154)
Year	0.998
	(0.00320)
Constant cut1	0.0409
	(0.263)
Observations	13,058

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The logistic regression results revealed significant associations between the variables and the outcome of interest. The Scimago Journal Rank (SJR) demonstrated a strong positive effect with an odds ratio of 1.988 ($p < 0.01$), indicating that higher-ranked journals are significantly more likely to publish articles that achieve citation counts above the global average. As predicted, collaboration type also plays a crucial role: international collaboration yielded an odds ratio of 1.821 ($p < 0.01$), while national collaboration showed an odds ratio of 1.441 ($p < 0.01$), both indicating a positive effect compared to solo authorship. In contrast, the number of authors (OR = 1.033, $p > 0.05$) and publication year (OR = 0.998, $p > 0.05$) did not exhibit significant impacts on citation likelihood.

Regional effects, our primary focus, showed notable variability. Articles authored by researchers from Asia (OR = 0.790, $p < 0.01$) and Russia (OR = 0.630, $p < 0.01$) were less likely to achieve citation counts above the world average compared to the reference region (North America). Among European authors, papers from East Europe (OR = 0.742, $p < 0.01$) and South Europe (OR = 0.684, $p < 0.01$) also garnered fewer citations compared to those from North America. Interestingly, no significant differences were found between North American authors and those from North Europe or Oceania/Australia. For Russian articles, the probability of being cited above the world average is the lowest compared to other regions (e.g., 0.31), while for North America, Northern Europe, and Oceania, this probability is notably higher, ranging from 0.42 to 0.44. In other words, even when scholars affiliated with Russian institutions overcome the challenges of publishing in reputable journals, their papers tend to receive fewer citations. These findings align with previous

studies in other disciplines, which have shown that Russian scholars do not achieve the same influence from their published research as scholars from frontier regions (Dyachenko & Pisklyakov, 2010).

Discussions

Area studies, such as Russian Studies, occupy an interstitial epistemic space, serving both as a research subject and as a field where many scholars are geographically situated (Kaczmarska & Ortmann, 2021). Local researchers possess valuable knowledge of the empirical context and cultural experience, which often makes them more informed experts compared to foreign scholars. However, as they are positioned on the academic periphery, their chances of getting published and cited are unequal. In this paper, we focus on the issue of unequal recognition in knowledge production about Russia by analyzing the quantity and impact of academic publications.

We observed unequal citation recognition across countries and world regions. What might explain these disparities? One possibility is that journal metrics fail to capture systematic differences in citation potential, though similar results have been observed in studies of citation patterns for Chinese papers (Qiu et al., 2025). Another explanation relates to network effects (Dion et al., 2018): scientists may be less aware of research produced by Russian authors. To gain citations, authors require access to "the networks that provide broad exposure to research findings" (Qiu et al., 2025). Previous studies have identified a "home bias," where scientists disproportionately cite researchers from the same region, language, or nation (Pasterkamp et al., 2007; Sin, 2011; Qiu et al., 2025). Given the larger size of the Western scholarly community, it is predictable that their articles would have more chances of being cited. Conversely, publishing internationally remains a significant challenge for Russian scientists, meaning that there are fewer Russian scholars publishing in international journals, and consequently fewer opportunities for them to cite each other. Building robust academic networks is often contingent on significant international experience – an opportunity that many Russian scholars lack.

Citation counts alone fail to capture the sociological interpretaion underlying how scholars recognize the work of their peers, highlighting the need for a deeper analysis of citing behavior. At a minimum, we have gathered sufficient evidence to justify continuing this line of inquiry. The most promising results may be obtained through experimental surveys, which offer opportunities to test hypotheses about the social factors influencing citation behavior by presenting differently formulated questions to control and experimental groups. Studies using experimental designs have already demonstrated the existence of evaluation biases based on factors such as gender and institutional prestige (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2013).

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