



12-1984

Commentary on "Publishing Opinions: A Note on the Usefulness of Commentaries"

J. Scott Armstrong

University of Pennsylvania, armstrong@wharton.upenn.edu

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Recommended Citation

Armstrong, J. S. (1984). Commentary on "Publishing Opinions: A Note on the Usefulness of Commentaries". *American Psychologist*, 39 (12), 1496-. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.39.12.1496>

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Abstract

Comments on J. J. Christensen-Szalanski and L. R. Beach's (see record [1984-21471-001](#)) conclusion that the attention given to commentaries and replies to articles did not justify the extra space. The author indicates that a 40% increase in space was associated with a 91% increase in citations; data do not argue against the use of commentaries.

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J. Scott Armstrong

University of Pennsylvania

Christensen-Szalanski and Beach (December

1983) concluded that the attention

given to commentaries and

replies to articles did not justify the

extra space. Here is another way to

look at their data. The increase in

journal space due to commentaries

and replies was 40% in their sample.

The "attention" given to the original

article plus commentaries plus replies,

was, they said, assessed by the number

of citations (not counting cross-citations

among the commentary and replies).

The median of 21 citations for

the articles plus commentaries was

91% larger than the median of 11

citations for the articles in the control

group. In other words, a 40% increase

in space was associated with a 91%

increase in citations. Looking at it

this way, these data do not argue

against the use of commentaries.

In the interest of fairness, I must

admit to being an editor, a commentator,

and the target of commentators

on numerous occasions. Although

some commentators did not seem to

invest much energy, many did. My

impression is that the efforts were

useful overall. But I am biased.

Commentaries may serve the

useful function of pointing out errors

in a paper—thus leading to fewer

citations. From my experience, the

commentaries added emphasis and

helped in the understanding of important

contributions—thus leading

to more citations and to classroom

use.

I agree with Christensen-Szalanski

and Beach on the need for guidelines

that call for short commentaries.

The editor can then relax the requirement

for commentators who add data.

REFERENCE

Christensen-Szalanski, J. J. J., & Beach,

L. R. (1983). Publishing opinions: A

note on the usefulness of commentaries.

American Psychologist, -38, 1400-1401.