

Case details

Presenter of case: Alexander Magazinov

COPE member involved: *Journal of Energy Storage* (Elsevier)

Date at which case was received: 25 September 2022

Article involved:

Publications in the special issue 'Recent Advances in Battery Thermal Management':

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/special-issue/10MKCTKWGV7>

Category of concern: Concern about citation and authorship practices, potential citation manipulation

Scope of review by subcommittee

Taking into consideration the scope of the Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee, the review focuses on the procedural aspects of the journal's evaluation of concerns about the articles, and the process that informed the determination to correct the published record for publications in the special issue.

An evaluation of the scholarly content or the citations in individual articles falls beyond the scope of the subcommittee's review.

Summary of issue, as outlined by presenter

A "special issue" "Recent Advances in Battery Thermal Management"

(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/journal-of-energy-storage/special-issue/10MKCTKWGV7>) has been reported to the EiC of the journal for abnormal citation and authorship patterns, as well as for nonsensical content of some published items.

- Out of the first 75 items published, "guest editor" Nader Karimi gained at least 461 citations, "guest editor" Masoud Afrand gained at least 356 citations. Many other well-recognizable persons of the same ring gained significant batches of citations.
- One of the papers by Karimi got more citations from the SI than from elsewhere, all in a vague context, unspecific to the content of that paper.
- Further concerns about the majority of items from the SI have been posted on PubPeer. For example, one of the papers in the SI claims that an energy of 17kWh (about \$2.00 by current US prices) is enough to heat a 2-store building in a "cold dry climate" for a year. This shows the quality control in the SI fails miserably.

The EiC claimed that he started discussing the issue with the publisher.

Recently, the production of the SI resumed, from which I infer that a decision has been taken that the SI is not problematic. I have not received any communication to that effect.

So far, the following items have been published after the communication.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.est.2022.105326>

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.est.2022.105602>

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.est.2022.105703>

Member's response

Please see below the response to the earlier raised questions regarding the Special Issue 'Recent Advances in Battery Thermal Management'.

- Please provide a summary of the follow-up undertaken in response to the concerns about the citation patterns in the publications in the special issue, in particular regarding citations to publications by the guest editors.

Our response: We opened an investigation in late October into the special issue, 'Recent Advances in Battery Thermal Management', which had been opened in the Journal of Energy Storage. At that time, the Guest Editors of the VSI had accepted 80 papers for publication and they were in various stages of production. A further 60+ papers had been submitted and were either in peer-review, being revised by the authors, or with the Guest Editors for a decision. In addition to opening the investigation, we put the special issue on hold. This meant that no authors can submit a manuscript to the VSI and that all work in the editorial process is paused. Articles that were in production were halted as well, but we acknowledge that a further two papers for which proofs had been returned by the authors were erroneously published.

Our investigation focused primarily on the rigour and the independence of the peer-review process. We have two primary concerns as a result of our investigation. The first is that the Guest Editors have used a small number of reviewers to evaluate the manuscripts submitted to the VSI. The second is that these reviewers have consistently requested that the authors add citations to their work and to the work of the Guest Editors to their manuscripts. We wrote to the Guest Editors last year and have now received a response. Although the response is detailed and argues that the field is niche, resulting in a small number of reviewers and a large number of citations to the work of the Guest Editors, the new Editor-in-Chief of the journal is not satisfied. We have, therefore, decided to close the special issue and we are in the process of terminating the Guest Editor agreements and working on a process to re-review the published articles. Those manuscripts that are in the editorial process will be re-routed to the Editor-in-Chief and will go through the journal's usual peer-review process.

In addition to re-reviewing the published articles, we are also reviewing several indicators of quality and validity around these papers. The Editor-in-Chief may decide to retract some or all articles if misconduct on the part of the authors is found and no satisfactory explanation is provided.

- Please provide a summary of the follow-up undertaken in response to the concerns about the scientific content of the articles in the special issue.

Our response: As outlined above, we will re-review the articles that have been accepted for publication. Depending on the Editor-in-Chief's findings, we may correct the articles or we may take further action which could include retraction. All manuscripts that are in progress will be re-reviewed via the journal's usual editorial process. We note that a number of these manuscripts have been revised to add citations to the original reviewers' and the Guest Editors' work and, at a minimum, these will likely be removed.

- Please provide information on the policies and processes in place at the journal for the handling of special issues.

Our response: The Journal of Energy Storage appointed a new Editor-in-Chief in 2023, Dr Luisa Cabeza, University of Lleida, Spain. Dr Cabeza is reviewing the scope of special issues. However, we can confirm that we have a process for reviewing the expertise of Guest Editors who propose special issues to our journals, which is constantly under review and includes identity validation, an agreement to inform Guest Editors on their role and responsibilities, and training on the use of the editorial system to identify independent reviewers. In addition, all Editors-in-Chief make the final decision on the acceptance or rejection of a special issue manuscript. In this instance, we clearly fell below the standards that we expect.

Communication from publisher about ongoing follow up and publication of Expressions of Concern

Timeline and actions to date:

This is a timeline of the case and the actions we have taken:

1. July 2022: we understand the journal was informed of ethical concerns about the above-named special issue.
2. 2nd October 2022: the case was escalated to the Research Integrity & Publishing Ethics team for investigation. It was triaged and assigned to a member of the team for further investigation.
3. 27th October 2022: initial investigations began to substantiate the concerns, including checks across published papers and those in process to determine whether the concerns raised by the complainant had foundation.
4. 1st November 2022 – 15th January 2023: editorial transition period due to retirement of previous Editor-in-Chief, Professor Dirk Uwe Sauer, and incoming Editor-in-Chief, Professor Luisa Cabeza.
5. 22nd November 2022: special issue was paused for submissions following substantiation of concerns in some papers, and manuscripts in process were held (please note that a small number of papers were already in-flight to ScienceDirect and in the process of being published – these could not be stopped).

6. 5th January 2023: an investigator for the RI&PE team wrote to the Guest Editors seeking an explanation for the concerns we had identified across published papers and those in process.
7. 8th January 2023: response received from the corresponding Guest Editor, Nader Karimi, on behalf of all Guest Editors, and shared with Professor Cabeza for her assessment.
8. 22nd January 2023: Dr Cabeza responded to the explanation from Dr Karimi and his colleagues and noted that it was not sufficient to answer the concerns raised. Professor Cabeza requested that the special issue was permanently closed.
9. 22nd January 2023: all manuscripts in process were re-routed to Professor Cabeza for peer-review and editorial decisions were made during the next four to six weeks following editorial evaluation and (in some cases) independent peer-review.
10. 1st March: change in team members at Elsevier. The team member assigned to this case left, the case was assigned to another team member who picked it up and continued to work on it.
11. 31st March 2023: the agreements with the Guest Editors were terminated.
12. 4th April 2023: communications begin with authors over concerns in published papers.

Ongoing actions:

- The corresponding authors of published papers have been contacted and we have received more than 70 replies.
- A small editorial committee has been set up by Professor Cabeza comprising Associate Editors, the Publisher, and an Ethics Expert. Together, they are working through the papers in question and the authors' replies. They are handling the papers in small batches, and we anticipate we should reach a conclusion on all the papers within the coming 2-3 months.
- The conclusions may range from corrigenda, retractions or no action. This will be decided on a paper-by-paper basis.

Please note that the Guest Editors assert that they have conducted the peer-review of this special issue in line with best practices and have raised a complaint to our Legal Team, which is ongoing. We continue to communicate with the Guest Editors.

Expression of concern:

We note the Facilitation & Integrity subcommittee's recommendation to publish an expression of concern. This has been done and linked to this special issue to explain to our readers that an investigation is ongoing:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/journal-of-energy-storage/special-issue/10MKCTKWGV7>.

Communication from publisher confirming that the follow up for the special issue had been completed

- We note that there have been 32 retractions and a number of Expressions of Concern processed for publications in the special issue. Can you please clarify whether the journal's follow up on the concerns about publications in this special issue has now been completed?

Yes, we can confirm that the investigations are completed. Out of the 88 scrutinized papers:

- 32 papers have been Retracted (36% of the Special Issue)
- 36 papers have (or will soon have) a Permanent Expression of Concern (41% of the Special Issue)
- 19 papers were handled according to our policies – Editor’s Note published (22%)
- 1 paper was not published in the end (~1%).

- Please provide some clarification for the approach for corrections to the record for the set of publications that received such notification, and the circumstances that informed the step to retract some articles but issue Expressions of Concern for others.

For each paper, we conducted a comprehensive analysis, considering factors such as the closeness of reviewers to the Guest Editors, unauthorized authorship changes, unusual citation patterns, suspicious email addresses etc. In cases where clear evidence of misconduct was identified, leading to the Editor-in-Chief’s loss of confidence in the paper’s findings, retraction of the articles was deemed necessary.

Some papers fell into a "grey area," where (minor) unethical activities were identified, yet the overall scientific validity of the paper and the authors' integrity were not in question. In such instances, a complete retraction was deemed harsh, but transparency regarding our concerns was deemed essential, leading to the issuance of “Permanent” Expressions of Concern.

For papers that were handled in accordance with our policies, such as those overseen by the current Editor-in-Chief or Guest Editors who used more “independent” reviewers, Editor’s Notes were provided to acknowledge the adherence to our review processes. One example of such Editor’s Note is available on <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.est.2024.112175>.

- Dr Magazinov raised concerns about additional publications in the journal, including the two articles below. Can you please confirm whether the journal is following up on these, and share an update on the current status of any such follow up.

· del Almarashi, Idir Mechai, Waleed Hamali, Musawa Yahya Almusawa, S. Bourazza, Hussein A.Z. AL-bonsrulah, Awatif M.A. Elsiddieg. [Analyzing cold storage unit during discharging process involving pure conduction utilizing nanomaterial](#). Journal of Energy Storage, Volume 85, 2024, 111080

· ahya Ali Rothan. [Influence of nanoparticle loading on rate of cold storage considering transient conduction](#). Journal of Energy Storage. Volume 86, Part B, 2024, 111371

The two papers were recently brought to attention of the Editor-in-Chief of the journal, despite of Mr. Magazinov not following up to provide further documentation for his concerns about the two articles. Depending on EiC’s assessment, we may still need to request that documentation from Mr. Magazinov.

COPE’s review

A member of the Facilitation & Integrity subcommittee reviewed the information submitted by the presenter and deemed the case to fall within the scope of the Facilitation & Integrity process.

COPE approached the journal for comments on Alexander Magazinov's concerns. The journal indicated that they had placed the special issue on hold and would be investigating the articles and issues raised but that some time may be required given the number of publications involved. Several months later, the journal provided details on their follow up, indicating that they had looked into the peer-review process for the articles and noted that a small number of reviewers had been involved in the evaluation of the submissions to the special issue, and that the reviewers had consistently requested that the authors add citations to their work and to articles by the Guest Editors. The journal indicated that they had closed the special issue, they would terminate the Guest Editor agreements, and would pursue a further review of the published articles, and any submissions still in the editorial process.

The Facilitation & Integrity subcommittee reviewed the response and followed up with the journal to ask whether, given the severity of the concerns and the length of time required for follow up, the journal would consider publishing Expressions of Concern on the articles to alert readers to the ongoing follow up on the articles.

The subcommittee was in touch with the journal and publisher at different points to request updates on the status of their follow up. The publisher stated that their follow up was ongoing and they were in communication with the Editor-in-Chief, the Guest Editors, and the authors of the articles. The publisher also indicated that per COPE's recommendation, they had issued Expressions of Concern for all the published articles in the special issue.

Several months later the subcommittee noted that several publications in the special issue had been retracted, and contacted the publisher for an update on the status of their follow up. The publisher indicated that the investigation was ongoing and that there would likely be additional retractions or updates to the record for the articles in the special issue. The subcommittee pursued further contacts with the publisher over the following weeks, and the publisher eventually responded to indicate that the investigation was complete. As a result of the investigation, 32 articles in the special issue were retracted, for 36 a permanent Expression of Concern was published, and for 19 an Editor's Note was published. The publisher noted that the decision on the type of correction to the record to publish was informed by consideration of several factors including the reviewers involved and their closeness to the Guest Editors, whether authorship changes had taken place for the manuscript, or concerns about citation practices.

Conclusions

Upon consideration of the concerns and the member's response, the Facilitation & Integrity subcommittee considers that the journal followed an adequate process aligned to COPE guidance to pursue follow up on the concerns about the special issue.

The process involved an evaluation of the manuscripts and their editorial process, contacts with the editors and the authors for comments, and a re-review of the articles. Upon this follow up, the journal has taken steps to correct the record for articles in the special issue, posting public notifications according to the nature and extent of concerns identified and whether they undermined the standing of the publication.

While the journal's process was adequate, we do have a recommendation for the journal and the publisher:

- The concerns about this special issue were initially raised to the journal in July 2022, but the journal only initiated follow up three months later, and the initial Expressions of Concern on the articles were published a year later. Given the severity of the concerns involved, it would have been pertinent for the journal to expedite its follow up on the concerns, and also to alert readers much earlier to the fact that active follow up was ongoing for the publications. We recommend that the journal reviews its process for the handling of this type of concerns to ensure that in future, follow up takes place in a timely manner, and that Expressions of Concern are also published in a timely manner if concerns are identified that require substantial follow up.

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