

Expert View on Journal Metrics Webinar Q&A

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Metrics & Indexes

Impact Factor

Traditionally, Impact Factors were the main metric used for judging a journal's success. Do you see this balance changing due to the rise of other metrics?

James Hardcastle: I think the Impact Factor is probably here to stay for the foreseeable future. As to whether we think of that as a good or a bad thing, it's so embedded in how so many systems of academic value and academic assessment work. But things like Citescore, which have brought you similar metrics from Elsevier and Scopus, are starting to get some traction. I think there is demand to move away from the Impact Factor and for it to be replaced by other metrics, but it's going to be a long time before it finally works its way through the system.

Why does it take so long to get a decision on whether a journal can be awarded an impact factor?

James Hardcastle: Clarivate Analytics and Scopus both undertake a detailed evaluation of journals as part of the selection processes for their databases to ensure that the journals meet their quality standards and will be of value to their users. This is the first stage in a journal receiving metrics, this process normally takes at least 12 months but sometimes considerable longer. Historically, once a journal had been selected and started being indexed it would then be another 2 years before its first Impact Factor was published as at least 3 volumes had to be indexed. Now Clarivate Analytics have launched the ESC, the delay between acceptance to the SCIE or SSCI and receiving an Impact Factor should be reduced.

Altmetrics

Will it be possible in the future, when an article of our journal gets an Altmetric score, that the system could send a notification to the journal's email automatically?

Euan Adie: Yes, definitely, it's something we're actually working towards. You can do it to some extent now – you can subscribe to email alerts for a single article and we do have an analytics tool where you can sign up to get a report every week about everything in a specific journal or set of journals.

You showed an article with an Altmetric score of 1346. How was that calculated?

Euan Adie: So the Altmetric score is basically a weighted score. First of all, we assign scores to each media type, so you can say a tweet counts for 1, and a news story counts for 6. We got those numbers by asking researchers to rank what kind of attention was most important to them, so the score measures attention. The thing is that it's not enough to just do one level of weighted scoring because there's a difference between The New York Times say, and a local newspaper that your Mum reads. And there's a difference between me tweeting something that nobody listens to, and Barack Obama who gets a much bigger reach. So we do one score weighting based on the type of mention, and a second score weighting based on the kind of reach and the quality of the account or the outlet that does it.

Can Editors generate the table Euan Adie showed of Altmetric scores broken down into News/Policy/Twitter and comparing their journal with competitor journals?

James Hardcastle: We can provide this for you. We have access to the data, so we can break this down as part of publishing reports or other information for you. Speak to your Managing Editor.

The impact indicated by high journal or article metrics isn't always a good thing; as with Altmetric score, for instance, a high score could be due to negative attention. How can we best deal with this ambiguity, and ensure our authors understand it?

Euan Adie: It is difficult. The focus has to always be on clicking through on the donut and actually reading the mentions and there's no good way of assessing the attention without doing that. We looked at a lot of alternative ways, and a lot of people ask about things like sentiment analysis, so could you say well 60% of these mentions are positive and 40% are negative, but it's first of all very difficult, and second of all I don't think it would give a true measure – it wouldn't really answer the question of whether people are angry at the topic of the paper or the paper itself.

James Hardcastle: Though citations are normally positive, and often in most disciplines people tend to ignore bad work, in other disciplines, particularly narrative-driven disciplines, people will highlight that they fundamentally disagree with a person's work, or they believe that the work is flawed in a particular way. So even with citation count, citations are not necessarily a positive indication that someone has agreed with your work. Usage is a bit trickier. There is no way of really knowing with usage if all someone has done is clicked the download button on the website; we have no idea if they actually read the paper.

How do you find the references to research in policy? What sources of policy do you look at?

Euan Adie: We mine the full text of documents and look for reference strings (specifically author names, years and/or volume & issues), links, DOIs, ISBNs etc... anything that may lead to an output. The reference strings are matched algorithmically against Crossref.

We don't share the full list of policy sources, but in general they're biased towards government & intergovernmental organizations in the US, Europe & Australia (we're trying to broaden geographical coverage). We have around 60 sources but some are "umbrella" organizations that aggregate documents from many different places.

They include gov.uk (government documents from the UK, including NICE, parliamentary briefings and government departments), Australian Policy Online, the Publications Office of the European Union, the World Bank, CDC, FDA, EPA etc. in the states and a number of societies, charities and think tanks.

Journal Performance

How can metrics help get the journal indexed in SCI/Scopus? Many early career researchers are reticent submitting their work to the journal because the journal is not SCI indexed. This also affects visibility and use by readers.

James Hardcastle: To be accepted into the SCI or Scopus a journal needs to have a decent citation profile. To get good early career researchers to publish in the journal, it needs to be in SCI or Scopus. There is an obvious catch-22 here. Metrics can help by providing different views of impact beyond citations such as Altmetrics or usage. In addition, all T&F journals display article level citations via CrossRef.

What about disciplines whose research methodology are different? Most STEM disciplines require an exhaustive review of literature, hence more citations, but humanities only cites works with which it engages, so a smaller number of citations per paper. Clarivate does not even feature a JCR for its Arts and Humanities Citation Index.

James Hardcastle: This issue doesn't just apply to citations; we also tend to see higher usage and Altmetric scores in the life sciences than in Humanities. The key when looking at all metrics around journal performance is to compare journals against other relevant titles rather than the data set overall. As an extreme example in the 2016 JCR an Impact Factor of 1 would place you 178th in the Cell Biology category compared 7th in History. Hence I would always encourage authors, editors and other users of journal metrics to look at Impact Factor or CiteScore rankings rather than the raw number.

Learned Societies & Metrics

What do the panel think that the role of a learned society is in managing the world of metrics for our authors and as publishing partners?

James Hardcastle: There's certainly a role for academic societies and learned societies in educating authors about what metrics are available and the different ways of looking at their research. Publishers and editors can only do so much in helping people connect metrics that might be more appropriate than the Impact Factor.

Dr Grant Abt: The [Journal of Sports Sciences](#) is published on behalf of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences, so that's a professional body. To be honest, they don't have a lot of involvement in the day to day running of the journal, but they certainly have a voice in the direction of which the journal goes. If they wanted a particular performance and metric to be analysed in terms of their own membership base, then that would be possible.

Dr John Harrison: [Regional Studies](#) is the journal of a large learned society, which is the Regional Studies Association. When you've got a learned society, you've got a wide community and audience for the research. It's not simply that the journal's there to publish research, but the journal is also there to serve the wider community, because without that community there is no audience for the journal, there is no research coming through. Metrics can be really helpful in showing the community the work that the journal and the association is doing to try to help them, to promote their research, and to give them as many opportunities as possible to disseminate and communicate their knowledge and research.

Maximizing Impact

In this changing publishing environment, what advice would you give to junior researchers starting their publishing careers on how to maximise their impact?

T&F Communications Team: Consider who your research is relevant to – the most obvious group might be your fellow peers, but there several other groups who might be interested in your research...



Are you using social media? If so, post about your research on there – an editor told us that [one article that had been downloaded 300 times over the course of several months was suddenly downloaded over 900 times in a couple of weeks](#). Think carefully about the tools and resources you already have and make the most of them, whether it's [listing your published works on your departmental profile](#), [adding your article to your students' reading lists](#), or [including a link to it in your email signature](#).

If your research is particularly newsworthy, you can nominate your article for a press campaign through our [press nomination form](#). Please remember to only nominate your article after peer review has been completed, but before the article is published online.

And finally, sign up to our weekly [Insights alerts](#) to have the latest publishing tips and news straight to your inbox.

Any comment on Kudos for promoting articles?

Euan Adie: Somebody has to take responsibility for publicizing and disseminating research, and authors are a good place to do that if you think about writing plain language summaries of their research and reaching the right communities, as presumably they know their peer groups. So in that sense I think it's a good thing to encourage authors to participate in telling people about their work. The only thing to watch for is that the point isn't to get attention for the sake of it;

nobody should just be tweeting papers because somebody told them to tweet the paper, that doesn't add value for anybody. It needs to be adding value to the conversation, so it needs to be reaching your audience, and somebody needs to be finding it useful.

Readership

Do simpler, shorter titles lead to more readership? Are they more likely to attract readers as it's easier to understand the focus of content?

Dr John Harrison: When we look at the titles of papers that don't get very many citations or have the lowest number of downloads, it's generally papers that have (often as a subtitle) 'The Case of Place X'. People might look at that and think I'm not interested in place X, and that can actually put people off. If you have the title just as the broad scientific focus of the topic, the debate that the paper's about, the indications are that that type of paper does generate more interest. Be very specific in terms of where the focus is. It might be a link that's an associational link, but it does seem that the articles that have got questions in the title, just fundamental questions that suggest that they're tackling a big issue or a big topic, generally generate the most interest. Now you can also look beyond that: they may have some of the best science in them, but certainly if you look at titles, shorter, snappier, eye-catching titles generally are more receptive and more engaging for researchers.

With regards to titles being short and snappy, isn't it also true that they mustn't be so obscure that search engines don't pick them up? For example, it might be smart, snappy and attractive to quote a Bob Dylan lyric, but the paper would nevertheless be invisible to somebody using a search engine to look for, say, research on sexuality and people with intellectual disability...

Dr John Harrison: Yes – I totally agree. A title which is obscure is equally off-putting to readers (as well as reviewers, editors and publishers,) but they can work if they are attention-grabbing and in conjunction with a short subtitle which *does* specify key terms which search engines pick up. This goes back to what I mentioned in my presentation, which is that improving impact requires improving visibility and quality. A Bob Dylan lyric helps if it increases visibility and gets more readers to look at the work, but the same title also needs to 'visible' to the right audience (hence the point about keyword searching via Google) and demonstrate 'quality' (it cannot simply be a quirky title). The trick is getting both into a short, snappy title.

There is an ancient paper that demonstrated that articles with a colon had more citations. Is that no longer the case?

Dr John Harrison: If I'm honest, I don't know. My initial reaction is ambivalence. On the one hand, articles with a colon can often be trying to do the two parts above (see Q9) – eye-catching, attention grabbing and contribution to knowledge (before/after the colon). On the other hand, they are generally longer and wordier.

Your advice on titles is very helpful. You also suggested in your presentation that abstracts may be key – do you have advice on content of abstracts, in terms of helping to turn ‘lookers’ into ‘readers’?

Dr John Harrison: The advice that I would give, in terms of abstracts, is just very clearly take the reader through what the paper is about. My advice would be: five fairly short sentences, first one identifying what the debate is (What debate, or scientific or policy debate, is this piece of research connected to? What’s the current state of the arts in that area, so maybe what’s missing, is there a gap in terms of the research? What’s the research that you’ve done? What have you found from that research?) And then the final sentence would be addressing the ‘So what?’ question – how’s this going to shape, advance, or change the debate? So you’re connecting to researchers: you’re very clearly just going through five points that say: this is what the research is, this is why it should be interesting, this is what I’ve found, and this is the take-home message.

Some journals use sub headings in the abstract concluding with significance. Is this a useful approach?

Dr John Harrison: It can be. I still think the best abstracts are those which are written as a single, integrated paragraph. Personally, I find abstracts with sub-headings can be constraining and prescriptive. I actually think it points to a weakness in writing abstracts, which editors are trying to correct by spelling out what an abstract should cover. If authors were writing good abstracts, using sub-headings would not be needed.

I would be interested in the types of prizes you might provide authors and reviewers to attract/maximise quality.

Dr John Harrison: A ‘Best paper’ prize for each volume. The prestige is probably sufficient – the ability to put it on your CV – but I’m sure the publisher would provide a small prize. A lot of journals already do this with the support of their publisher.

Some journals also do a ‘Best reviewer’ prize. It is an acknowledgement of the work they do for the journal.

If you were to give an author a single job to do following their publication to raise readership, what would it be and how long do you think it would take to do?

T&F Communications Team: That’s a tough one, because there are so many different ways you can do this – see our [top ten tips for maximizing impact](#) for inspiration. If I had to pick one, it would be to include your article in your email signature. It’s almost effortless to do and from

then on, everyone you email will be able to see the link through to your article. Many of the people you contact professionally are likely to be working in the same or similar fields as you, and this is a quick and easy way to tell them you're published.

If you'd like a banner like the one below, then just fill out [a banner request form](#) and we'll create one for you.



Social Media & Twinterviews

Having a Social Media Editor sounds like a good idea. Do you have a list of typical activities carried out by a Social Media Editor, and tips on how to be most effective in this role?

Dr Grant Abt: Please take a look at [this presentation](#) I created on the role of a social media editor.

I'm a new journal manager and have just set up a Twitter feed. Do you have any tips for making our Twitter content as useful for our community as possible?

Dr Grant Abt: Please take a look at [this presentation](#), which includes tips on the sort of content to post.

For Twinterviews, do you post a pre-recorded audio or video?

Dr Grant Abt: The interview is conducted on Twitter so there is no audio or video content. We have started using Periscope to do live interviews at conferences though, so I would encourage you to investigate this. You can conduct a live video interview directly from within the Twitter app. All you need is a smartphone (e.g. iPhone) and an external microphone (conferences can be noisy and the built-in microphone isn't quite good enough in my experience).

How does tweeting about articles that have been accepted by your journal but not yet published generate interest and impact? I would have thought people on Twitter would want to be able to read the paper.

Dr Grant Abt: We do this in two ways. First, we tweet the title of the paper immediately as it is accepted by the Editor-in-Chief (EiC). When the EiC sends the acceptance email to the corresponding author, I am copied in on the email. I then tweet the article title with the hashtag #JSSAcceptedToday. I see it as a teaser trailer simply to wet people's appetite. You'd be surprised how many people 'like' these tweets and start discussing the topic based purely on the title.

Second, the Twinterviews are conducted with the author of a paper that is 'in press' – that is, it is available on the journal website but hasn't been assigned an issue yet. We also make the paper freely available for a limited period of time to enable people to download it and read it prior to the Twinterview. They have been incredibly popular and I would encourage you to try it.

Can T&F Editors help to set up Twinterviews?

T&F Communications Team: If you have an idea for a Twinterview please speak to your Managing Editor about it, and they can work with our social media team to help advise you on best practice.

Studies suggest that there is not a necessarily a positive correlation between citations and media visibility. More specifically, articles that are discussed on some social media sites attract less attention in scholarly venues, perhaps because the issues discussed in the articles have already been exhausted in the public space.

Dr Grant Abt: I think it works both ways. Some papers are highly theoretical, and as a social media editor it's very difficult to capture the essence of those papers in a tweet. So those papers may not get the love from the Twittersphere that other papers do, but their impact on theory might be substantial. In my field, sport and exercise science, a lot of the work we've published over the years has been from professional football, and people working at football clubs use this information. So practical work isn't always highly cited, but it can be very popular.

It comes back to the point that it depends on your definition of impact, and any given paper can have multiple impacts. If a paper is only cited a few times, that doesn't necessarily mean it's worthless. Likewise, many papers that are highly cited might not actually change practice or policy in any way. We have to view things with a wider field of vision, so we can capture the wider variety of impact that papers can have.