

## IMPACT FACTOR: IS THIS A TRUE MEASURE OF QUALITY?

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“Impact factor” is given to journals indexed in Science Citation Index (SCI) based on articles cited from the same in preceding two years. This is a quantitative measure, the ratio of citations of articles published in the journal in previous two years (numerator) to the total articles published in that journal in the these two years (denominator).<sup>[1]</sup> The impact factor is considered as an index of measurement of quality of the journal, quality of research work by a researcher and quality of an article. Many academic or research institute’s and funding agencies consider impact factor as valid measure for the quality of a journal and people with publications in such high impact journals get leverage in jobs in academic and research institutes or for funds for their research. Editors of such individual journals and managers of publication houses advertise their journals on the basis of impact factors considering it as valid measure of quality of the journal. Also Researchers want to publish their articles in the journals which have high impact factors irrespective of the journals sustainability. At present an impact factor is considered as a surrogate for the quality of a journal and it is used for this purpose by majority of stake holders.<sup>[2]</sup>

Because of the various reasons mentioned below, it seems that the impact factor is degrading the progress and quality of science rather than helping it. And there is an immediate need, to consider other parameters to measure the quality of journals and researchers.<sup>[3]</sup> It is very important to understand that the impact factor is given by a private institute based on small number of journals from each specialty, majority of which are in English language published by financially sound publishers. As there is an annual fee and limited opportunity, majority of journals do not have an impact factor as they are not indexed in SCI. There are various reasons which prevent the impact factor to become a valid measure of quality for the journal or the research work of a researcher. The impact factor is based on articles cited in previous two years which may be a very less time for an article to get cited particularly in some

specialties and this becomes more confusing and less valid when two journals of different specialties are compared on the basis of impact factor. Impact factor is also depends on the type of article and negotiation with the SCI for inclusion of type of article for the calculation. It is observed that review articles are cited more as compared to original research articles, hence the journals which publish review articles will have more impact factor and editor will promote publication of these review articles when compared to the original articles. Other issue is self-citation, to inflate impact factor authors keep on citing their own articles and journal encourages authors to cite the articles published in that journal. Initially there was no method for adjustment of this self-citation but now journals are being tracked for self-citation and journals found to be involved in excessive self-citation are discouraged for inclusion in SCI. Sometimes few journals make a secret association where they cite articles published in each other’s journal to prevent detection of self-citation and to artificially inflate impact factor. I have observed that many journals invited commentary on an article which is going to be published in coming issue. Many instances, more than one commentary are published with the original research article. All these commentaries which are of typical 600-700 words cite the primary article for which that commentary is written. I see it as a method to inflate impact factor though many other editor’s may not agree with the same. I strongly believe that citations done in these commentaries should not be counted for impact factor as these are not the spontaneous citations.

Overreliance of impact factor is taking the science toward a system of inequality where few high impact journals will dominate in the publication and small journals will not get good quality articles. These so called high impact journal will be in so much of demand that they will make their own rules and other will be having no choice but to follow them. It may not help the science but will certainly help big publishing houses financially. Publication charge for many

these so called high impact factor journal is more than 1500 USD which is too high as compared to the actual cost involved in the publication and processing and for many researcher's working in developing countries this fee is almost equal to a six month pay. There is a need of development for other methods for the measurement of the quality of a journal and a researcher than impact factor if we want to develop the science and help the society.

## References

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