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Publishing and Impact Factor

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In the world of search engines, we have moved into cite by title or by the contents of the abstract without ever immersing ourselves in reading of the paper. In addition, researcher had started the process of citing reviews as primary citations rather than citing the original work. However, citation of our papers is important because our intellectual bank account is our published papers and our value is based upon how this work is cited. Another important change in the society is the inappropriate use of Impact Factor (IF) to perceive value of people, of work, and of journals.

So we can consider some questions; what role, should a journal's IF have on whether we choose to publish our work in it? Should IF be used to evaluate the quality of work published in any given journal and to evaluate the performance of a faculty or whether a certain person should be hired over another person? Should IF be used to determine who gets a grant and who does not?

It appears that we have fallen into a deep love affair with IF and we run the risk of passing on this ill-advised affair to our students. To put it into perspective, IF is a population statistic that reflects how many citations of a journal's papers published over a two-year period receive during the subsequent year. "The annual Journal Citation Reports impact factor is a ratio between citations and recent citable items published: a journal's impact factor is calculated by dividing the number of current year citations to the source items published in that journal during the previous two years" [1].

Thus, it is not an indicator of potential future performance for any published paper nor is it an individual statistic, but rather a population statistic based upon the general population of what has been published. Simply put, an IF of 2 suggests two citations on average for each paper published over that 2 year period in the following year. So, is a journal with an IF of 2 half the quality of a journal with an IF of 4? Alternatively, does publishing in a journal with an IF of 2 mean that my work published will only be referenced twice, while work in a journal with an IF of 16 will be cited 16 times over that time period? I think we all know the answer is not. We more often than not teach our students that there is value in publishing in high impact journals and that they should strive to do so, because publishing in low IF journals is indicative of poor work. Cannot get a job without high IF journals on their CV! Is that true? Or is it a falsely created point-of-view based upon misperceptions of what IF means and for what it should be used? In other words, has academia fallen into a rose colored glasses view of IF in our torrid love affair with this metric?

Unfortunately, many graduate students' perception of the importance of IF is much different than many of colleagues who serve as their mentors and advisors. Similarly, many colleagues have a false perception of what IF means and its ill-conceived use in evaluating individuals' published work or as a measure of journal worthiness.

Clearly, good work is cited, although we do believe that there is an ever growing view that work published in lower IF journals is not as worthy of citation as that published in higher IF journals. However, there is a growing movement to place an emphasis on how many times individual papers are cited, a metric much more reflective of how well work is accepted by the individual's field. Nonetheless, even this metric is not without issues, as some people in more esoteric fields may do fantastic work that is viewed as key to the field, yet because of the size of the field, not cited to the extent of what might occur in other fields. In addition, paper maturity happens at different rates in different fields and may even depend upon how forward thinking a piece of work might be viewed by the field. Hence, really important, interesting work may very well take some time to overcome the status quo and associated dogma in order to begin to be accepted. This is difficult to predict and is an important point to keep in mind.

There are many reasons that IF is a really bad reason to use as a sole guiding light for journal selection. First, as a student I was taught that journals were classified by tiers and that tier I journals were generally those supported by scientific societies. Then there were high end, tier II commercial journals that were well respected mainly due to the editor-in-chief and the rigor they placed on the acceptance of work. Tier III journals were the lower end commercial journals that published just about anything. So journals were ranked by tiers, with the highest being those in which the distinguished individuals of a society served as the editors, on the editorial board, and generally as the reviewers. Thus, there was an elevated level of rigor that was society based, but nonetheless recognized as equal amongst societies. This view of journals' worth was challenged by the IF generation in which the net worth of a journal was not its editorial board or position in the field, but rather a metric that was derived for one reason but morphed into a "I'll pick that journal" number [2].

In the end, we have simply lost our way by the deceptive lure of the IF compass. We need to teach our young colleagues and our students that all work that is of a high quality will be cited regardless of the journal. We need to teach them that more complete work is published in better journals and that this is the one major reason that it is cited more often. Not due to the journal, but rather due to the rigor that the journal places upon the work that is published therein. Work that is less complete is cited less, but often this work is found in lesser journals. Again, not lesser because of some magical number, but less due to the incomplete nature of a lot of the work published therein. Experimental design, interpretation, and quality of the analysis are a huge factor in how well work will be viewed by the field.

As Editors, we should not have our judgment clouded by IF and reject manuscripts based upon a perception of its current value. I must constantly hold fast to some key, guiding principles. One key principle is that *Journal of Food Processing and Technology* has been and will

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continue to be a repository for technological oriented papers. We house data on impact of processing on properties of various foods and edible products and will continue to do so. Additionally, we will resist the urge to reject manuscripts based upon a preconceived notion of its potential, projected worth. This does not mean we are interested in publishing papers merely demonstrating an incremental advance or in the papers that demonstrate what has been repeatedly done by others. So, we take a little IF break.

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