Journal Impact Factor: baby and bathwater discarded?

R. Grant Steen
MediCC!, Medical Communications Consultants, LLC, USA; G_Steen_MediCC@yahoo.com

Abstract The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) criticises Journal Impact Factor (JIF) without offering an alternative. It is true that JIF is flawed and can be misused but it also helps match manuscript to publication venue and identifies references likely to be authoritative. Above all, JIF helps librarians make difficult purchase decisions. JIF is a way to assess a journal, not an individual paper. If the DORA authors wish to abandon JIF, an appropriate alternative should be proposed.

Keywords Research assessment; research impact; journal metrics; science communication.

The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) was cobbled together by a consortium of editors and publishers at the annual meeting of the American Society for Cell Biology in 2012. It is true that JIF is flawed, it can be misused, and it has become fashionable to dislike it. From my perspective, any journal ranking system in which “the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published.” This is true, but unhelpful. No hint is given as to how that importance should be measured, if not by use of the Journal Impact Factor (JIF).

JIF is a measure of how often, on average, articles in a journal are cited over time, and it was conceived as a way to help librarians select amongst a range of journals when allocating subscription money. Clearly, JIF is flawed, it can be misused, and it has become fashionable to dislike it. From my perspective, any journal ranking system in which “the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published.” This is true, but unhelpful. No hint is given as to how that importance should be measured, if not by use of the Journal Impact Factor (JIF).

The problem with the Declaration is that “the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published.” This is true, but unhelpful. No hint is given as to how that importance should be measured, if not by use of the Journal Impact Factor (JIF).

JIF is a measure of how often, on average, articles in a journal are cited over time, and it was conceived as a way to help librarians select amongst a range of journals when allocating subscription money. Clearly, JIF is flawed, it can be misused, and it has become fashionable to dislike it. From my perspective, any journal ranking system in which “the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published.” This is true, but unhelpful. No hint is given as to how that importance should be measured, if not by use of the Journal Impact Factor (JIF).

JIF is a measure of how often, on average, articles in a journal are cited over time, and it was conceived as a way to help librarians select amongst a range of journals when allocating subscription money. Clearly, JIF is flawed, it can be misused, and it has become fashionable to dislike it. From my perspective, any journal ranking system in which “the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published.” This is true, but unhelpful. No hint is given as to how that importance should be measured, if not by use of the Journal Impact Factor (JIF).

JIF is a measure of how often, on average, articles in a journal are cited over time, and it was conceived as a way to help librarians select amongst a range of journals when allocating subscription money. Clearly, JIF is flawed, it can be misused, and it has become fashionable to dislike it. From my perspective, any journal ranking system in which “the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published.” This is true, but unhelpful. No hint is given as to how that importance should be measured, if not by use of the Journal Impact Factor (JIF).
Grey literature: a growing need for good practice

Paola De Castro, Sandra Salinetti
Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome (Italy) paola.decastro@iss.it

Abstract Before the internet, grey literature addressed specific audiences and had limited circulation; it was produced mainly in-house with varying editorial standards. Today grey literature is increasingly available online and new responsibilities arise for its authors and issuing organizations. The challenges of a wider dissemination of grey literature are outlined; in particular, grey literature authors and issuing organizations should become aware of basic editorial standards and guidelines, including both technical and ethical issues.

Keywords Grey literature, guidelines, standards, scientific writing, technical reports.

Research scientists do not always adhere strictly to a journal’s instructions to authors. When it comes to informal documents, such as those falling under the umbrella term of grey literature, scientists are even less inclined to follow editorial standards and guidelines. The broad category of grey literature includes technical reports, reports to funding agencies, teaching material, operational protocols, guidelines for laboratory techniques, translations and or information leaflets addressed to specific targets or produced for very practical aims.

Before the advent of the internet, grey literature had a limited circulation. It was produced mainly in-house, for practical rather than prestige purposes, and often had a rather shabby look—defined as “grey” to differentiate it from white or open publications appearing in commercial journals and books. It was therefore the Cinderella of literature.

During the 6th International Conference on Grey Literature held in New York in 2004, the following definition for grey literature was adopted:

“information produced on all levels of government, academia, business and industry in electronic and print formats not controlled by commercial publishing, ie where publishing is not the primary activity.”

The limited circulation is no longer applicable because grey literature can now be freely and widely available via the Internet.

The most recent international conference on grey literature, held in Rome in November 2012, focused on tracking innovation. Disseminating research results in all forms is now widely recognised as best practice by many national and international institutions, not only for research but also for society. For example, the European Commission supports and encourages sharing all types of information and data, including grey literature. This implies a paradigm shift in information dissemination that goes beyond classical scholarly publications and confers a different status on grey literature as an accepted and important source of information circulated online.