Reviewer's report

Title: The level of non-citation of articles within a journal as a measure of quality

Version: 1 Date: 22 March 2004

Reviewer: ARGYRO FASSOULAKI

Reviewer's report:

General

This is a well written article that attempts to replace the impact factor of the journals by measuring the non-cited articles. However, the level of non-citation of articles published in a journal does not eliminate or compensate for the flaws of the Impact Factor, such as scientific field, language of publication, influence of self citations and bias in the choice of articles to be cited. So, looking at the Impact Factor of a journal is like looking at a glass of beer half-full, while looking at the level of non citations is like looking at a glass of beer half empty.

Since the authors compared the Impact Factor for the year 2002 with the non citations, they should study the articles published in the year 2000 and 2001, not only the articles published in 2001. It would be interesting however, the authors to continue their investigation by substracting the self citations of each journal, then calculate the new Impact Factor (without the self citations) and correlate this Impact Factor with the levels of non cited articles. A non correlation would suggest that self citations significantly influence the conventional Impact Factor, since the authors have already demonstrated a correlation between the non cited articles and the conventional Impact Factor.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Background

pp 4, 1st paragraph: In measures of quality of a journal the authors include subscription levels. This parameter depends also upon the field as the numbers of physicians between fields vary significantly. Subscription levels, article acceptance and rejection rates as measures of quality should be established by relevant references, otherwise to delete this paragraph.

pp5, last paragraph: Why immunology is science and surgery is not? Do the authors mean basic vs clinical sciences?

Methods

pp 6, 3rd paragraph: At the end of this paragraph the authors should describe the handling of the data they collected (selected journals, Impact Factor and citation counting) e.g. " We investigated the distribution of citations of articles, the influence of the article type and length on the level of citation, and the correlation of the non-cited articles with the Impact Factor. Then describe how they analyzed their data.
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discussion
1. pp 11, 2nd paragraph: Today academically, whatever we are talking about should be evidence based. I suggest the sentence: "Indeed why is it necessary to have a method at all" I suggest to be deleted.
2. pp 12 1st paragraph: The authors are mistaken. Clinical articles which substantially change clinical practice are highly cited. Examples are some of the Citation Classics articles in the Anesthesiology literature:
3. The authors need to clarify in Tables 1 and 2 that the median numbers of pages are referred to the pages occupied by the articles published (not to the total number of pages of the journal).
4. Figures 4 and 5 are not in the text and are not accompanied by legends. Please indicate where these two Figures should be inserted and add the appropriate legends.
5. The scales (percentages) used on the vertical axis (ordinates) in Figures 2 to 5 vary (0-40% in Figure 2, 0-60% in Figure 3, and 0-100% in Figures 4 and 5). This is misleading somehow, and is preferable a full scale from 0 to 100% to be used in all figures.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No