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Review Article

Citation Counts, Not Journal Branding, Should Guide Academic Recognition

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Abstract
The prevailing academic culture continues to place journal branding and indexing ahead of the real impact of research. However, the value of a scientific contribution should be measured by the extent to which it is quoted, discussed, and built upon, not by where it is published. This mini-review argues that peer review, including on the basis of articles published in journals indexed by Google Scholar or Copernicus, should be recognized in academic evaluation systems.

Key words
Impact factor; Index; Scopus; Web of Science; Google Scholar; Index Copernicus; Citation-index; I-Index

Introduction

Academic evaluation systems in India and worldwide often rely on journal brand status or indexing as a proxy for quality[1-4]. This approach simplifies the assessment, but runs the risk of neglecting the high quality research that is disseminated through alternative or less well-known journals. Over-emphasis on impact factors and indexation status often obscures the real academic value of research output[1-4].

On the contrary, citation counts are a proxy for the real-world impact of research - they show how findings are disseminated across the academic ecosystem, regardless of journal prestige[5]. Citing analysis therefore offers a more democratic and fair measure of the value of research, which is in line with global trends in evidence-based assessment[6]. (Table 01 and Figure 1)

1. Citation as a Measure of Knowledge Dissemination

Citing is the currency of scientific communication, and reflects how often other scientists find a study useful or authoritative[6]. If an article published in a journal indexed by Google Scholar or Index Copernicus is subsequently cited in a recognized database such as Scopus, Wiley journals or the Web of Science, this is an indication of intellectual contribution and scholarly outreach[7]. Reference to citations should therefore be recognized as valid evidence of the impact of research, irrespective of the original place of publication[8]. This recognition promotes diversity in publications and democratizes access to research dissemination platforms[9].

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2. The Challenge of Journal Branding and Bias

The dominance of brand, high-impact journals perpetuates structural biases and often puts scholars from institutions with fewer resources and for developing countries it is a disadvantage[8-10].Many early-stage researchers and researchers in rural areas lack access to costly open access facilities or a clear understanding of indexing systems[9]. As a result, even high-quality, new research may be presented in non-mainstream publications, which reduces its perceived academic value[10].

Global declarations such as the "*Leiden Manifesto on Research Metrics*" underline that the evaluation should focus on the intrinsic quality of research and not on the prestige of a journal[10]. Thus, citation-based recognition offers a corrective lens through which to assess academic merit more fairly[10].

3. Unintentional Publication in Predatory Journals: A Systemic Issue

The main problem is the inadvertent submission of high-quality manuscripts to predatory or pseudonymous journals by inexperienced or misdirected researchers[11-13]. These journals exploit new researchers for publication by offering low-cost, quick-track publication, peer review in 3 to 5 days, misleading information on their websites, misleading new researchers, lack of awareness and lack of proper mentoring[13, 14]. The striking difference in higher education running in India and the educational gap between East and West[14]

What matters is that when an article originally published in a dubious journal is subsequently cited in Scopus, Web of Science or Wiley, this shows that the work is actually of scientific interest[15]. Therefore, penalizing authors solely on the basis of journal brand or index status - without taking into account independent citation evidence - is counter-productive[16].

This issue is particularly relevant in India, where the number of publications has a direct impact on academic promotion and the qualification for doctorate. Many researchers fall prey to misleading websites, believing that they are legitimate, which highlights the need for institutional awareness programmers[17, 18].

4. Policy Recommendation: Citation Validation Framework

In order to ensure equity, regulatory bodies such as the UGC, NAAC and NMC should adopt a framework for the validation of citations in the evaluation of research performance[19].

Under this validation framework:

This approach will shift the focus of research evaluation to impact validation rather than brand validation, promote academic inclusiveness and discourage citation bias[16-20], Exclusion criteria should only apply to articles that do not have verifiable citations or that have been shown to be based on research misconduct, plagiarism or falsification[17].Inclusion: Articles published and indexed by Google Scholar or Copernicus journals, which have been quoted in recognized databases (e.g. Scopus, Wiley Journals, Elsevier)[16-20].

5. Future Directions and Ethical Responsibility

Promoting peer review based on citations will promote recognition, strengthen academic freedom, equity and fairness, and will not penalize researchers[19]. Institutions should reinforce training on the identification of legitimate journals, ethical publishing practices and the critical assessment of citation data[20].At the same time, researchers who unwittingly publish in non-brand journals or predatory ones should be protected if their work has been shown to have had an impact on mainstream scholarship[13-20]. Recognition of the validity of citations in such cases is in line with global ethical frameworks and promotes trust in evidence-based academic evaluation[21, 22]. (Table.01 and Figure 1)

Conclusion

Citation metrics not journal brands - better reflect how knowledge is developed across disciplines[21]. The academic impact of an article can extend beyond its publication, especially if it is cited in authoritative sources such as "*Pubmed*", and Scopus[21]. Recognizing the impact of citations from papers from unbranded or misnamed journals would promote academic equity, reduce systemic bias and align evaluation systems with research's true aim of disseminating knowledge and ensuring that researchers are truly treated fairly[22].

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Ethical statement:

No animal or human trials have been conducted in the current research

Declarations of conflicts of interest

Authors declare no actual or potential conflicts of interest, including financial, personal or professional relationships, which could be perceived as affecting the integrity, objectivity or interpretation of the research presented herein.

Table 1 Evidence showing Non-Index Journal Paper Cited by Scopus Index Journals

Title	Name of Journal	Indexing status	Google Scholar article Cited by (Articles in Vancouver style)	Data base/ Journal
Antioxidant assay in vivo and vitro[23]	International Journal of Phytopharmacology. 2014;5(1):51-8.	Google scholar	El-Kayal M, Nasr M, Elkheshen S, Mortada N. Colloidal (-)-epigallocatechin-3-gallate vesicular systems for prevention and treatment of skin cancer: A comprehensive experimental study with preclinical investigation. European Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences. 2019 Sep 1;137:104972.	Elsevier (Scopus)
			Konidala SK, Kotra V, Danduga RC, Kola PK. Coumarin-chalcone hybrids targeting insulin receptor: Design, synthesis, anti-diabetic activity, and molecular docking. Bioorganic chemistry. 2020 Nov 1;104:104207.	Elsevier (Scopus)
			Achuba FI. Role of bitter leaf (Vernonia amygdalina) extract in prevention of renal toxicity induced by crude petroleum contaminated diets in rats. International journal of veterinary science and medicine. 2018 Dec 1;6(2):172-7.	Elsevier (Scopus)
			Pradhan S, Prabhakar MR, Karthika Parvathy KR, Dey B, Jayaraman S, Behera B, Paramasivan B. Metagenomic and physicochemical analysis of Kombucha beverage produced from tea waste. Journal of Food Science and Technology. 2023 Mar;60(3):1088-96.	Springer
			Bag J, Mukherjee S, Ghosh SK, Das A, Mukherjee A, Sahoo JK, Tung KS, Sahoo H, Mishra M. Fe3O4 coated guargum nanoparticles as non-genotoxic materials for biological application. International Journal of Biological Macromolecules. 2020 Dec 15;165:333-45.	Elsevier (Scopus)
			Vileigas DF, de Souza SL, Correa CR, de Almeida Silva CC, de Campos DH, Padovani CR, Cicogna AC. The effects of two types of Western diet on the induction of metabolic syndrome and cardiac remodeling in obese rats. The Journal of nutritional biochemistry. 2021 Jun 1;92:108625.	Elsevier (Scopus)
			Saravanan S, Malathi S, Sesh PS, Selvasubramanian S, Balasubramanian S, Pandiyan V. Hydrophilic poly (ethylene glycol) capped poly (lactic-co-glycolic) acid nanoparticles for subcutaneous delivery of	Elsevier (Scopus)

			insulin in diabetic rats. International Journal of Biological Macromolecules. 2017 Feb 1;95:1190-8.	
			Sharma R, Satyanarayana P, Anand P, Kumari GA. Adiponectin level association with MDA in the patients with type 2 diabetes mellitus. Biomedical and Pharmacology Journal. 2020 Jun 25;13(2):943-55.	Elsevier (Scopus)
			Osunkalu VO, Taiwo IA, Makwe CC, Akinsola OJ, Quao RA. Methylenetetrahydrofolate reductase enzyme level and antioxidant activity in women with gestational hypertension and pre-eclampsia in Lagos, Nigeria. The Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology of India. 2019 Aug 1;69(4):317-24.	Springer
			Rajput R, Chavda V, Patel SS, Barreto GE, Ashraf GM. Efonidipine exerts cerebroprotective effect by down-regulation of TGF-β/SMAD-2-dependent signaling pathway in diabetic rats. Journal of Molecular Neuroscience. 2021 Sep;71(9):1884-96.	Springer
			Bag J, Mishra M. Biochemical assays to detect the antioxidant level in Drosophila melanogaster. InFundamental approaches to screen abnormalities in Drosophila 2019 Dec 17 (pp. 151-168). New York, NY: Springer US.	Springer
			Dhar G, Bag J, Mishra M. Environmental cue affects the hearing-related behaviors of Drosophila melanogaster by targeting the redox pathways. Environmental Science and Pollution Research. 2020 Sep;27(26):32899-912.	Springer
			Erhunmwunse NO, Tongo I, Ezemonye LI. Multiple biomarker responses in female Clarias gariepinus exposed to acetaminophen. Environmental Science and Pollution Research. 2023 Dec;30(58):122437-57.	Springer
			Arunachalam K, Sasidharan SP. Experiments of Antioxidant Activities. InBioassays in Experimental and Preclinical Pharmacology 2021 Feb 17 (pp. 143-155). New York, NY: Springer US.	Springer

*Source of above table is Google scholar search: All citation verified

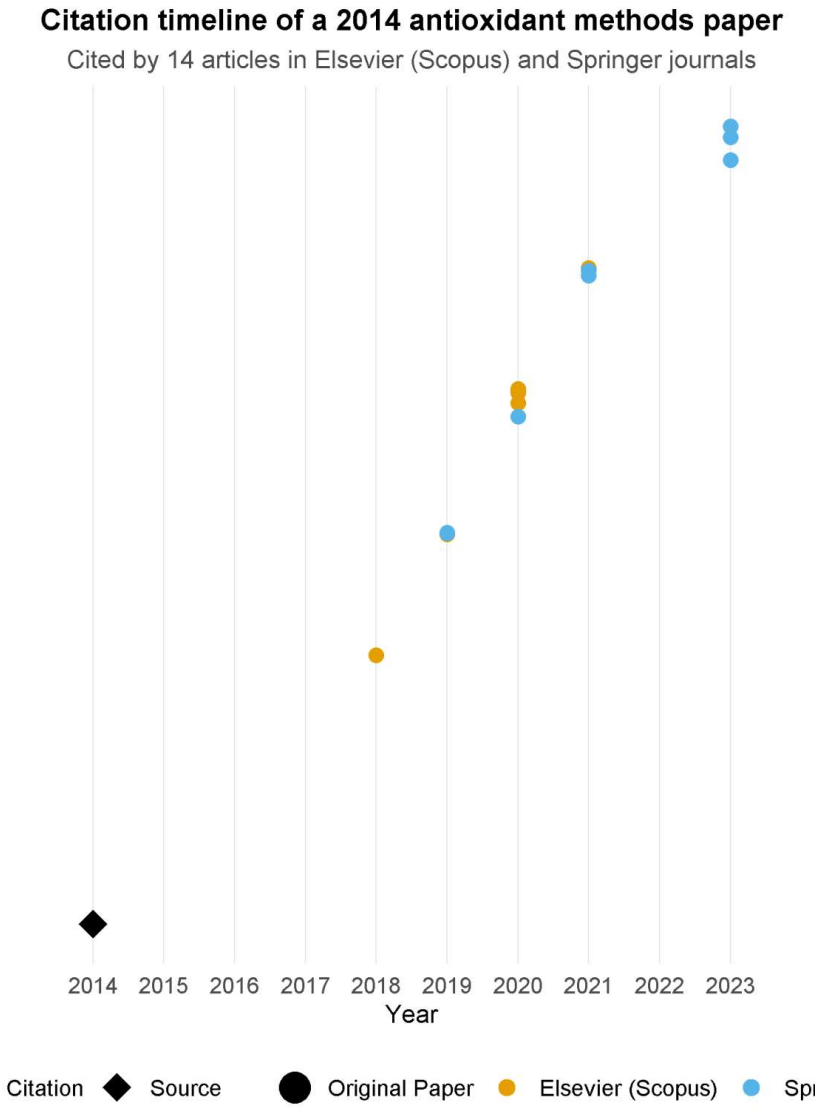

Figure 1 Graphical Evidence Non index / Google -index paper cited in Scopus and Springer

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