



Opinion

Impact Factor, My Donkey!

Ray Egerton

Physics Department, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB T6G 2G7 Canada

regerton@ualberta.ca

No recent phenomenon in scientific publishing is more remarkable than the rise of the Impact Factor (IF). Once an obscure statistic devised by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), it has now assumed a prominent place in the minds of researchers and administrators.

Closely coupled to this IFy concept, which seems inspired by the ratings system of commercial TV, is the Prestige Journal (PJ): by definition, one with a high IF. A few centuries ago, it may have been possible for an educated person to browse through a journal that reported new discoveries within the entire field of natural philosophy and understand every article. Nowadays that is clearly nonsense.

The short-note format of the PJ encourages rapid publication rather than a careful evaluation of results. It cannot be easy for the editor of an all-science journal to find the best referees for each specialized field, so publishing in a PJ is a somewhat hit-or-miss affair. Results are announced and later retracted, or they simply remain to confuse everyone.

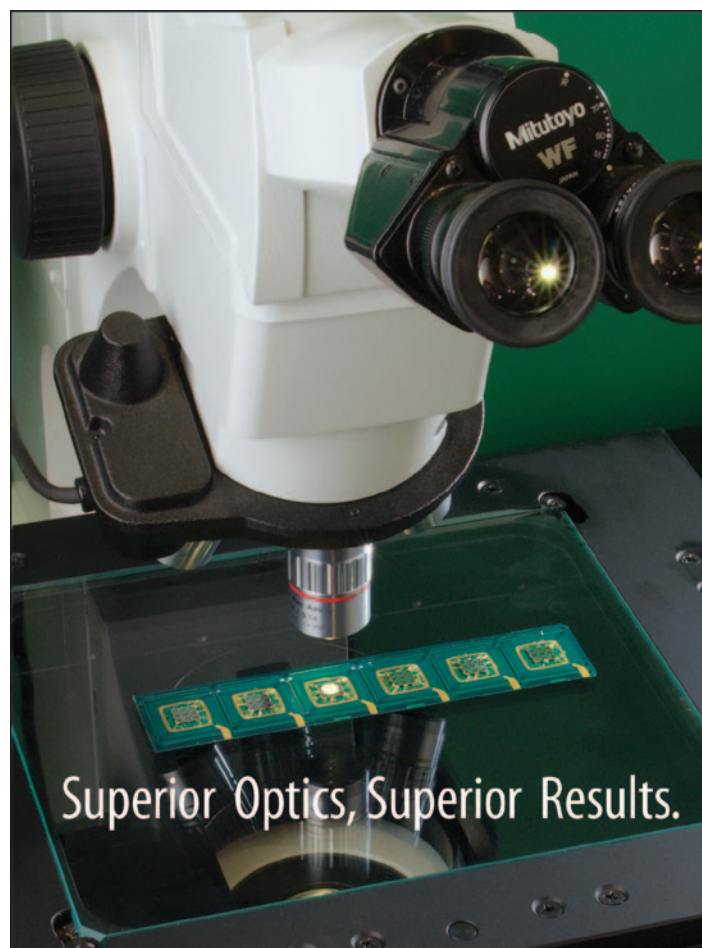
PJs were not established to be a major part of the promotion and tenure process, and I doubt that their editors were recruited with that in mind. Nevertheless, they have gained the affection of administrators because the idea of an elevated IF supports the notion that career evaluations can be quantitative and therefore scientific.

Now there is pressure to not only publish in a PJ but to have a picture on the front cover so it can be framed and hung on the lab wall to impress visitors. Some years ago, I told a Faculty Evaluation Committee that universities would eventually compete with each other on the basis of the combined IF of all of their employees, and apparently this has already happened. Most of my scientific colleagues dislike these developments, believing them to be detrimental to good science, but they feel powerless to do anything about it.

Who to blame? Not the ISI because they are simply supplying a service. Not the PJs who are just responding to market demand. I suggest that the individuals and institutions who pay homage to the IF are responsible for its prevalence.

Of course, it is easier for a retired professor to rant like this than someone whose career has become dependent on the process. Courage, mes ami(e)s! Just a little protest can be effective if enough people participate. Speak out against this tyranny of numbers! Publish in journals that are appropriate to the subject matter. That way, you treat your scientific colleagues with respect rather than as consumers to be impacted.

MT



Microscopes from Mitutoyo: Precision, Quality and Value

Mitutoyo proudly introduces a full line of measuring and materials microscopes that span diverse applications from macro stereo inspection to minute semiconductor geometry measurements. Our precision staging, incorporated with Mitutoyo designed and manufactured world renowned extra long working distance lenses, offer the optimum combination of optical performance, ergonomics, accuracy and ease of use. Visit www.mitutoyo.com or email us at microscopy@mitutoyo.com to learn how we can save you time and money with our world class optical and metrology instruments.



Mitutoyo

Mitutoyo America Corporation
965 Corporate Boulevard
Aurora, Illinois 60502
1-888-MITUTOYO (1-888-648-8869)

See us at the upcoming tradeshows:
MD&M West, Anaheim, CA
Feb. 9 - 11, Booth No. 2826
Westec, L.A. Convention Ctr.
Mar. 23 - 25, Booth No. 2501
BIOMEDevice, Boston Conv. Ctr.
April 21 - 22, Booth No. 1032

Precision is our Profession

CMM • VISION • FORM & FINISH • PRECISION TOOLS & INSTRUMENTS • DATA MANAGEMENT

Expand your Knowledge of Microscopy with MSA Membership!

Whether your primary focus is in light, electron, or scanning probe microscopy, or the biological or the physical sciences, MSA takes your knowledge to the next level!

Members Receive:

- A personal subscription to MSA's official journal, *Microscopy and Microanalysis*, and MSA's popular bi-monthly magazine, *Microscopy Today*.
- Peer Networking through the Society's Focused Interest Groups and Local Affiliated Societies.
- Discounts on books, journals and other educational materials.
- MSA Awards Programs, Scholarships, Speaker Opportunities, and more!



Join MSA Today!

Visit: www.microscopy.org or call 1-800-538-3672