## """"""current comments"

The Economics and Realpolitik of Exponential Information Growth; or, Journal Selection Ain't Easy!

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At a recent NSF seminar Professor J. Georges Anderla projected a 14% growth in scientific information.1 Even if the projected growth were smaller, that is great news for the information industry. However, this means that the problem of journal publication and coverage is one to which you and I must pay greater attention. Consider what would happen if we were to stop adding journals altogether. Each year there would still be a growth of 4% to 5% in the number of articles listed for the journals now covered by CC® & SCI , since the established journals grow larger each year. That is half our problem. The other half is the new or not yet covered journals.

Suppose you are the editor of a bright new journal that meets all criteria we choose to apply for coverage. Suppose, further, that our budget allows us to add only ten journals. But yours is eleventh on the list. You may plead that coverage in CC may mean the difference between life and death for your journal. If for no other reason, because authors have told you that they will not publish in a journal that is not covered in CC.

When you learn that you are number 11, you may then recognize the reality of our budget, and propose that your journal itself help underwrite the cost of CC coverage. In that sense, your contribution is nothing more than a variant of the page charge used

by so many journals for inclusion of articles.

Such proposals have been made, and we have accepted them. In principle it's fine, but I have often found that many assume subliminally if not explicitly, that a journal can buy its way into CC or SCI.

We now cover in CC and SCI some journals that wouldn't be included were it not for the fact that their publishers have provided a subsidy. They are good journals; they meet any standard of excellence we can reasonably apply. But they are journals that would have received a lower priority than some others.

Recently we announced the availability of our Journal Citation Reports™ .2 We have tried to make plain that such citation studies enable us to identify the obviously important journals-those that rank at least amongst the top 1000! When we start evaluation of "less important" journals, we are forced to consider other factors. One of the most important is reader interest, e.g., biochemists compose a major segment of our readership. Therefore, a new journal in biochemistry or molecular biology will get a higher priority than a journal in horticulture, or one published by a local medical society.

If you are one of the many journal editors who read CC, you should appreciate our problem in selecting journals. Is my desire to cover more journals less valid than your desire to publish more manuscripts? Is my inability to add yet another journal any more culpable than your decision to set aside a good manuscript because your printing budget won't allow it? Editors of new journals may not have this problem. The editor of any established journal ought to be concerned if he doesn't.

Some of our editorial board members prefer that we wait two years before we cover a new journal in CC. They argue that it is usually easy for a new journal to pick up a few good papers for inaugural issues. Later it becomes tougher to maintain high quality. If the new journal maintains quality or achieves significance its articles will be cited. Under ordinary circumstances, we should find evidence of this in our Journal Citation Reports. If the journal's quality is poor, it generally won't get cited.

But will good material really be cited, whether or not it's covered in CC? If yes, then why is CC coverage so imperative? Thus begins a vicious circle. We really don't know whether citation by workers on the immediate research front is affected by CC listings. (Evidence for self-citation within an invisible college should become evident in JCR™). Nor do we know whether wide reprint distribution, because of CC listing, affects long-term citation patterns. One Latin-American journal editor has informed me that it does, since previously his authors were not cited. We might someday do a controlled experiment to measure the citation impact of a journal before and after its addition to CC. It might lend support to the intuition that wide reprint distribution does indeed increase use and citation.

But all such discussion inevitably returns to the question of economics. One does not have to be a die-hard Marxist to admit the importance of economics in history. Unless the scientific community assigns its highest priority to scientific information, publication, dissemination, etc., we shall continue to be forced to make choices based in part on economics. The "inevitability" of the 14% increase predicted by Anderla demands even greater selectivity. Information without selection or control will be a mere chaos of facts.

I do not like the power that has been vested, or imputed, to me to "control" the destiny of journals, especially small and new ones, because of CC's success. It imposes an unwelcome responsibility.

If you hear that CC has "buckled in" and responded to the pleas of some editor who has been willing to defray the coverage and indexing costs for a limited period of time, do not conclude that we have in any way lessened our standards of selection. Our policy on these "less important" journals remains to ask for a subsidy for a limited time, after which we will cover the journal as any other. We reserve the right to drop any journal, or to switch its coverage to a more appropriate edition of CC. While some of you may not realize it, the latter decision simply means we have shifted the burden of added costs to you the subscriber. Our subscribers pay for CC coverage. We can make their payment as equitable as possible by enlisting more subscribers or increasing our efficiency of production. I think there is evidence that we have consistently done both.

- Anonymous. Big growth ahead in technical information. C&E News, 23 April 1973, p. 7.
- Garfield, E. The new 1S1 <sup>®</sup> Journal Citation Reports should significantly affect the future course of scientific publication. Current Contents <sup>®</sup> No. 33, 15 August 73, p. 5-6.