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## Evaluating Scholarly Book Publishers—A Case Study in the Field of Journalism

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### ABSTRACT

By adapting multiple metrics used for journal article evaluation and replicating recent publisher metrics, the authors tested methods for evaluating scholarly book publishers. Using monographs published in journalism between 2007 and 2011 as a test case, results indicate that these methods may be useful to other scholarly disciplines.

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### INTRODUCTION

The quality of research publications is of key importance for faculty attempting to justify an application for promotion and tenure. The quality criterion is of equal value to librarians as they make selections for their library collections. Impact factors, citation analyses, peer review status, and acceptance factors, have traditionally been used as relatively objective, though often controversial, methods of determining the quality of scholarly journals. A reasonably objective means of establishing quality may be more difficult for scholarly books than it has been for journals, as researchers struggle to find ways to make rankings. Although the sciences often rely heavily on research published in journals, the social sciences also use monographs as a primary method for disseminating research. This leads to an ongoing desire to develop better ways to establish impact and quality of book publishers (Gabbidon, Higgins, & Martin, 2010; Laband, 1990; University of Kentucky, 2009; Wiberley, 2004).

Scholarly book reviews are not available for every published book. Although cited references for monographs are becoming more common via *Google Scholar* and other sources, at this point these metrics may be difficult to assemble for many book publications. While it can be argued that publishing reputation may change over time and not every book by a particular publisher is of equal quality, some attempt at comparison remains useful for academia. A relatively impartial ranking of impact by publisher could be a helpful addition to the research evaluation

process. As with journal article metrics, multiple measures for establishing quality would provide the most complete picture of monograph value and influence.

To assist in the development of book metrics, the authors decided to select a single academic discipline that might serve as a test. A sample of book publications from this field was used to compare the tools suggested in previous studies aimed at ranking publishers or journals. Journalism suited this study since monographs in this discipline have not been analyzed in any depth and the subject is fairly focused yet large enough to allow for reasonable sample sizes. A review of the literature discussing research conducted by faculty in the field of journalism and mass communication reveals that, in addition to articles published in scholarly journals, value is also placed on book publications. The results of a survey conducted in 1984 listed the publication of a scholarly book as the most valuable form of research activity, followed by refereed journal articles (Fedler & Smith, 1984). Schweitzer (1989) reported that the academic administrators of journalism programs ranked writing a scholarly book first over several creative research activities. In a study by Leigh and Anderson (1992), approximately one third of journalism faculty going for promotion to associate professor, authored or co-authored books and 37% of those applying for promotion to full professor had published at least one book. In a 2010–2011 self-study, the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications reported that book production had increased by 52% and book chapter production by 22% over the previous accreditation period (University of Florida, 2011). The University of Kentucky School of Journalism and Telecommunications lists scholarly book publication first in a ranked list of research expectations. Book chapters were ranked third of all activities considered (University of Kentucky, 2009). In an attempt to

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answer some of these concerns, this study will address the following research questions:

1. Can tools used to evaluate individual scholarly book titles also be used to effectively analyze scholarly book publishers?
2. Can formulas used to compare journal quality be adapted to compare scholarly book publisher quality?
3. Do multiple methods provide similar rankings for scholarly book publishers?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Attempts have been made to determine the quality of publishers in certain disciplines, particularly political science (Garand & Giles, 2011; Goodson, Dillman, & Hira, 1999; Lewis, 2000), economics (Laband, 1990; Torres-Salinas & Moed, 2009), and criminology (Gabbidon et al., 2010). These studies have employed various methods including surveys and the creation of new metrics.

Calhoun and Bracken (1983) performed a study on cross-disciplinary publisher quality when they analyzed the *Choice Outstanding Academic Book* lists to determine the publishers who occurred most frequently on the list. They calculated a ratio between the total number of books produced by an individual publisher in a given year and the number of those books that appeared on the *Choice* list. Comparing five years of ratios, the authors concluded that the ratio remained reasonably constant, thus providing a useful measure of academic publisher quality. In 1992, Goedecken replicated the study to determine if there had been any changes to the top ranked publishers since the 1983 study was published. While confirming that many of the established publishers' rankings had remained relatively constant over time, the new study discovered some fluctuations with different publishers joining the *Choice* lists and others being removed. In particular, Goedecken noted that university presses were more frequently represented in the more recent *Choice* lists (Goedecken, 1993).

Several studies evaluated individual book titles that were considered to be of high quality based on having won national or disciplinary awards or having been determined as “best books” in a discipline. In addition to straight-forward rankings of the publishers of these high impact books, researchers have also come up with some creative ways of using award winning books to assess publisher quality. In complementary studies of books in the humanities and the social sciences, Wiberley created a list of prize-winning books published during the 1990s. He calculated the average number of OCLC catalog holdings for each book and used these findings as one means of comparing publishers (Wiberley, 2002, 2004).

While cited references have been employed in studies aimed at analyzing book impact, these studies are usually focused on a specific book title rather than the evaluation of a publisher or publishers. Researchers used cited references in *Google Books*, *Google Scholar*, and *Scopus* to determine if any or all of these resources provided enough data to reasonably analyze cited references for books. They noted that *Google Books* and *Google Scholar*, in particular, may provide enough citations to make these resources a potential source of evaluation in some disciplines (Kousha, Thelwall, & Rezaie, 2011). Gabbidon and Collins (2012) looked at the number of *Google Scholar* citations for books, which were previously identified as “most significant” in the field of criminology. Laband created a list of books published in economics in 1980 and then located cited references to those books for the five years following publication. Adapting a formula created by Liebowitz and Palmer for journals, Laband used these cited reference counts to analyze publisher impact (Laband, 1990; Liebowitz & Palmer, 1984). Selecting a sample of references from articles in high-impact journals and conference proceedings relevant to information systems, Kleijnen and Van Groenendaal (2000) counted the times that a book publisher was cited in the sample set to generate a list of top ranked publishers. Recently, researchers in Spain have attempted to construct a “Book

Publishers Citation Report” using citations from Thomson Reuters' *Book Citation Index*. They analyzed citations from 2006 to 2011 for nineteen disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences as a first step in creating a resource that might be analogous to ISI's *Journal Citation Reports* (Torres-Salinas, Robinson-García, & López-Cózar, 2012).

Library catalog holdings have also been used as a tool for assessing publisher prestige. White et al. (2009) coined the term “libcitations” during a project aimed at developing a book equivalent to the impact factor calculation for journals. Using the premise that a librarian's decision to acquire a book for his or her collection may, in some ways, correspond to a scholar choosing to cite an article, they created formulas for calculating how one book title might compare to others in the same Library of Congress classification area. Using library catalogs from different national and international institutions, Torres-Salinas and Moed (2009) created formulas for a publishers' “Diffusion Rate” and a “Catalog Inclusion Rate.” Like White and his colleagues, Torres-Salinas and Moed contend that the inclusion of a title in an academic library catalog is one way of measuring its value.

A number of researchers have used qualitative surveys to gain insights on publisher reputations. Garand and Giles surveyed political scientists in 2005 to establish what publishers' books they read most often and to which publisher they would most likely submit a manuscript. They also attempted to evaluate publisher impact by adapting Garand's earlier formula for journal impact: “Impact = Quality + (Familiarity \* Quality)” (Garand & Giles, 2011, p. 379). In the mid-1990's, Metz and Stemmer (1996) asked academic librarians to rank a selected group of publishers. The authors found that the rankings were quite consistent regardless of institution type or collection development experience. Lewis (2000) applied a method originally used in a survey of political scientists (Goodson et al., 1999) to examine the preferences of librarians who specialize in the development and management of political science collections. These two studies provide an opportunity to compare the opinions of practicing academicians toward subject-specialist librarians.

Several formulas have gained acceptance for comparing journal or author impact. The h-index considers both the number of articles published by an author and the number of times those articles have been cited (Hirsch, 2005). Although the h-index is more commonly used to measure the productivity of individual authors it has also been tested on journal titles, academic programs, and institutions (Braun, Glänzel, & Schubert, 2006; Hodge & Lacasse, 2011; Nosek et al., 2010; Prathap, 2006). Bradford's Law describes the geometric dispersion of scholarly literature into groups (zones), where a small, core group of producers is responsible for a significantly greater amount of literature. Pulgarin and Gil-Leiva (2004) studied references from journals published between 1956 and 2000 to illustrate Bradford's Law as it relates to the literature on automatic indexing. While some researchers have questioned the statistical usefulness of Bradford's Law, it is often used by librarians to identify core titles (Black, 2004).

## METHODS

To create the data set of titles for analysis, the authors selected scholarly book titles, published between 2007 and 2011. This time frame was considered to be recent enough to be relevant but having been published long enough to allow libraries to purchase the title and for scholars to begin citing the content. A five-year span provided a large enough sample to work with while still keeping the totals manageable.

The *WorldCat* database was used to locate the initial list of titles since it is the largest catalog of library holdings available and has the advantage of being international in coverage (OCLC, 2013). The expert search mode was used to search the main Library of Congress call number (lc:) areas for journalism: PN4699–PN5650. The search was then limited to publication dates 2007 to 2011, English language, books, and Internet resources. Fiction and juvenile materials were removed from the results.

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