

## Association for Information Systems AIS Electronic Library (AISeL)

---

AMCIS 2009 Proceedings

Americas Conference on Information Systems  
(AMCIS)

---

2009

# Unpacking the Journal "Impact Factor" and its Effect on IS Research: Does It Do More Harm than Good?

Mike Gallivan  
*Georgia State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2009>

---

### Recommended Citation

Gallivan, Mike, "Unpacking the Journal "Impact Factor" and its Effect on IS Research: Does It Do More Harm than Good?" (2009).  
*AMCIS 2009 Proceedings*. 55.  
<http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2009/55>

This material is brought to you by the Americas Conference on Information Systems (AMCIS) at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in AMCIS 2009 Proceedings by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact [elibrary@aisnet.org](mailto:elibrary@aisnet.org).

## **Unpacking the Journal "Impact Factor" and its Effect on IS Research: Does It Do More Harm than Good?**

*Mike Gallivan*

CIS, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA, USA.

### **Abstract:**

The “impact factor” computed and published by ISI has become increasingly prominent as a quality measure for evaluating journals and, in turn, the prominence of researchers who publish in them. This paper identifies the origins of the impact factor, as well as its current uses, and numerous problems associated with it. Among these problems are the fact that the conventional impact metric simply examines the number of times an average paper is cited within the first two years after the year of publication – a window that is shorter than the sum of the review cycle time and the publication lead time. As a result, it is simply a matter of chance whether some papers cite a given, published paper within a two-year window. One by-product is that impact factors exhibit highly irregular (i.e., jagged) patterns over time, rather than smooth growth curves. The impact factor is susceptible to “gaming” by journal editors; moreover, it is susceptible to the positive effect of a “blockbuster” paper – which causes a journal’s impact factor to surge upward for a short time and then fall dramatically. We predict various statistical anomalies in journal impact factor data, and we test these predictions with published data.