Indicators of scholarship

The scholarliness of published peer reviews: a bibliometric study of book reviews in selected social science fields

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Book reviews serve a number of important functions in various academic settings, necessitating a high level of scholarship. A scholarly book review describes and characterizes not only the book in question, but also the topic with which it is dealing. It examines whether the book under review provides new knowledge to the field, and how it relates to established theories. Scholarly book reviews consequently reflect their scholarly qualifications by containing appropriate discussions of related literature. The paper proposes a bibliometric technique for determining the scholarliness of book reviews. The proposed technique rests on central insights gained from related research on scholarly communication, strategic research materials, and genre analysis. Inclusion of bibliographic references is revealed to be a key indicator of scholarship and is therefore implemented as the decisive factor in the following case study of book reviews in six selected social science fields.

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THE PRACTICE OF BOOK REVIEWING in academia is as old as the scientific community itself. The earliest journals, commenced in the major European countries in the latter part of the seventeenth century, consisted for the most part of book notices; and *Journal des Scavans*, the first periodical to provide regular information on scientific matters, was in fact composed entirely of summaries of scholarly or scientific works. Today, countless academic journals in all fields either contain a section devoted exclusively to book reviews or else they publish reviews of interest to those in the field from time to time. Some journals even operate exclusively as book-reviewing journals.

Book reviews serve a number of vital functions and are sometimes referred to as *published peer reviews* (e.g. Hyland, 2000; Schubert *et al*, 1984). They are widely used to help estimate the quality and importance of books published by academics, and are thus instrumental in decisions about hiring, promotions, and salary increases (Glenn, 1978). Librarians and information specialists rely to a great extent on book reviews for developing and maintaining library and information center collections. Various commentators (e.g. Chen, 1976; Ingram and Mills, 1989; Miranda, 1996; Snizek and Fuhrman, 1979) have furthermore called attention to the fact that book reviews are valuable academic tools, making it feasible for members of scientific communities to keep up with the latest professional progress despite the eternal growth and dissemination of recorded knowledge.

But the scientific worth of the genre is nonetheless frequently questioned. It has even been branded a

second-class citizen of scientific literature (Riley and Spreitzer, 1970). Book reviews are, moreover, regularly charged with merely reflecting individual opinions, which, according to their critics, disqualifies them entirely as scholarly contributions (Sabosik, 1988). However, the survey on scholars' conceptions of the utility and importance of book reviews done by Spink, Robins and Schamber (1998) opposes these objections. Their findings indicate on the contrary that reviewers synthesize and critically evaluate the work of peers into book reviews, which contribute to the development of new ideas, theories and research hypotheses. As a result, Spink and colleagues conclude their examination by proposing an extension to Garvey and Griffith's (1971) long-established model of scholarly communication to include book reviews.

But clearly not all book reviews are alike. Like instances of other genres they differ in regard to their prototypicality (Swales, 1990). Some are short, while others are longer. Some are more focused on providing a general view of how the book is organized rather than an actual evaluation. A number of reviewers situate the book in the field while others concentrate on making topic generalizations or informing about the author or potential readership. Furthermore, like exemplars of other academic genres, some are more scholarly than others.

Then what exactly characterizes a scholarly book review? What are the qualities it must possess in order to be given such a hallmark? In light of the critical functions that book reviews serve in various specialized settings, answers to these questions are pressing and important. Professional matters like tenure, education and information selection all call for professional assistance and consequently require reliable scholarly sources. The remainder of the present article therefore aims to outline the general requirements for scholarly book reviews and to describe a potential bibliometric technique for determining the scholarliness of different exemplars of the genre. Bibliographic referencing is revealed to be a key indicator of scholarship and is therefore used as strategic research material in a case study of the scholarliness of book reviews in six selected social science fields.

Scholarly communication and book reviews

A bibliometric technique for determining the scholarliness of academic book reviews must logically be anchored in theories of scholarly communication and established strategic research materials for determining the scholarliness of academic contributions. However, the organization and content of book reviews differ vastly from other academic genres, and a bibliometric technique should consequently also rest on the central insights of related genre analytical studies.

The following three sub-sections present a review of the literature concerning scholarly communication, strategic research materials and related genre analytical studies. The fourth sub-section provides a closing discussion of what constitutes a scholarly book review and concludes with recommendations for appropriate strategic research materials suited for implementation in future bibliometric studies of the genre.

Scholarly communication

The term *scholarly communication* is a very broad one. It can cover everything from two scholars conversing with each other, to discussion boards, to print and electronic journals and more. Furthermore, scholarly communication influences almost every facet of academic life. Borgman and Furner (2002) therefore deliberately limited their recent *ARIST* chapter on 'Scholarly communication and bibliometrics' to include studies of authors directly engaged in the creation of original scholarly works and thus excluded behavioral studies of other academic activities (e.g. peer reviewing). Other writers have taken a more system-oriented view and studied the channels through which scholars communicate. Garvey and Griffith (1971) were among the first to map the information flow within the system of scientific communication and were later followed by others who studied the whole system (e.g. Subramanyam, 1981) or specific fractions (e.g. Drott, 1995; Liu and Danziger, 1996; Kean and Ronayne, 1972). The recent increase in electronic media has stimulated renewed interest in this line of research. Crawford, Hurd and Weller (1996) gave an early prophecy on how the shift from print to electronic environment in time would transform scientific communication and they are currently followed by a wealth of actual investigations.

A number of writers have been occupied by disentangling the question of what constitutes a scholarly contribution. While some confine scholarly contributions to peer-reviewed journal articles and books, others adopt a much broader conceptualization of scholarly output. Borgman (1990), for instance, describes scholarly communication as 'how scholars in any field … use and disseminate information through formal and informal channels'. She consequently suggests that every exchange of information must be characterized as *scholarly* as long as it involves scholarly producer(s) and user(s). Although it is hard to disagree with Borgman's description of scholarly communication, the resulting definition of a scholarly contribution is nevertheless problematic, as it does not leave much room for graduation of the concept. Instead of pursuing an absolute and all-embracing definition, it seems more fruitful to establish a set of family resemblance criteria, which subsequently could be utilized to assess the prototypicality or scholarliness of different exemplars of academic genres.

Kling and McKim (1999) conceptualize scholarly communication as 'a communicative practice anchored in three dimensions: *publicity, accessibility, and trustworthiness*'. A scholarly contribution is

accordingly one that is publicly accessible, implying that interested readers are able to access it independently of its author(s), and in a stable manner, over time. Meadows (1998) has also emphasized the importance of such practices by stating that

> communication lies as at the heart of research. It is as vital for research as the actual investigation itself, for research cannot properly claim that name until it has been scrutinized and accepted by colleges. This necessarily requires that it be communicated.

A scholarly contribution is furthermore one to be trusted because it has gone through some social process that guarantees readers that they can place a high level of trust in its content based on community-specific norms.

Merton (1942) was among the first to write about such community-specific norms. He identified four norms (*universalism, communism, disinterestedness* and *organized skepticism*), which he then believed guided the behavior of scientists. The consensus among social scientists has for decades been that, as descriptions of the norms that actually guide scientists' action, Merton's norms do not exist in any pervasive form (Hess, 1997). Merton himself has actually also long emphasized the emotional commitment of scientists and their ambivalence to the norms of science (e.g. Merton, 1976). The four *Mertonian norms* should therefore be perceived as prescriptions of how scientists ought to behave ideally. Kling and McKim (1999) also recognize the concept of trustworthiness as being highly variegated. According to the authors it is typically marked by peer review, publishing house/journal quality, and the reputation of the author (as perceived by the reader). But scholars rely upon a variety of processes and markers, which depend upon everything from the structure of the discipline itself to the social networks the readers are embedded within. For instance, during *normal science* (Kuhn, 1970) scientists accept the dominant scientific theories in their research area and engage themselves in puzzle-generating and -solving activities. They consequently build upon the work of other scientists and thereby generate solutions to the research problems of their fields. Ziman (1968) therefore argues that 'a scientific paper does not stand alone; it is embedded in the "literature" of the subject'. A trustworthy contribution during *normal science* is consequently one that links its theories, methods, experiments and results to related literature in the field.

Strategic research materials

Strategic research materials are the empirical materials that exhibit the phenomena to be explained or interpreted to such advantage and in such accessible form as to enable the fruitful investigation of previously stubborn problems and the discovery of new problems for further inquiry (Merton, 1987). Researchers have established and utilized a variety of such materials in investigating the scholarliness of academic contributions. These previously applied indicators may, however, be separated from one another by observing which of Kling and McKim's (1999) three dimensions of scholarly communication (publicity, accessibility and trustworthiness) the indicators claims to measure.

The majority of studies have dealt with indicators of trustworthiness, while only a few studies have concentrated on publicity and accessibility. However, the work of Dillon (1981a; 1981b) exemplifies the latter. In his research on titles, Dillon determined the scholarliness of documents in various ways; he distinguished, for instance, between published and unpublished documents.

The concept of trustworthiness has been empirically established in many ways and researchers have consequently determined the reliability of academic works by different methods:

- Publication counts
- Citation counts
- Textual indicators
  - Colonic titles
  - References

Evaluative studies based on publication counts rely on the assumption that the higher the number of publications of a researcher, an institution, a country, and so on, the higher the quality of scholarship.

In the first recorded citation analysis, performed by Gross and Gross (1927), the authors employed citation counts as a measure of scholarly quality and developed a fictive collection of chemical journals by selecting the most highly cited. Gross (1927) later explained that

> construction of the method of investigation [citation counts] here employed will show that we are not concerned merely with the quantity of work published … but, that in reality we are concerned only with the good work, the work which has survived and which has proved of value to the investigators who followed.

Studies based on citation counts have ever since rested on the assumption that the higher the number of citations to an author's work, a journal, an author, an institution or a country, the greater the peer esteem and therefore the higher the quality of scholarship.

Other researchers have attempted to measure the trustworthiness of new contributions by identifying special textual markers of scholarship. Dillon (1981a; 1981b) advocated that the presence of a colon in the title of a paper is the primary correlate of scholarship. He examined 804 titles of journal articles in the fields of psychology, education and literary criticism and found that 72% of the papers in

scholarly journals had a colon in the title, compared with only 13% in non-scholarly journals. He also tested the hypothesis by calculating the distribution of colons in titles of early scholarly career productions and mid-career papers and found that titles of doctoral dissertations were significantly less 'colonic' than titles of mid-career papers (11–20% vs. 66%). Further analysis of the data led Dillon to correlate more frequent use of colons with scholarly productivity (colons were found more often in longer titles, in book titles, and in titles of the most astute authors), scholarly distinction (articles with colonic titles were more likely to appear before non-colonic articles in tables of contents), scholarly complexity (colonic titles consist of complex phrases held together by a mark of punctuation), and scholarly character (colons were found to be more prevalent in theoretical papers and less so in empirical and pedagogical papers). Other investigators have replicated Dillon's tests and confirmed his results in other fields (Diers and Downs, 1994; Perry, 1985; Townsend, 1983).

Various types of reference markers have also been proposed and used as measures of trustworthiness. The rationale behind these procedures is a conception of the practice of citing other works as being second nature to anyone writing a scholarly or a scientific paper (Kaplan, 1965). Explicit citations are, according to Garfield (1977), essential in order to communicate effectively and intelligently about scientific and technical subjects, and Price (1963) maintains additionally that the practice of footnoting is as old as scholarship itself. Price (1970) later established the norm of scholarship as being equivalent to a paper with approximately 10 to 22 references. He assumed that papers with larger numbers of references were reflections of non-creative scholarship as they typically are review articles, and perceived papers with less than 10 references as unscholarly *ex cathedra* pronouncements of innate knowledge. Such rigid numerical meters are of course highly time- and field-dependent, and a number of succeeding researchers have therefore modified Price's notions to some extent. Windsor and Windsor (1973) considered the distinction between scholarly and non-scholarly literature to rest on the presence or absence of references. The authors consequently measured the scholarliness of six years of information science literature by inferring the ratio of papers without references to papers containing references. Lockett and Khawam (1989), Metz (1989), Mittermeyer and Houser (1979), Schrader (1985), Schrader and Beswick (1989), and Stephenson (1993) all operate with the same categorization in their investigations of the scholarliness of different journals in the field of library and information science (L&IS). The procedure is hardly controversial since most people will agree that a research paper without references is a very simple, unsophisticated work (Peritz, 1981), and the method of investigation has also been subjected to very little critique (Terrant, 1974; Worthern and Shimko, 1974).

The different measures of trustworthiness have previously been shown to correlate to various degrees. Peritz (1983) demonstrated a moderately positive correlation between the total number of references a paper contains and the number of times the paper is cited, even after controlling for journal, year, subject, number of authors and seniority. She was thus able to conclude that the relationship is not spurious. Townsend (1983) found, on the other hand, that colonic titles are only weakly positively correlated with scholarly impact as measured by frequency of received citations. However, his sample was rather small (n = 40) and the derived results should therefore be taken with due consideration.

Genre analysis

The strategic research materials for investigating the scholarliness of different genres in different eras and fields are not necessarily the same. Academic genres are neither stable nor completely identical in separate disciplinary communities. All genres are constantly evolving and the unique traditions and conventions of special disciplines constrain the acceptable content, positioning and form of new contributions. These adjustments generate observable variations among similar genres in different eras and fields. Bazerman (1988), for instance, demonstrated how textual elements of spectroscopic articles in the *Physical Review* changed over time from the founding of the journal in 1893 to 1980. By implementing a mixture of statistics and close analytical reading, he was able to identify a variety of trends and implications. He found, for instance, a significant increase in the length of articles starting in 1940, which contradicts the common belief that research articles became gradually shorter during the last century. He was also able to determine remarkable shifts in the use of references during the investigated period. In the early years references were mainly concentrated in the introductory section of articles and rarely related to specific findings or works with an explicit relation to the citing work. Reference lists instead served as indexes of previous works in the general area. By 1910, the number of references had become

Academic writers act as members of groups with special professional practices and requirements. Different groups or discourse communities therefore develop special kinds of documents as adaptations to their specific needs

remarkably reduced, but the very few that remained were all recent, had explicit publication dates and were of direct relevance to the research being reported. From then on, the number of references trended upwards and spread from the introduction to all parts of the article, while maintaining specific relevance to the citing work. Bazerman also noticed interesting changes in regard to sentence length, syntax, word choice, graphical features, organization, argumentation and epistemology, which further illustrated the transformability of genres.

Other investigators have demonstrated that academic writers act as members of groups with special professional practices and requirements. Different groups or discourse communities therefore develop special kinds of documents as adaptations to their specific needs (for examples, see Hjørland, 2002). While several distinct disciplines share a number of genres (articles, letters, monographs, etc.), the rhetorical organization and content of these are still tailored to, and consequently modified by the unique professional practices and requirements of each field. Hyland (2000), for instance, provides a detailed investigation of how writers in different fields[1] work to create a context for their research. By distinguishing how authors cite syntactically and by examining how they incorporate references into research articles he is able to document significant disciplinary differences in both the extent to which writers rely on the work of others in presenting arguments and in how they choose to represent such work.

Academic book reviews are similarly products of their time and specific environments. Though they are usually restricted to serving two major functions — descriptive and evaluative — variations have been demonstrated to exist between book reviews of different ages (Roper, 1978) and disciplines (Hyland, 2000). Book reviews of modern academia nevertheless share a number of characteristics, which make generalizations feasible to some extent. Motta-Roth's (1998) genre analytical study of book reviews from the fields of chemistry, economics and linguistics revealed certain general invariable features of rhetorical organization in content and form. By close analytical reading she was able to formulate a schematic description of the typical structural organization of academic book reviews corresponding to four rhetorical moves, comprised of one or a number of sub-functions. Nicolaisen (2002) extended her schematic representation further when he discovered two additional sub-functions (12 and 13) while studying a sample of L&IS book reviews (Table 1). The opening paragraph of most book reviews usually encompasses the first move, which may provide five pieces of information about the book: central topic and format, readership, author, topic generalizations, and inserting the book in the broader field of study to which it relates. The second move is usually the longest one. It typically includes a detailed description of how the book is organized, which topics are treated in each chapter, with what

Table 1. Typical rhetorical moves in book reviews

Move 1	**Introducing the book**
Sub-function 1	Defining the general topic of the book
Sub-function 2	Informing about potential readership
Sub-function 3	Informing about the author
Sub-function 4	Making topic generalizations
Sub-function 5	Inserting the book in the field
Move 2	**Outlining the book**
Sub-function 6	Providing general view of the organization of the book
Sub-function 7	Stating the topic of each chapter
Sub-function 8	Citing extra-text material
Move 3	**Highlighting parts of the book**
Sub-function 9	Providing specific evaluation
Move 4	**Providing evaluation of the book**
Sub-function 10	Definitely recommending the book
Sub-function 11	Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings
Sub-function 12	Neither recommending nor disqualifying the book
Sub-function 13	Disqualifying the book despite indicated positive aspects
Sub-function 14	Definitely disqualifying the book

approach, and what kind of additional information is included in the book (graphs, pictures, tables, etc.). During the third move the reviewer concentrates on specific aspects of the book, giving a positive or negative comment from very mild criticism to praise. Move 4 rounds up the text, breaking up with the detailed perspective adopted in Move 3. It provides a final evaluation of the whole book and additionally serves the purpose of closing the text of the review.

Characteristics of scholarly book reviews

In line with Kling and McKim's (1999) conceptualization of scholarly communication, a scholarly book review is required to be publicly accessible and trustworthy. Published and accessible book reviews should therefore be perceived as *potentially scholarly* until their trustworthiness is established. Only then can the additionally dependable exemplars of the genre be recognized accordingly as indisputable scholarly works. Characteristics of reliable book reviews are, however, scarcely documented and consequently the construction of a new procedure for assessing the reliability of the genre initially calls for a clarification of what makes a trustworthy book review.

A book review is by definition produced by a reviewer. Trustworthy book reviews consequently require reliable reviewers. As it is commonly understood, reviewing is the process whereby

authorities in a given field determine the validity and assess the relative significance of a particular contribution of a scholar or scientists within that field (Osburn, 1989). To be able to perform their tasks, reviewers should therefore be experts in their specific research areas and have mastery of the literature of their fields. The book review editor of *Studies in Philosophy and Education* (Miranda, 1996) commented on the ethics of book reviewing and concluded,

> in our quest for knowledge, in researching and publishing, we are members of a scholarly community, the standards of which we are expected to uphold. To these standards we are accountable and must answer if we claim that we are doing our work in the name of scholarship. Authors and reviewers, alike, are both accountable to their scholarly community. For a reviewer, surely, this means that he or she [who] reviews a book, is competent in doing so because he or she is an active participant in and contributor to the book's particular area of research.

George Sarton (1960), a historian of science, summarized the qualities of a good book review. He especially emphasized that a review should describe and characterize not only the book in question, but also the subject with which it is dealing. It should furthermore answer the question, 'Is the book a real addition to our knowledge, and if so, what exactly has been added?' The reviewer should therefore effectively position the book in relation to the literature devoted to the same subject and evaluate the new contribution accordingly. Miranda (1996) concurs with Sarton in stating that a good review

> does not solely inform readers of *a particular book*, dealing with it as though it were the *only* book in an area of study. But rather, it enables the readers to know a book and the judgment of the reviewer of it in relation to other books in the same area and to similar topics treated in them.

A reliable reviewer can thus be characterized as one who is capable of evaluating the quality and integrity of a contribution, while simultaneously setting the piece of work in a larger, broader context in relation to previously published works in related areas. Book reviews by such reliable assessors reflect trustworthy capabilities by containing appropriate discussions of related literature. Klemp (1981), on the other hand, postulates that reviewers rarely cite other works, but Motta-Roth (1998) found that a number of reviewers in fact do situate the book within the field while reviewing its strengths and weaknesses. This finding is also consistent with the empirical results of Diodato (1984) who found that book reviews in the arts and humanities contain 3.2 references on average.

Inclusion of explicit references signals the contextualization of the work under review. The most obvious strategic research material for accessing the scholarliness of the genre is therefore the potential references of book reviews. But more than 30 years of indicator theory have taught us the inappropriateness of confining dependable documents to those with an exact number of references. Academic genres vary over time and between different research areas. For that reason it is impossible to state exactly how many references book reviews should contain in order to be trustworthy. Book reviews, which bear references to additional literature other than the work under review, should essentially be regarded as trustworthy no matter how many references they contain. Those exemplars of the genre that contain no references or that refer only to the reviewed work must conversely be considered as less reliable works.

Other strategic research materials are less suited for exploring the scholarliness of book reviews. Book reviews are hardly ever cited (Diodato, 1984) and colonic titles of reviews only indicate the plausible scholarliness of the books in question rather than the reviews, because reviewers and editors normally replicate the titles of the reviewed books.

In conclusion, book reviews that are published, accessible and that bear references to additional literature reflect scholarly qualities.

Methodology

The following case study devises a method for investigating the scholarliness of disciplinary book reviews published in the international journal literature of six social science fields during a 30-year period. The proposed methodology can easily be modified to measure the scholarliness of book reviews in specific journals, institutions and countries.

The six selected fields are: business; economics; history and philosophy of science and social sciences; library and information science; psychology; and sociology. These fields are chosen for two major reasons. First, book reviews are a vital tool in the social sciences. Natural scientists traditionally rely on monographs to a lesser extent than their colleagues in the social sciences, which is clearly reflected by a much smaller production of book reviews in the natural sciences. Second, Glänzel (1996) has previously devised suitable ISI subject categories that can be utilized for retrieval of literature in the six fields in question by searching the Social SciSearch (SSCI).

All analyses are based on data retrieved from the online version of SSCI. Hicks (1999), however, presents a detailed review of the literature examining SSCI coverage, and provides a thoughtful analysis of the possibilities and limitations of SSCI data for bibliometric purposes. She offers three reasons why the coverage of SSCI falls short for most bibliometric analyses.

1. Monographs are widely used in the social sciences for communicating research, but SSCI covers only the international journal literature.
2. Such coverage makes comprehensive retrieval of citations to books impossible.
3. Social scientists often write for national journals, but SSCI covers the national journal literature insufficiently.

These shortcomings certainly constrain the generalizability of many bibliometric studies based on SSCI data, but hardly affect the results of the present study as it neither investigates the monographic literature, citations to books, nor national journal literatures. Instead it analyzes the scholarly proportion of book reviews in six social science fields during a 30-year period by detecting the share of book reviews in the international journal literature that contain additional references to works other than the book under review. This is done by searching the online version of the SSCI database,[2] which indexes all significant items including book reviews from more than 1,500 of the most important worldwide social science journals. The references of all items are recorded in the index, and all journals are assigned to a subject category, which allow searchers to retrieve items from field-specific journals with an exact number of references. Table 2 shows the proper ISI subject categories for clustering the journals of the six selected social science fields.

The reviewed book of each book review indexed in SSCI is consistently included in the reference list of the indexed item. Book reviews that are indexed with just one reference can therefore not be charac-

terized as scholarly as they lack references to additional literature. Only book reviews with more than one reference should be credited as such. Table 3 illustrates the appropriate method for retrieving scholarly book reviews using of the online version of SSCI hosted by Dialog.

In Table 3, all items of the journals in the three subject categories encapsulating the field of Economics are initially retrieved (S1). These items are subsequently (S2) restricted to book reviews (DT = Document Type) published between 1997 and 2001 (PY = Publication Year), and the retrieved book reviews are finally (S3) confined to those containing more than one reference (NR = Number of References). Results of the three searches reveal that 2.013 scholarly book reviews have been published in the field of Economics from 1997 to 2001, corresponding to 15.3% of all book reviews published in the field during the same period.

Results

Table 4 shows the percentage growth and decline of scholarly book reviews in the six selected fields over a 30-year period. The number of book reviews is generally increasing over the entire period (except in the field of economics), and book reviews with references to additional literature are also growing in number, but with different rates with repect to the total numbers of reviews. These diverse expansions between disciplines result in quite different percentage growths and declines of scholarly book reviews in the six fields under study. The general percentage growth of scholarly book reviews is most marked in the field of psychology followed by economics,

Table 2. Definition of six social science fields based on ISI's subject category assignments (modified from Glänzel, 1996)

Social science field	ISI subject category
Business	*Business (excl. business, finance)*
	Management
Economics	*Business, finance*
	Economics
	Planning and development
History and philosophy of science and social sciences	*History and philosophy of science*
	History of social sciences
Library and information science	*Information science and library science*
Psychology	*Psychology*
Sociology	*Demography*
	Ethnic studies
	Family studies
	Sociology
	Women's studies

Table 3. SSCI: Search for scholarly book reviews in the field of economics 1997–2001

S SC =	**(Business, finance or economics or planning & development)**	
	71518	SC = Business, finance
	263235	SC = Economics
	60643	SC = Planning & development
S1	360527	SC = (Business, finance or economics or planning & development)
S S1 and DT = Book review and PY = 1997:2001		
	360527	S1
	1093866	DT = Book review
	720190	PY = 1997 : PY = 2001
S2	13180	S1 and DT = Book review and PY = 1997:2001
S S2 and NR > 1		
	13180	S2
	2006853	NR > 1
S3	2013	S2 and NR > 1

Table 4. Selected social science fields: number of book reviews in six equal sized periods 1972–2001, number and percentage of scholarly book reviews

Social science field		1972–1976	1977–1981	1982–1986	1987–1991	1992–1996	1997–2001	Total
Business								
		4,101	5,951	5,582	5,126	5,731	5,587	32,078
		310	360	518	667	846	1,050	3,751
	%	7.6	6.1	9.3	13.0	14.8	18.8	11.7
Economics								
		14,003	17,423	16,836	16,507	14,664	13,180	92,613
		1,272	1,567	1,701	1,884	2,058	2,013	10,495
	%	9.1	9.0	10.1	11.4	14.0	15.3	11.3
History and philosophy of science and social sciences								
		4,352	7,618	8,736	9,479	10,198	11,782	52,165
		352	475	499	561	644	693	3,224
	%	8.1	6.2	5.7	5.9	6.3	5.9	6.2
Library and information science								
		3,647	6,383	6,997	7,981	26,110	34,596	85,714
		201	333	408	454	705	731	2,832
	%	5.5	5.2	5.8	5.7	2.7	2.1	3.3
Psychology								
		12,920	18,327	19,153	19,597	19,466	15,500	104,963
		886	1,355	3,195	3,786	4,539	4,838	18,599
	%	6.9	7.4	16.7	19.3	23.3	31.2	17.7
Sociology								
		12,382	15,276	15,741	17,502	19,135	16,948	96,984
		564	780	1,065	1,084	1,284	1,898	6,675
	%	4.6	5.1	6.8	6.2	6.7	11.2	6.9

business, and sociology, while the percentages of scholarly book reviews in the two remaining fields decline during the 30-year period (see Figure 1).

There is, however, one important problem attached to the utilization of SSCI for retrieval of potentially scholarly book reviews in the field of L&IS. According to Table 4 a huge increase of book reviews appear in L&IS from 1992 and onwards, but further analysis has revealed that the majority of this growth is caused by the sudden exhaustive indexing of *one* journal. The journal in question is *Library Journal*, which is published 20 times annually. Each issue distributes 250 to 350 book reviews of adult books to be used as tools for book selection in both public and academic libraries. Reviewers are asked to address their reviews to the educated generalist, rather than the subject specialist, and all reviews must be designed to present the information needed for the selection decision in a highly condensed form.[3] Book reviews in *Library Journal* are thus clearly not productions of scholarship and one should therefore seek to avoid them in studies dealing with book reviews for scholarly purposes. A number of other journals in the field also produce book reviews for the practicing librarian. When measuring the scholarly progress of book reviews in
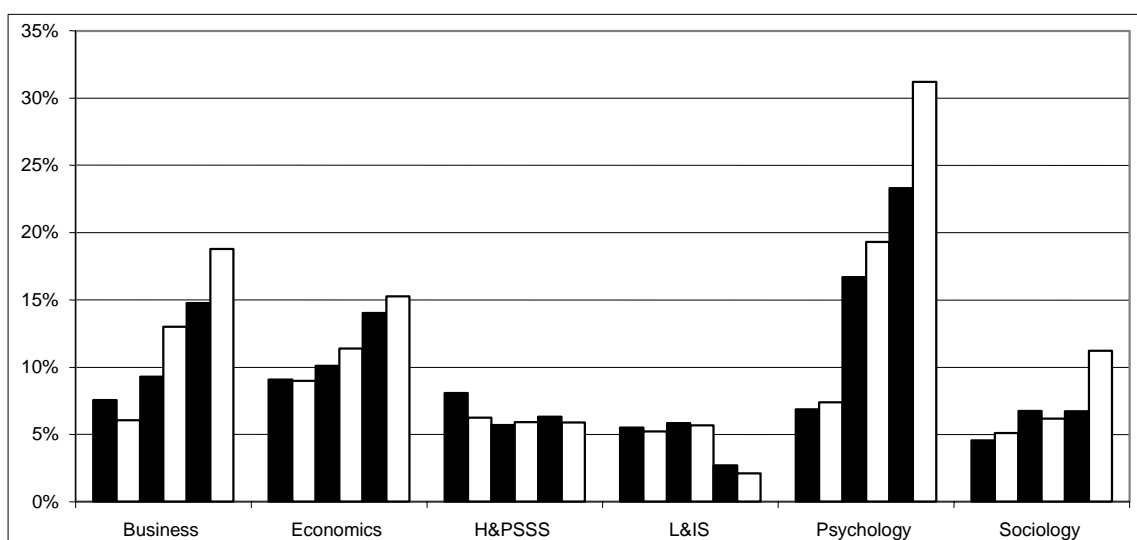

Figure 1. Selected social science fields: percentage of scholarly book reviews, 1972–2001 (1972–1976, 1977–1981, 1982–1986, 1987–1991, 1992–1996, 1997–2001)

the field of L&IS, one should therefore restrict the sample of journals to those in the field with scholarly ambitions.

Table 5 shows the progress of scholarly book reviews in the field of L&IS measured by ten selected book reviewing core journals (White and McCain, 1998). Only five of these journals have published reviews since 1972, which helps to explain some of the growth of book reviews during the 30-year period. *Journal of Documentation* must be characterized as *the* scholarly book reviewing journal of its field. Since 1972 it has published no less than 302 book reviews with additional references, corresponding to almost 40% of all scholarly book reviews in the ten core journals under study. The journal has, however, also published a high number of reviews without additional references, leading to a moderate total of 20.4%

scholarly book reviews during the whole period. *Library and Information Science Research* is top scorer, displaying a total of 27.9% scholarly book reviews, followed by *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* (22.9%). At the other end of the continuum we find *Electronic Library* (1.9%) and *Information Technology and Libraries* (1.4%).

Figure 2 helps to illustrate the problem related to the coverage of SSCI. The percentage growth of scholarly book reviews in the core journals of L&IS is quite different from the pattern of book reviews in the larger segment of the field. Book reviews in the core journals generally display a moderate percentage growth of scholarliness contrary to the general decline found when measuring reviews from a wider range of field specific journals. The general decline of scholarliness in the entire field of L&IS is

Table 5. L&IS core journals: number and percentage of scholarly book reviews, 1972–2001

| L&IS core journals	1972–1976	1977–1981	1982–1986	1987–1991	1992–1996	1997–2001	Total
Electronic Library (1984–)			45	96	73	257	471
			0	1	1	7	9
%			0.0	1.0	1.4	2.7	1.9
Information Processing and Management	45	81	214	237	199	66	842
	5	5	2	26	46	16	100
%	11.1	6.2	0.9	11.0	23.1	24.2	11.9
Information Technology and Libraries	56	52	113	136	122	22	501
	0	1	1	0	1	4	7
%	0.0	1.9	0.9	0	0.8	18.2	1.4
Journal of Documentation	208	163	230	274	298	306	1,479
	10	26	34	64	82	86	302
%	4.8	16.0	14.8	23.4	27.5	28.1	20.4
Journal of Information Science (1979–)		39	9	2	3	1	54
		5	2	0	0	0	7
%		12.8	22.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.0
Journal of the American Society for Information Science	64	66	74	91	125	161	581
	6	7	12	13	33	62	133
%	9.4	13.6	16.2	14.3	26.4	38.5	22.9
Library and Information Science Research (1979–)			49	49	133	88	319
			6	4	45	34	89
%			12.2	8.2	33.8	38.6	27.9
Library Resources and Technical Services	87	14	0	260	129	71	561
	3	2	0	6	16	16	43
%	3.5	14.3		2.3	12.4	22.5	7.7
Program – Electronic Library and Information Systems (1979–)		32	136	147	89	143	547
		1	4	12	13	31	61
%		3.1	2.9	8.2	14.6	21.7	11.2
Scientometrics (1980–)		14	45	22	5	3	89
		0	5	2	4	2	13
%		0.0	11.1	9.1	80.0	66.7	14.6
Total	460	461	915	1,314	1,176	1,118	5,444
	24	47	66	128	241	258	764
%	5.2	10.2	7.2	9.7	20.5	23.1	14.0
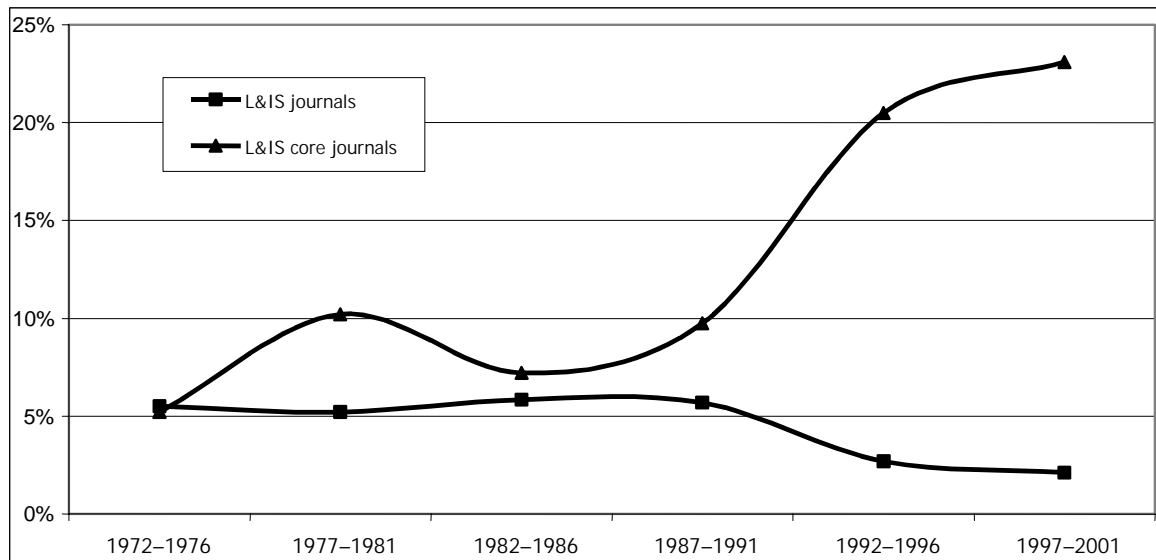
Figure 2. L&IS journals and L&IS core journals: percentage of scholarly book reviews in six equal sized periods 1972–2001

primarily caused by the reviewing procedures of one unscholarly journal and the changing indexing policy of SSCI.

Discussion

The results of the case study can be used to mediate in the old dispute on whether book reviews are second-class citizens of academic literature or proper first-class members of the scholarly communication network. If one accepts that an educated subject specialist is the sole competent person to provide a trustworthy book review because they relate the book to previous works in the field, then additional references in book reviews could be taken as signs of scholarship. However, when this indicator is applied to large segments of book reviews in the social sciences, a vast number of reviews are revealed to be lacking additional references to other works than the books under review. Scholarly book reviews with additional references have, however, been growing rapidly in share in most fields since 1972, displaying a dynamic trend of scholarship that should be taken into account in discussing the qualities of the genre. Instead of minimizing or dismissing the genre for its unscholarly character, one should be pleased with the positive trend and could more actively support it by demanding scholarly book reviews in all academic journals.

The case study of book reviews in selected social science fields supports the contemporary view on academic genres as being dynamic and field-dependent text types. The percentage of scholarly book reviews has trended upwards in five of the six fields under study, clearly illustrating the dynamism of academic genres. Only in the field of history and philosophy of science and social sciences have scholarly book reviews been slowly stagnating since

1972. This could indicate that the genre in this particular field is much more stable compared to the other fields. Such field dependency is also found in the remaining five fields, however, which all display rather different growth rates of scholarly book reviews. Book reviews in psychology and in the core journals of L&IS present much higher scholarly rates of growth than the reviews in business, economics and sociology. The differences in book reviews among fields must be ascribed to the unique traditions and conventions of the fields in question, which, to various extents, constrain the acceptable content, positioning and form of the genre.

Though Price (1963) provided a theoretical basis for the law of exponential growth of science and several examples of its accuracy, it might still be possible for us to speed up the growth of scholarly book reviews. The book review editors in charge of the book review sections of scholarly journals are the proper people to start with. They must live up to their responsibilities as scholarly editors and ensure the scholarliness of all published book reviews. This could easily be accomplished by selecting competent reviewers for all books to be reviewed. The reviewers must naturally be subject specialists and should furthermore be informed about the characteristics of a scholarly book review.

Conclusion

In order to be labeled as a scholarly contribution, a book review must first and foremost be published, accessible and trustworthy. A scholarly book review therefore essentially requires a dependable reviewer who is an expert on the field of the book and on the literature of the field. Scholarly book reviews describe and characterize not only the books in question, but also the subjects with which they are dealing.

They examine whether the books under review provide new knowledge to their fields, and how this new knowledge relates to established theories. A scholarly reviewer is consequently one who is capable of evaluating the quality and integrity of a contribution, while simultaneously setting the piece of work in a larger, broader context in relation to previously published works in related areas. Book reviews of reliable assessors reflect their scholarly qualifications by containing appropriate discussions of related literature. Such contextualization must be documented by explicit references. This makes the reference lists of book reviews the logical strategic research material for accessing the scholarliness of the genre.

However, it is recognized that book reviews and the concept of trustworthiness have more facets than those measured by the proposed reference analysis. Reviewers might be biased by social-psychological mechanisms, for example, making their conclusions and judgments less reliable. One bias would be the influence of the Matthew effect of science; another would be preconceived opinion against certain books in question. Given the critical functions that book reviews serve in various academic settings, future studies should seek to investigate the trustworthiness of academic book reviews further. The proposed methodology for assessing the scholarliness of book reviews may serve as an appropriate point of departure.

Notes

1. The disciplines examined are molecular biology, magnetic physics, mechanical engineering, electronic engineering, philosophy, sociology, marketing, and applied linguistics.
2. All searches were carried out on 3 June 2002.
3. 'Within 125–150 words, the review must include: a brief statement of the thesis or description of the contents, a critical appraisal of both substance and execution, and an indication of the book's value for library collections' (Guidelines for Library Journal reviewers: <http://libraryjournal.com>).

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