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Prof. Nenad Medvidović
Editor in Chief, IEEE Transactions on Software Engineering
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Dear Professor Medvidović,

It has come to our attention that IEEE Transactions on Software Engineering recently published a preprint paper about the Journal Impact Factor titled “Metamorphic Robustness Testing: Exposing Hidden Defects in Citation Statistics and Journal Impact Factors” authored by Zhi Quan Zhou, T.H. Tse, and Matt Witheridge. We realise that, as a preprint, this paper is not likely to have been through peer review yet but it has already received some attention.

We have taken the opportunity to review this paper. We believe that it would be helpful to alert your editorial board to the authors limited understanding of how the Journal Impact Factor (JIF) is calculated. In particular, in regard to the Journal Citation Report (JCR) citation aggregation methodology, they had not read the background information which confirms that we use both linked and unlinked citations to calculate the JIF¹. Additionally, we do not rely on article title to unify “citation to source” records in the Web of Science, as we are entirely aware that this field can be ambiguous and prone to error. For these reasons, hyphens in a cited reference article title will not by themselves prevent a cited reference from linking to a source. Therefore, by extension, hyphens in an article title have no impact on citation counts within the JCR or the JIF. The authors also note in the example in Figure 1 that the unlinked cited reference had other metadata errors. We performed further analysis of unlinked citations to IEEE TSE articles containing a hyphen in the title and determined that these were also due to citation errors and/or missing metadata, again unrelated to the presence of a hyphen in the cited article title.

Given the nature of authors’ claims, which would constitute a serious criticism of a methodology that has been tried and tested over many years, we strongly urge your editorial board to reflect on the validity of this research and whether it is in fact a publishable item.

Respectfully,

Dr Jonathan Adams, Director, Institute for Scientific Information

Tilla Edmunds, Director, Web of Science Content Management

1. Hubbard, S. C. and McVeigh, M. E. (2011), Casting a wide net: the Journal Impact Factor numerator. *Learned Publishing*, 24: 133-137. doi:[10.1087/20110208](https://doi.org/10.1087/20110208)