

Mr. Tom Ciavarella
Manager, Publisher Relations
Clarivate Analytics
Friars House
160 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8EZ
UK

July 30, 2018

Dear Mr. Ciavarella,

We learned from the editors of the journals the *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* (EJHET), *History of Economic Ideas* (HEI), and the *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* (JHET), that these three main journals in the history of economic thought were suppressed by Clarivate Analytics from the 2017 Journal Citation Report (JCR) data. The allegation was that of “citation stacking,” which according to your June announcement is an “anomalous” citation pattern that “result[s] in a significant distortion of the Journal Impact Factor and rank that does not accurately reflect the journal’s citation performance in the literature.”¹ Clarivate Analytics then concludes: “The Journal Impact Factor provides an important and objective measure of a journal’s contribution to scholarly communication. In the interest of fairness and accuracy for all journals, the distortion of the Journal Impact Factor by an excessive concentration of citations gives rise to the need for suppression.”

However, in our view, Clarivate Analytics also has to recognize its responsibilities in handling alleged problems in a transparent, direct and fair way — values that are so central to the very scholarly communities that are served Clarivate Analytics. That requires, first of all, giving the involved parties a direct channel of communication with the company and the right to explain alleged ‘anomalies’ before any decision detrimental to the journals is taken. Secondly, it requires that there be a clearly understood timetable for decision taking.

Clarivate Analytics have not followed a procedure with these characteristics. No editors were directly contacted and no warnings or requests for clarifications issued before the final decision was announced in June. The editors of EJHET and JHET wrote to you on July 2nd expressing our concerns about this process and its outcome, but as yet have not received a reply.

In addition the problems of handling the situation, the suppression decision ignores the size of the scholarly fields. If it is true that, as Clarivate Analytics states, the objective measurement of a journal’s contribution to scholarly communication should not be “distorted,” it is also true that Clarivate Analytics should be able to go beyond numerical

¹ We are referring here to the announcement at your website: <http://ipscience-help.thomsonreuters.com/incitesLiveJCR/JCRGroup/titleSuppressions.html>

indicators to distinguish what is a data distortion from what could be either an academic innovation of a scholarly field or an episodic publication. There are many such possibilities, but consider that a scholarly field decides to innovate by publishing a different kind of article that happens to cite a lot of recent papers in that field. Or a journal that celebrates a noted anniversary by also reflecting on the current trends of that particular field. Both possibilities would be scholarly initiatives that increase citation counts and ought to be distinguished from other kinds of impact factor “distortions.” In many areas of the natural sciences, or in economics, for example, none of those initiatives would cause any citation distortions because of their broad net and higher level of citations. In fact, in economics, the American Economic Association created in 1969 its *Journal of Economic Literature* (JEL) “designed to help economists keep abreast of and synthesize the vast flow of literature,” as recorded on the journal’s website. As a long-existing record of literature reviews, JEL is not flagged by “distorting” citation statistics in economics, but if such a journal was to be created today it probably would be. There are many other such journals, including the *Journal of Economic Surveys*. Similarly, journals celebrating their anniversaries would most likely create no citation “distortions” in economics.

The history of economics is a small field devoted to studying the contributions of past economists to economic knowledge and policies. For that reason it engages much more with works published many years ago than with very recent works. Consequently the pattern of citations is bound to be different from the rest of economics. Moreover, as the EJHET-JHET letter also mentioned, the history of economic thought is a specialized field and nearly all journal articles appear in a relatively small number of journals. In this case, any article that proposes to study or celebrate what has been recently produced in the history of economics is bound to create a significant citation increase for those journals. Clarivate Analytics indicators should not treat that as “citation stacking.” Yet this is precisely what it has done in relation to HEI’s 2017 annual survey of the field. This article and this article alone was then treated as the basis of a finding of “citation stacking.”

Besides the need to be transparent in its procedures and to recognize the inadequacy of its current indicators in distinguishing different reasons for increases in citations, we believe that Clarivate Analytics has to recognize the impact its decisions can have on scholarly fields. Clarivate Analytics’ data on impact factors is used in several countries to evaluate researchers and departments (and graduate programs) by using it to create national rankings of journals. Not having three main journals in the history of economic thought in the 2017 JCR data is very harmful to an entire field.

Finally, we note that irrespective of Clarivate Analytics’ claim (in the original letter to publishers) that it “make[s] no assumption about whether the citation anomaly was deliberate or incidental,” suppressing three journals that have existed for many decades for “citation stacking” imputes wrong-doing to journal editors, not least because “stacking” is a pejorative word. We reject the imputation that there has been wrong doing.

We therefore write in support of the letter written by the the EJHET and JHET editors. First of all, we ask Clarivate Analytics to reverse its decision in respect of the three journals. Secondly, we call for it to engage constructively with HEI in finding ways to handle surveys without having them recorded as “citation stacking.” Thirdly we hope

Clarivate Analytics will in future communicate properly with the editors of any journal it proposes to treat in this kind of way, and in particular to seek their account of the facts as you see them. We hope your company understands the seriously damaging consequences of your decision to a long established and reputable scholarly field, that just does not have the same citation patterns as other fields and thus is prone to be affected by citations made in a single article published in 2017.

Yours sincerely,

The presidents of history of economics societies:

Evelyn L Forget (University of Manitoba, Canada), *History of Economics Society*

Andre Lapidus (Université Paris 1: Panthéon-Sorbonne, France), *European Society for the History of Economic Thought*

Antonella Stirati (Università Roma Tre, Italy), *Associazione Italiana per la Storia dell'Economia Politica*

Atsushi Komine (Ryukoku University, Japan), *The Japanese Society for the History of Economic Thought*

Gianfranco Tuset (Università di Padova, Italy), *Associazione Italiana per la Storia del Pensiero Economico*

John Vint (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK), *The History of Economic Thought Society*

Sylvie Rivot (Université de Mulhouse, BETA, France), *Association Charles Gide pour l'Étude de la Pensée Économique*

The journal editors:

Arnaud Orain (Université Paris 8: Paris-Saint-Denis, France), *Revue Économique*

Carlos Eduardo Supryniak (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil) & Luca Fiorito (University of Palermo, Italy) & Scott Scheall (Arizona State University Polytechnic Campus, USA), *Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology*

Estrella Trincado (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain), *Iberian Journal of the History of Economic Thought*

Jean Sébastien Lenfant (Université de Lille, France), *OEconomia: History, Methodology, Philosophy*

John David (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands and Marquette University, USA) & Wade Hands (University of Puget Sound, USA), *Journal of Economic Methodology*

John King (La Trobe University and Federation University Australia) & Eithne Murphy (National University of Ireland Galway) & Constantinos Repapis (Goldsmiths, University of London, UK) & Michel Zouboulakis (University of Thessaly, Greece), *Economic Thought*

Kevin Hoover (Duke University, USA), *History of Political Economy*

Piero Bini (Univeristy of Florence, Italy), *History of Economic Thought and Policy*