

# *The decline and fall of book reviews in psychology: a bibliometric analysis*

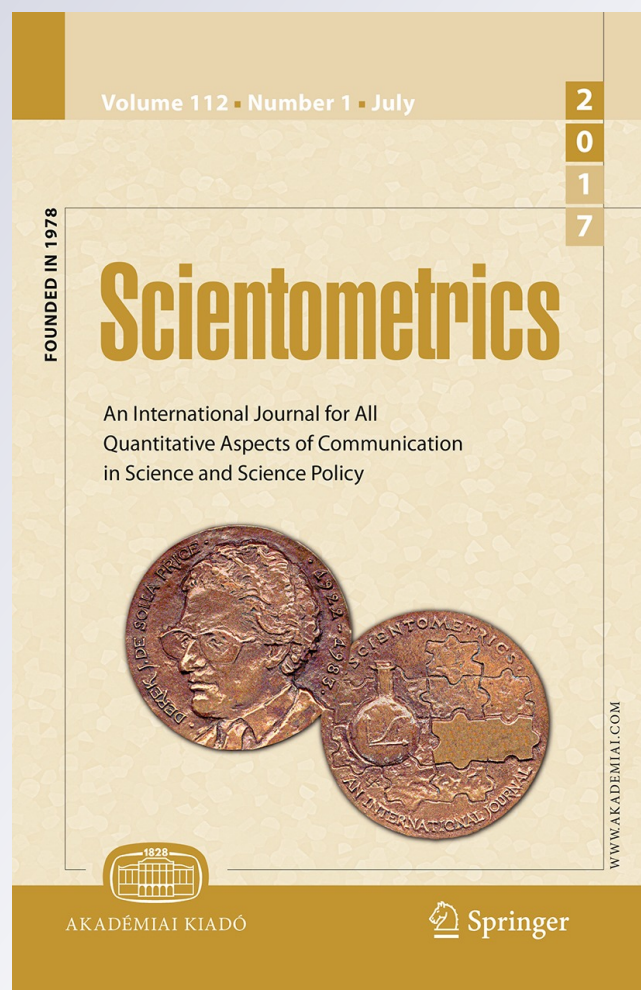
**James Hartley & Yuh-Shan Ho**

## **Scientometrics**

An International Journal for all  
Quantitative Aspects of the Science of  
Science, Communication in Science and  
Science Policy

ISSN 0138-9130  
Volume 112  
Number 1

Scientometrics (2017) 112:655-657  
DOI 10.1007/s11192-017-2256-7



**Your article is protected by copyright and all rights are held exclusively by Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, Hungary. This e-offprint is for personal use only and shall not be self-archived in electronic repositories. If you wish to self-archive your article, please use the accepted manuscript version for posting on your own website. You may further deposit the accepted manuscript version in any repository, provided it is only made publicly available 12 months after official publication or later and provided acknowledgement is given to the original source of publication and a link is inserted to the published article on Springer's website. The link must be accompanied by the following text: "The final publication is available at [link.springer.com](http://link.springer.com)".**

# The decline and fall of book reviews in psychology: a bibliometric analysis

James Hartley<sup>1</sup> · Yuh-Shan Ho<sup>2</sup>

Received: 12 January 2017 / Published online: 27 February 2017  
© Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, Hungary 2017

**Abstract** Book reviews have been published in psychology journals since 1900—and possibly before then. Approximately 200 such reviews were published each year until the 1950s and this number increased to nearly 600 before 1990. However, since then, the number of book reviews in psychology journals has reverted back to the current rate of approximately 200 a year. Whether or not this can be attributed to the measurement of impact factors is a moot point.

**Keywords** Book reviews · Document type · Web of Science · SCI-EXPANDED · Impact factor · Psychology

## Introduction

Nicolaisen (2002) has provided a brief, but informative, survey of the scholarliness of book reviews in the social sciences, and Liu et al. (2017) have more recently assessed the patterns and dynamics of book reviews published in the sciences, the arts and the social sciences. Liu et al. found that the absolute numbers of book reviews in these different disciplines remained relatively stable but that their relative shares were changing. In addition, they found that book reviews were very common in the arts and humanities, common in the social sciences, but rarer in the natural sciences.

In this letter we report our findings using a similar methodology for a single subject-matter—that of psychology—although this discipline in itself contains many different sub-disciplines—ranging from the soft (e.g., psychotherapy) to the hard sciences (e.g.

---

✉ Yuh-Shan Ho  
ysho@asia.edu.tw

<sup>1</sup> School of Psychology, Keele University, Staffordshire ST5 5BG, UK

<sup>2</sup> Trend Research Centre, Asia University, Taichung 41354, Taiwan

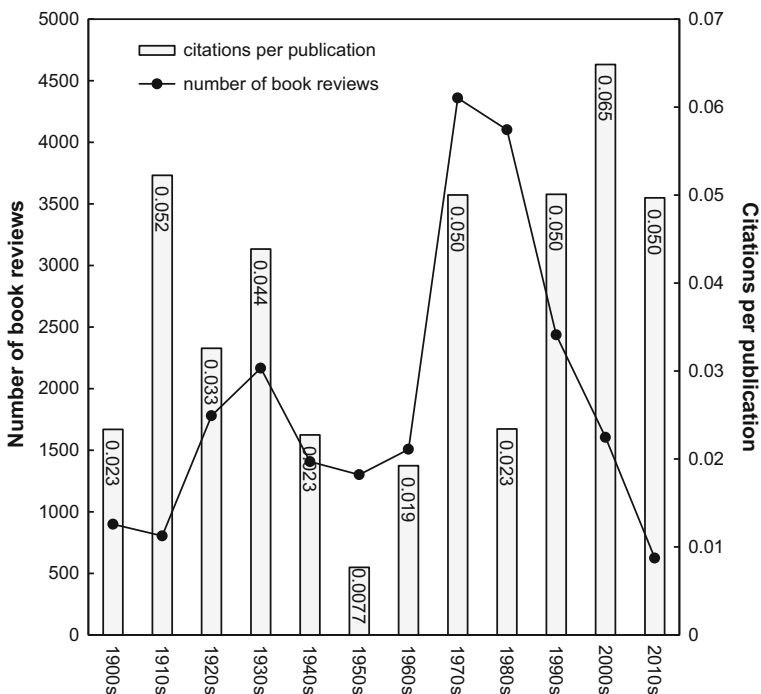
neuropsychology). We carried out this research to substantiate—or not—the current view that printed book reviews are declining in this information age.

### Method

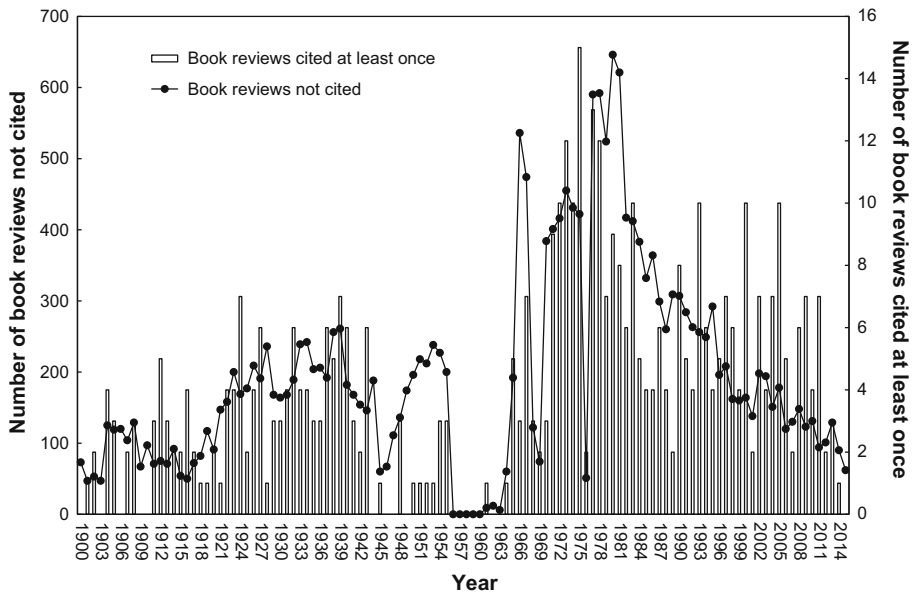
In this study we used the Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI-EXPANDED) database of the Web of Science from Thomson Reuters (updated on 02 December 2016) to provide the data. According to the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) of 2015, there were 76 journals listed in the Web of Science category of psychology, and a total of 287,037 book reviews from 1900 to 2015. However, we refined these results by selecting the Web of Science category of Psychology, which gave us 22,988 book reviews to work with.

### Results and discussion

Figure 1 shows both the number of book reviews in each decade and their citations per publication. It can be seen that there was an increase in the number of book reviews from the 1910s until the 1930s, then a lull until the 1960s, then an increase to the 1970s, and then a steady decline since the 1990s. In addition Fig. 1 also shows that, despite the ‘gee-whiz’ nature of the graph, that book reviews in psychology *are hardly cited at all* (with highest book reviews being cited only 0.65 times in the 2000s).



**Fig. 1** The number of book reviews published in Psychology and their citations, 1900s–2010s



**Fig. 2** The number of book reviews published in psychology since 1900 that have been cited at least once and not cited at all

Figure 2 shows (1) the number of book reviews without any citations and (2) the number of book reviews have been cited at least once.

## Conclusions

The data do indeed show that the number of published book reviews in psychology is declining. We now need to replicate this study with other disciplines to see if this is specific to psychology or is a more general case. It is possible that the number of published book reviews in paper-based journals may be declining for at least two reasons: (1) it takes too long to publish reviews in a paper-based journal compared with publishing them on a web-based system, and (2) because (as shown in Fig. 1) book reviews are hardly cited at all by others, editors may prefer to use the space for more citable articles.

## References

- Liu, W., Ding, D., & Gu, M. (2017). Book reviews in academic journals: Patterns and dynamics. *Scientometrics*, *110*(1), 355–364. doi:[10.1007/s11192-016-2172-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-016-2172-2).
- Nicolaisen, J. (2002). The scholarliness of published peer reviews: A bibliometric study of book reviews in selected social science fields. *Research Evaluation*, *11*(3), 129–140.