

Journal Rankings: Save the Outlets for Your Research

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Rankings of MBA programs by journalists have had a dramatic impact on business schools. Now, we face the prospect of journal rankings. Journal rankings impose a single dimension to journals that will inevitably hurt some journals. However, there are steps that researchers can take to keep their journals strong. For example, we should all support our professional organizations, subscribe to relevant journals, and count journal service in promotion decisions. In sum, this article identifies nine steps all researchers should take.
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I was just promoted to full professor at the University of Chicago when the first *Business Week* rankings of the full-time MBA programs appeared around 1986. It seems that the later event almost had more impact on my life than the former. Suddenly, I found that the ranking of my Business School's MBA was, to put it mildly, disappointing. Of course, *Business Week* has subsequently ranked the University of Chicago's MBA program much higher. In fact, over the many years since 1986, almost each top business school can claim a year where each achieved a desired rank.

Without warning, some journalists can suddenly decide to become external evaluators of anything. Rumors persisted that the journalists who did the early MBA rankings not only lacked MBAs but also had virtually no training in statistical methods or survey design.

Of course, myriad criticisms surrounding the rankings persist (see, e.g., Trieschmann et al. 2000, Zell 2001). One criticism of particular concern is the inherent one-dimensional nature of rankings. With differentiation and specialization occurring on multiple

dimensions, rankings cause a few very large business schools to dominate because they enjoy the enormous benefits of size (e.g., more recruiters, more electives, cost-effective class sizes) and network externalities (e.g., more alumni with an incentive to provide high rankings). It seems the result should be increased concentration, but research on the ultimate influence of external evaluators is indeterminate (e.g., see Eliashberg and Shugan 1997).

Notwithstanding widespread criticism, MBA rankings have had a profound impact on business education, changed the MBA market, and homogenized MBA programs. Since 1986, many other journalists have entered the ubiquitous MBA rankings game, causing considerable confusion. For example, at least, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, *Success*, *Business Week*, *US News and World Report*, *The Financial Times*, and the *National Post* all each provide, often-different rankings. Academics also produce rankings, but academic journals fail to enjoy the widespread readership of the trade press (see, e.g., Tracy and Waldfogel 1997). Now, MBA students and business practitioners often view MBA program ranking as business school rankings, overlooking excellent business schools with small or no MBA programs. Consequently, business school

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deans are shifting scarce resources from other business programs to MBA programs. More importantly, business school deans must consider the impact of every resource decision on the few criteria used by these journalists. For example, improving class sizes or creating higher standards for graduation might be far less important than getting students with higher admission test scores or admitting much older students with secure jobs after graduation. Unfortunately, given the extreme variance in rankings from year to year and the fact that current students only evaluate their own institutions, the validity of the rankings becomes extremely questionable, making the value of all of these changes also questionable. For many students, however, the primary problem with MBA rankings is that they often ignore research, which is a critical component in the prestige of the degree and the quality of the advanced courses (Armstrong and Sperry 1994). Perhaps, given their weak statistical methods, we should eliminate these MBA-ranking trade publications from our classrooms.

Sadly, ignoring the ratings is virtually impossible. It is absolutely critical to remember that potential business school students are influenced by these rankings. Rankings can be self-fulfilling prophecies because the highly ranked schools obviously attract the best students (Schatz 1993). Of course, for better or worse, the MBA rankings continue. To be fair, if MBA programs fail to provide their own performance metrics, someone else should.

Having survived MBA rankings, we now face the journal rankings. History might repeat itself as zealous external evaluators evaluate academic journals.

As with MBA rankings, one-dimensional analyses prevail with journal rankings (often limited to citation analyses). Also like MBA rankings, journal rankings can be self-fulfilling when highly ranked journals attract the best manuscripts. As with MBA rankings, journal rankings will influence your research outlets. Like MBA rankings, journal rankings will have financial consequences. For example, online full-text periodical services often use citation rankings to fix payments for the journal content. Ultimately, libraries might choose journals based on citation rankings, and ultimately rankings might also influence subscriptions.

There are more than analogies to business school rankings. To recognize research reputation, many MBA rankings are now including a measure of research productivity, which includes publication pages in top journals. Of course, top journals will inevitably be defined by journal rankings. Eventually, deans, who must worry about MBA rankings, will pressure faculty to get published in the “approved journals”.

As with MBA rankings, there are numerous other problems with journal rankings (e.g., Vastag and Montabon 2002). MacRoberts and MacRoberts (1989) identify many problems associated with citation-based rankings, including uncited primary research and biased citing. Again, to be fair, we should avoid arguing that our performance is irrelevant. We certainly need to develop our own performance metrics.

Beyond inaccuracies in the rankings process, there are other dangers associated with one-dimensional rankings. With one-dimensional rankings, the number of outlets for research could diminish. Libraries that face scarce resources might discontinue journals with low rankings. Small specialized (Steve: Do you mean small-Specialty” here? Or OK as “small specialized”?) journals might have financial difficulties. Temporary anomalies might hurt excellent journals (e.g., see Baumgartner and Pieters 2003). For example, because the Marketing Science Conference lacks proceedings, *Marketing Science* loses those proceedings citations. Proceedings citations (e.g., *Advances in Consumer Research*) are the major source of citations for comparable marketing journals (see Table 1). Table 1 provides the 2002 citations rankings for the most-cited marketing journals.

In the immediate future, editors might reallocate their resources to compete over rankings. That reallocation might hurt many valuable types of research, including replications, research notes, applications articles that might be invaluable for practitioners, and methods requiring future software development.

Marketing Science has not adopted a high-citations strategy yet. *Marketing Science*, for example, seldom publishes review articles (for a notable exception, see Rossi and Allenby 2003). We publish cutting-edge methodological articles (for example, see Toubia et al. 2003, Allenby et al. 2003, and Swait and Andrews

Table 1

2002 Rank*	Journal Name	Source of Citations**
1	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	1. <i>Advances in Consumer Research</i> 2. <i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i> 3. <i>Psychology and Marketing</i>
2	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	1. <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i> 2. <i>Journal of Business Research</i> 3. <i>Advances in Consumer Research</i>
3	Marketing Science	1. <i>Journal of Marketing Research</i> 2. <i>Marketing Letters</i> 3. <i>Management Science</i>
4	<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	1. <i>Journal of Marketing</i> 2. <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i> 3. <i>Advances in Consumer Research</i>
5	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	1. <i>Advances In Consumer Research</i> 2. <i>Journal of Marketing</i> 3. <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i>

Notes. *Ranks are based on ISI 2002 Journal citation reports. See the copyrighted ISI reports for details. **Ranked by journal providing largest number of cites excluding self-cites (from highest number of cites to lowest number of cites).

2003), which might involve software lags and, consequently, delayed citations. We also publish research notes (e.g., Banerjee and Bandyopadhyay 2003) that might be very influential, albeit within a smaller audience.

However, most of our articles are very timely and could have an immediate and significant impact. For example, Ganesh and Pazgal (2003) show how Internet shopping agents can create differentiation. Kahn and Luce (2003) study mammographies and "false alarms." They show that "patients receiving a false alarm result experienced more stress, were less likely to believe that a positive mammography result indicated cancer and more likely to delay mammography than patients receiving normal results". Tellis et al. (2003) find "sales of most new products display a distinct takeoff in various European countries, at an average of 6.2 years after introduction." I regret that space limitations here prevent additional examples. However, as Tellis et. al (2003) note, not all products' take-offs are immediate, and I expect that some articles might take time before citations begin to appear.

Moreover, it is also important to note that *Marketing Science* publishes a wide variety of articles on interesting problems (e.g., see Shugan 2003). For example, we are one of the few marketing journals to emphasize findings articles (e.g., Danaheret al. 2003, Rao and Mahi 2003), as well as special issues articles (e.g., Chatterjee et al. 2003).

As it is with MBA programs, many editors are optimizing to the criteria mandated by the rankings, as well as adopting tricks to improve their journals' rankings. It is now tempting to strongly advocate tricks that inventive authors can do to support their journals, such as increasing citations to *Marketing Science*.

I will not do so. Instead, I will advocate keeping all of the marketing journals strong. Unlike MBA students who choose only one program, researchers can choose multiple journals. As with MBA students who have a vested interest in keeping their alma mater healthy, authors have a vested interest in keeping their journals healthy (particularly, those journals already containing their published articles).

Healthy journals will continue to certify research, archive research, and keep that research accessible in a durable media. These value-added functions are crucial for authors (Hovav and Gray 2002, Slagell 2001).

As an author, you should choose outlets for your research that are based on many criteria and ensure that those outlets all remain strong. Let the editors worry about the rankings. You should recognize that journals face hostile forces and require your support. Realize that journals exist to recognize and advertise your ideas and your research efforts. Hence, I will only advocate a more basic strategy. Here are a number of actions you can take to support the outlets for your research and ensure that your future research receives the widest possible audience.

1. Let your dean or superiors know at every opportunity that you and your colleagues read journals such as *Marketing Science*. Explain how important these academic journals are for promoting your faculty or associates, providing content for the classroom or professional projects, promoting the prestige of your business school or company, and disseminating your research. Deans or superiors must not only

value the journal, but they must also value the faculty or employee time devoted to editorial endeavors.

2. Subscribe, subscribe, and subscribe. Certainly, office space is limited, and libraries often have copies. However, your subscription is your vote of support for the journal. It signals that the content of this journal has value—at least as great as the few dollars of your subscription.

3. Obey the copyright laws. With routine permission, INFORMS policy includes free usage for most educational purposes, allows posts of published articles on the author's website, and allows reprints in books. If you don't respect the intellectual property of others, you can't expect others to respect yours.

4. Don't allow others to post your published papers on the web. If you give the content away, journals will disappear. Although free dissemination of knowledge seems attractive, it is like burning the wooden furniture to make temporary heat. It works well in the short-run but fails in the long run. Journals play important roles. They are integrated into professional organizations which, in turn, help promote your interests. Journals archive research. Journals put physical (i.e., not perishable) hard copies of articles into libraries. They give authors valuable feedback. They certify articles. They copy-edit articles. They publicize important research. They should be longer-lived than many dot-com companies. They enhance visibility by bundling similar articles together and so on.

5. Join your professional organizations and be active. INFORMS, AMA, ACR, AMS, etc., all represent you. They need to know your views. They need your support. There is truly safety in numbers. The entire business model of research is highly dependent on network externalities. These organizations provide essential seed money for conferences, publications, meetings, and public goods.

6. Respect the research of other researchers. Certainly you should cite articles in *Marketing Science*, given their extraordinary relevance. Beyond that, we should take great care to recognize the ideas of other researchers in marketing, particularly ideas developed in the nonmodeling marketing literature. Some authors favor citations to basic disciplines to garner prestige or gain credibility by association. You must acknowledge research in your own discipline if you

expect other disciplines to do so. I hope all journal editors provide these the appropriate rewards for respect.

7. Reward service. Of course, reviewing articles and accepting editorial responsibilities help your journals. However, these activities also help determine which research is published, which future directions the discipline will take, and which universities participate. You need to consider these activities when writing recommendation letters, making promotion decisions, and evaluating faculty or employees.

8. Foster a culture of cooperation. Despite popular belief, the publication game is not zero-sum. Some journals die. Some quarterly journals become bi-monthly. Advances in research spawn new funding sources and new research outlets. We need streams of research involving many different researchers.

9. Foster a culture of respect. When you write reviews, never refer to the authors. Evaluate their research and not the authors. Be polite. When you write a review, pretend that you might be the recipient.

We, as researchers, must be wary of all threats to an open and productive research environment.

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