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Journal characteristics, rankings and social acculturation in operations management

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Abstract

Over the past 15 yr, there have been several attempts in operations management to rate journals, authors and schools based on their research productivity and quality. While many of these have been very helpful in generating a relative ranking of productivity and prestige, these analyses seem incomplete in many ways. Most notably, they neglected the fact that these rankings are loaded with value judgments acquired in the process of academic acculturation on one hand and that they did not provide basic information about the journals on the other. This paper argues that the rankings reflect the *milieu* in which they were conceived and calls for “usage-based” measures as more appropriate ways of measuring a publication’s impact through influencing and changing the thinking and actions of researchers, students and practitioners. Specifically, this article has three objectives. First, it fills an information gap by giving the characteristics of 28 journals in the broadly-defined field of operations management. Second, the article summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches taken to rank journals. Third, this article shows some factors of social acculturation (acquired either through education or working in different environments) in the journal evaluation process. The empirical part of the paper is based on analyzing referencing practices of these journals, surveying senior editors, analyzing reading lists of doctoral programs at major research universities, and contacting university and corporate libraries, and consulting companies. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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“Empirical research that gains recognition beyond the fact of publication invariably has an interesting story to tell and provides insights on topics of theoretical and practical significance. In addition, it has something to teach us about the research process and how our own work might be improved.” Mowday [1]

1. Introduction

In the past 15 yr, there has been a new-found interest in measuring the influence and strength of authors and

journals in the broadly-defined field of operations management [2]. The published efforts have mainly been of three types: (1) simply counting the number of articles published in a pre-determined set of journals by researchers and institutions, taking into account the perceived quality differences among journals (e.g., [3,4]); (2) a survey of academics to determine the perceived influence or quality of journals (e.g., [5,6]); or (3) a citation analysis to see which authors, journals and institutions are the most influential (e.g., [7–9]). Despite all their differences, the three methods reflect an *internal, research community-based view* of publications. The pioneer of the “journal ranking” studies in the operations management field, Saladin [10], was much broader in his assessment as he included both academicians and practitioners in his survey to determine top quality OM-oriented journals—an idea that has not been followed so far. As suggested by the literature of other fields, practitioners

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should also be used to as a reference when the practical significance or usefulness of research is evaluated [11–13]. The “real” life of a publication starts after it is published, because then it becomes available for the broader public and its impact can be felt. In this paper, we argue for a usage-based notion of impact and define it as the extent to which a journal is actually used or has the potential to be used. The impact of a journal can be the inclusion of its articles in educational or executive programs (as a “must read” for doctoral students, for example), or getting labeled as a “must have” in academic, corporate and consulting libraries.

Different inquiry paradigms can be used to rank journals. The common assumption of all these paradigms is that of the value-determined nature of inquiry [14]. The scale ranges from the objectivist approaches to the relativist ones. Objectivists are rationalists and in their world “the relationships and observations are considered to be independent of the theories used to explain them” [15]. Most approaches used for journal rankings were based on a dominantly objectivist model—implicitly or explicitly stating that the ranking is independent from the values of the author, from time, space and environment. We are more on the relativist side on this issue and believe that there may be several conflicting rankings, reflecting the views of different communities, and these rankings to a great extent are the products of social acculturation and editorial actions.

This article has three objectives: First, Section 2 gives an overview of potential publication outlets in the broadly-defined field of production and operations management (POM). We have found that despite all the rankings and perceptions about the journals, the objective characteristics of the journals were not presented. Second, Section 3 summarizes the approaches taken to rank journals, shows the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches and builds on research in other fields. Third, the article shows how factors of social acculturation (acquired either through education or working in different environments) affects the evaluation of a journal’s influence. The empirical part of the paper is based on analyzing referencing practices of journals, surveying senior editors, contacting corporate and university libraries, consulting companies, and analyzing reading lists of major research universities. Section 4 discusses the research samples and methodologies, while Section 5 presents the results. The paper ends with a discussion of the findings and conclusions.

2. Journals and their characteristics

As noted by Beyer et al. [16], despite all the developments in information technology, journals are still the primary means of scientific communication. In determining our journal list, we had to answer two questions: (1) What journals should we include in our analysis, and (2) What are the important characteristics of a journal?

The selection of journals primarily was based on previous papers [5,17,18,9,4] and were perceived to be relevant to operations management (OM). These journals fairly easily can be divided into three broad groups. The group of production and operations management journals had eight members: *International Journal of Operations and Production Management (IJOPM)*, *International Journal of Production Economics (IJPE)*, *International Journal of Purchasing and Materials Management (IJPMM)*, *International Journal of Production Research (IJPR)*, *Journal of Business Logistics (JBL)*, *Journal of Operations Management (JOM)*, *Production and Operations Management (POMS)*, and *Production and Inventory Management Journal (PIMJ)*. The group of methodology-oriented journals (they were primarily operations research based) included eight journals: *Decision Sciences (DS)*, *European Journal of Operational Research (EJOR)*, *Interfaces (IF)*, *Management Science (MS)*, *Naval Research Logistics (NRL)*, *Omega—International Journal of Management Science (OME)*, *Journal of the Operational Research Society (JORS)*, and *Operations Research (OR)*. There were eight journals in the management group: *Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)*, *Academy of Management Review (AMR)*, *Business Horizons (BH)*, *California Management Review (CMR)*, *European Management Journal (EMJ)*, *Harvard Business Review (HBR)*, *Sloan Management Review (SMR)*, and *Strategic Management Journal (SMJ)*. We have also added four “outliers”, top journals from other fields (economics and public policy—*Economic Development Quarterly (EDQ)*, engineering—*IIE Transactions (IIE T)*, *IEEE Transactions (IEEE)* and international business—*Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)*). Although arguments can be made for the inclusion of some other journals or against some of the journals on this list, historically these 28 journals published most breakthrough articles in the broadly-defined field of Operations Management. Moreover, these journals represent the population and *lebensraum* for almost all of us in this field; it is possible but highly unlikely to have international academic success or reputation in operations management without publishing papers in a subset of these 28 journals.

Information on the journals was compiled through a survey of editors-in-chief and administered by electronic mail in late 1997 and early 1998. The survey consisted of three sections. The first section requested data on the journal’s general characteristics (paid circulation and distribution of the circulation by region and by groups) and on the journal’s review process (number of revisions and reviewers of a manuscript, average acceptance rate, lead time from submitting a manuscript to publication). The second and the third sections of the questionnaire asked questions about the perceived ranking of journals and criteria associated with these rankings. These sections will be discussed in detail later

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