

Relationships among the academic business disciplines: a multi-method citation analysis

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Abstract

A great number of papers have been published that compare the quality or impact of academic journals. This article seeks to broaden the debate on journal evaluation by showing how top journals in various academic business disciplines, as defined by the Financial Times list of top research outlets, relate to one other. Using large-scale sociometric analyses on about 140,000 citations we found that the integration of the citation network has increased over time. Moreover, the information flow from Finance and Economics to Management has become stronger and, within Management, a polarization between information generators and users has taken place. We also found that most business academics published in distinct and mostly non-overlapping disciplines. The only exceptions were Finance and Economics as well as Strategic Management and OB/HR. Surprisingly, we also found that the general business journals, which could be assumed to be cited by most other journals across the management disciplines, are not central to the entire field. For instance, they are not complementary at all to Finance and Economics. Instead, Operations Research (OR) and Management Information Systems journals occupy the central space on the perceptual map. This indicates that these disciplines (and OR in particular) are complementary with Management and with Finance and Economics.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, a series of papers in OMEGA discussed journal evaluation methodologies as well as the value of various academic journals (e.g., [1–6]). The discussion of these methods and the resulting rankings has not been limited to OMEGA but is spread over a large number of journals. A search of the literature revealed that over the last 30 years, Economics and Finance journal rankings have been discussed in 16 articles each, Accounting

journals in 10 articles, and Operations Management and Management Science journals in 9 articles each, to name a few.

There has been little research exploring the relations between journals or academic business disciplines—that is, on how journals (or disciplines) are qualitatively distinct from, or similar to, one other. One recent paper analyzed characteristics of Operations Management and Management Science journals rather than attempting another ranking [6]. This is a refreshing development in this literature stream to which we wish to add this paper.

This article seeks to show how 31 top journals in the management disciplines, as defined by the Financial Times (FT) list of top research outlets [7], relate to one

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other.¹ The purpose of this analysis is to show the interdependencies of the journals and the disciplines they represent. This is accomplished in part by comparing citation patterns over two periods of time in order to discern changes over time.

Analyzing the similarities and differences among business management journals and disciplines has several potential applications for academics. When a paper is rejected from a journal because of some shortcomings other than content, this analysis may aid the author in determining the journal with the next best fit for the article. Understanding the relationships among journals greatly aids in making this decision. Moreover, it will be useful to find out which journals are interdisciplinary in nature and thus provide outlets for publishing cross-functional research. Lastly, the analysis of journal similarities allows for empirical observations regarding the disciplines. How closely related are the management disciplines? Which journals publish (interdisciplinary) research from which academic disciplines?

Little cross-disciplinary research of this nature has been conducted. We were able to find only a few articles that reviewed journals covering the entire business management field. The first article [8] rated the perceptions of 16 journals based on the survey responses of management chairs. In the second paper [9], the authors established the importance or impact of management journals relative to each other. Two papers [10,11] used citation analysis to measure the impact of management journals. Other articles used perceptual or citation-based impact factors of management journals to establish institutional research productivity and compare the research output of business schools [2,12]. Johnson and Podsakoff [10] investigated the influence of some top-tier management journals and compared various measures of influence statistically. Similarly, Baumgartner and Pieters [13] used citation-based analyses to examine the structural influence of marketing journals on one another. Lastly, Hoffman and Holbrook [14] carried out a co-citation analysis of authors that published in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. None of these articles, however, investigated the relationships among a broader range of top management journals and their respective disciplines.

In the following section we explain the methodology employed to analyze the journals and management disciplines. We then analyze citation data to explore the relationships among journals on one side and the disciplines on the other. We conclude by assessing the implications and proposing further research.

2. Analysis of network structures

2.1. Citation analysis

We conducted a citation analysis of 31 top management journals specified in the *Financial Times* [7] (see Table 1 for a list of the journals) by counting the citations from each journal to each other journal on the list.² We refer to these 31 journals as the FT dataset throughout this paper.

Many advantages and disadvantages of using citation analysis have been discussed in the literature. The main advantage is that research can be measured in a timely fashion, independent of personal perceptions [4]. Disadvantages of citation analysis discussed in the literature include conflicting results depending on the approach used, inappropriate citation of articles, and the tendency of authors to cite within their networks in order to include possible editors and reviewers [4]. In addition, authors do not necessarily cite only the articles most relevant to their research (“we make some citations because we think our colleagues think they are important and we want to show we know that” [6], and the time lag for citations varies from one journal to the next [1].

Most of these disadvantages are only relevant when citation analysis is used for ranking a journal’s importance. There are other problems with citation analysis that are addressed by our research methods. Specifically, the issue of citing possible editors and the general tendency to cite articles published in the same journal as the article under investigation (as evident from this paper’s bibliography) is addressed through treating any self-citations as missing data [15,16]. Moreover, instead of using data from articles published during a short time frame (most studies use a one to three year time period), we used citation counts from articles published between 1985 and 2001 to articles published during the same period. This large data set remedies the issue of varying time lags across journals before articles are cited. In addition, since we counted only citations to articles contained in our data set and we included only journals that have been both in existence and covered by ISI’s *Web of Science* since 1985, a citation bias towards older journals [15] is avoided.

We also addressed another, less significant, shortcoming of citation analysis. Differences in the number of articles published in a journal each year may skew the results in favor of journals with a large number of articles per year [15]. Moreover, in some journals it is customary to have a long bibliography. Combined, these two facts result in a wide range of citation counts. On the high side, the *Strategic Management Journal* (SMJ) cited almost 7000 other articles in the FT set, followed by the *Academy of Management Journal* (AMJ) and the *Journal of Finance* (JF) with

¹ The authors acknowledge that there are high quality journals that do not appear on the FT list. The FT list is used as a representative and externally valid sample of top management journals.

² For practical purposes we have excluded 9 of the journals listed in Table 1. The main reason for omitting these journals was that they either did not exist or were not captured by ISI in 1985.

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