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Journal reputations and academic reputations – the role of ranking studies

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Abstract

Journal ranking studies are a popular means of assessing research performance but are subject to criticism. An analysis of rankings of marketing journals is undertaken revealing consistency in rankings across regions and methodologies. Agreement is most strong for the very top journals. Explanations for the consistency in rankings and implications of it are discussed.

Introduction

Over recent years Australasian academics have faced major changes in the research climate. The New Zealand government's introduction of Performance Based Research Funding (PBRF) in 2003 placed strong emphasis on publication as a measure of research performance by awarding relatively high weightings for publications relative to peer esteem and contribution to the research environment (TEC 2003). In Australia, the new Research Quality Framework (RQF) assesses research quality through quantitative measures including grading publications into tiers based on subject-specific rankings and citation data (DEST 2006).

Research assessment panels in schemes like PBRF and RQF examine vast numbers of portfolios. It is clear that proxies have to be employed to assess the quality of the publications cited and the perceived quality of the journal is the most obvious proxy (Geary, Marriott, and Rowlinson 2004). Outside of formal assessment schemes the quality of the journal is also viewed as the most important basis for assessing the quality of articles (Koojarenprasit et al. 1998). Scholarly journals have long been recognised as "an essential component in the organisation of science, and in the apportionment of recognition to scientists" (Meadows 1979:1). Academic reputations are clearly strongly linked to journal rankings (Theoharakis and Hirst 2002; Zinkhan and Leigh 1999).

The top tier journals are seen as particularly important in assessing academic success (Armstrong and Sperry 1994; Bakir et al. 2000; Kirkpatrick and Locke 1992; Theoharakis and Hirst 2002; Zinkhan and Leigh 1999). The PBRF and RQF systems' need to assess high numbers of publication lists suggests that the 'top tier' journals will become more important in Australasia in the future.

Given the focus on published outputs and perceived quality of journals, it is no wonder that journal ranking studies are common (a list of rankings of marketing journals is provided at the end of this paper). Imperfections of individual studies are sometimes used to argue that journal rankings in

general have little value (Uncles 2004; Van Fleet, McWilliams, and Siegel 2000). It is also suggested that the most influential journals change over time to a degree that makes lists mere snapshots (Baumgartner and Pieters 2003; Hawes and Keillor 2002). To assess the validity of such criticisms it is necessary to assess journal ranking studies beyond the level of individual studies. Some work has been carried out in this area already: Hawes and Keillor (2002) produced a compilation of twenty-one rankings of marketing journals, but unfortunately did not subject the rankings to any meaningful analysis. Polonsky and Whitelaw (2005) carried out an interesting analysis of consistency of ranking studies by comparing results from the following three studies: Theoharakis and Hirst's (2002) web-based survey of marketing academics in 'leading' business schools (producing both worldwide and USA rankings); Hult, Neese, and Bashaw's (1997) survey of USA-based marketing academics; and Baumgartner and Pieters' (2003) international citation-based study. Though based on only a small number of studies, their findings showed consistency between rankings, particularly for the most highly ranked journals.

The current research extends previous studies by analysing ten journal ranking studies with diverse methods and geographic coverage to provide a broader evaluation more relevant to Australasian academics. The aim is to investigate further whether there is consensus on the top marketing journals, and thence to reflect on the role of journal rankings in assessment of academic performance.

Ranking studies used in the analysis

Selection of ranking studies was designed to capture a variety of methods and data sources. Additionally, criteria such as currency, coverage of marketing titles, and sample size were considered. In addition to the three sources used by Polonsky and Whitelaw (2005), six opinion-based rankings were included: Nottingham University's 1995 multi-disciplinary survey of academics at highly-ranked UK institutions (Harzing, 2006); Koojarenprasit et al.'s (1998) surveys of chairs of AACSB marketing departments in the USA; Aston University's 2003 multi-disciplinary opinion survey of academics at Midlands universities in the UK (Harzing, 2006); and Mort et al.'s (2004) survey of Australasian marketing department heads and ANZMAC professorial members. The final data sources selected were Easton and Easton's (2003) UK RAE submission study; the University of Queensland's 2003 multi-disciplinary study based upon a compilation of more than 120 rankings which was then refined by staff at the university (Harzing, 2006); and citation-based rankings from the *Social Science Citation Index (SSCI)* (Thomson, 2005).

The ranking database

Data from the 10 sources were compiled into a database comprising 127 journal titles. Bibliographic details were checked on *Ulrich's International Periodical Directory* (2006). After merging duplicate entries, the data were reduced to 456 rankings of 121 unique journal titles. An overall ranking score was then calculated by averaging the ranks each title received.

The journals were predominantly published in the USA (61) or UK (48), with Australasia providing five ranked titles, Europe three, India one, and three journals listed as published in two regions. Calculation of Pearson Chi Square revealed no significant association between the origin of the journal and the ranking score it received ($p=0.06$). The relationship between the average of the journals' ranking scores and the age of the journals was explored using Pearson correlation. A significant but weak relationship was found ($r=0.28$, $p=0.00$) indicating that older journals tended to receive better scores.

The methodology of most of the studies did not discriminate against inclusion of any journal yet many of the journals in the database received rankings from only a few of the ten sources. This suggests that if a journal was not ranked, it was arguably not considered relevant or important. Therefore, the absence of a title from the ranking studies was in effect data in itself. The titles that had received fewer rankings were investigated using Chi Squares and it was found that the number of rankings a journal received was not significantly associated with the origin of the journal ($p=0.06$), nor with the age of the journal ($p=0.08$). A decision was made to remove the journals that were ranked in less than half of the ten studies to produce a list of titles that are commonly considered to be the leading marketing journals. The removal of infrequently ranked titles left 36 journals as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Highly Ranked Marketing Journals

Journal Rank and Title	Origin	Start year	# of Ranks	Ranking score
1. Jnl of Marketing	USA	1934	10	1.70
2. Jnl of Consumer Research	USA	1973	9	2.33
3. Jnl of Marketing Research	USA	1964	9	2.44
4. Marketing Science	USA	1982	8	4.38
5. Jnl of the Acad of Marketing Science	USA	1973	9	5.78
6. Jnl of Retailing	USA	1925	8	7.00
7. International Jnl of Research in Mktg	Europe	1984	8	11.38
8. Jnl of Business Research	USA	1973	9	11.56
9. Jnl of Advertising	USA	1972	9	11.67
10. Jnl of Advertising Research	USA	1960	10	12.00
11. Jnl of International Business Studies	UK/Can	1970	6	13.50
12. Advances in Consumer Research	USA	1973	7	16.43
13. European Jnl of Marketing	UK	1967	8	16.75
14. Industrial Marketing Mgmt	USA	1971	10	16.80
15. Marketing Letters	USA	1990	8	17.25
16. Jnl of Personal Selling & Sales Mktg	USA	1980	8	18.88
17. Jnl of Macromarketing	USA	1981	5	19.00

Journal Rank and Title	Origin	Start year	# of Ranks	Ranking score
18. Jnl of Public Policy & Marketing	USA	1982	9	19.44
19. Jnl of Product Innovation Mgmt	USA	1984	5	19.60
20. Jnl of Marketing Education	USA	1979	7	19.86
21. Jnl of Consumer Psychology	USA	1992	8	20.38
22. Psychology & Marketing	USA	1984	7	21.14
23. Jnl of International Marketing	USA	1992	9	21.78
24. Jnl of Marketing Mgmt	UK	1985	8	22.00
25. International Jnl of Market Research	UK	1959	8	25.38
26. International Marketing Review	UK	1983	7	26.86
27. Jnl of Services Marketing	UK	1986	8	27.00
28. Jnl of Consumer Marketing	UK	1983	8	27.50
29. International Jnl of Advertising	UK	1982	6	27.83
30. Jnl of Business & Industrial Mktg	UK	1985	7	30.43
31. Intl Jnl of Retail & Distribution Mgmt	UK	1986	5	33.20
32. Jnl of Global Marketing	USA	1987	6	33.83
33. Marketing Health Services	USA	1981	5	34.60
34. Services Marketing Quarterly	USA	1985	5	37.00

Agreement between ranking sources

There was strong agreement evident for the top six journals (*JM*, *JCR*, *JMR*, *MS*, *JAMS*, *JR*), with all studies that ranked them assigning them a top-ten position. Spearman rank order correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the overall level of agreement across the ten sources on all 121 titles (i.e. before removal of the infrequently ranked titles). Results are presented in row (a) of Table 2. Overall, there was a high degree of agreement in the rankings of the full list of 121 titles. Agreement between rankings does not appear to be influenced by the age of the study, with strong correlation ($r > 0.7$, $p < 0.001$) evident between studies from the 1990's and from 2002-2004. Of the 45 comparisons between rankings, only two non-significant correlations were found: Easton & Easton (2003) and Koojaroenprasit et al. (1998); and Theoharakis & Hirst (2002) and *SSCI* (2005).

When only the 36 frequently ranked titles were examined, the level of agreement between studies changed little (row (b) of Table 2), with one new significant correlation: Theoharakis & Hirst (2002) and *SSCI* (2005); and three new non-significant results: Easton and Easton (2003) was no longer significantly correlated with Hult et al (2002); *SSCI* (2005), or Baumgartners and Pieters (2003). The non-significant results could be due to Easton and Easton's (2003) unusual methodology based on RAE submissions and ranks for institutions.

Following Polonsky and Whitelaw's (2005) approach, correlations were also calculated after removing the top journals to assess their affect on the results. The ten journals with the best average ranking scores were removed from the full list of 121 titles, (row (c) of Table 2) and the top three journals were removed from the list of 36 journals (row (d)). The removal of the top journals had a similar effect on the consistency between rankings on both data sets, with 15 additional correlations no longer being significant for the 121 data set, and 17 in the 36 journal data set. Overall, 24 of the 45 correlations remained significant regardless of the data set. In all cases each of the ten studies was still correlated with at least two others, and correlations remained across diverse methodologies.

The results for the Australian-based studies are of particular interest: Mort et al. (2004) was the only study to remain significantly correlated with all the other studies regardless of the data set. This is perhaps a sign that Australian academics are well-attuned to international perceptions of journals. When the top journals were removed from the data sets *SSCI* (2005) retained significant correlations only with the two Australian-based ranking sources, perhaps indicating that Australasian academics are particularly influenced by *SSCI* impact factors.

Table 2: Spearman Correlations Between Rankings of Marketing Journals

Ranking Study	Data set	Hult et al 2002	Kooj. et al	Aston Univ.	Easton & Easton	Nottingham Univ.	Mort et al	Univ of QLD	Baumg. & Pieters	SSCI
Koojaroenprasit et al. 1998	(a)	.95(**)								
	(b)	.95(**)								
	(c)	.88(**)								
	(d)	.92(**)								
Aston University 2003	(a)	.51(**)	.80(**)							
	(b)	.51(**)	.80(**)							
	(c)	<u>.14</u>	<u>.26</u>							
	(d)	<u>.24</u>	<u>.45</u>							
Easton & Easton 2003	(a)	.58(*)	<u>.30</u>	.73(**)						
	(b)	<u>.35</u>	<u>.30</u>	.67(**)						
	(c)	<u>.49</u>	<u>-.40</u>	.71(**)						
	(d)	<u>.20</u>	<u>-.40</u>	.64(**)						
Nottingham Univ. 1995	(a)	.73(**)	.74(**)	.73(**)	.84(**)					
	(b)	.73(**)	.74(**)	.71(**)	.84(**)					
	(c)	<u>.47</u>	<u>.27</u>	.63(**)	.79(**)					
	(d)	<u>.47</u>	<u>.27</u>	.59(**)	.79(**)					
Mort et al. 2004	(a)	.78(**)	.96(**)	.79(**)	.64(**)	.69(**)				
	(b)	.72(**)	.98(**)	.80(**)	.70(**)	.71(**)				
	(c)	.56(**)	.88(**)	.69(**)	.59(**)	.54(**)				
	(d)	.47(*)	.93(**)	.71(**)	.64(*)	.55(**)				
Univ of QLD 2003	(a)	.69(**)	.93(**)	.69(**)	.61(**)	.53(**)	.87(**)			
	(b)	.66(**)	.96(**)	.68(**)	.59(*)	.54(**)	.85(**)			
	(c)	<u>.41</u>	.81(**)	.54(**)	.56(*)	<u>.28</u>	.81(**)			
	(d)	<u>.38</u>	.93(**)	.52(**)	<u>.52</u>	<u>.28</u>	.77(**)			
Baumgartner & Pieters 2003	(a)	.80(**)	.95(**)	.62(**)	.51(*)	.65(**)	.87(**)	.69(**)		
	(b)	.81(**)	.95(**)	.62(**)	<u>.40</u>	.65(**)	.87(**)	.70(**)		
	(c)	.66(**)	.83(**)	.43(*)	<u>.41</u>	<u>.38</u>	.78(**)	.47(*)		

	(d)	.67(**)	.86(**)	.47(*)	<u>.26</u>	<u>.38</u>	.77(**)	.50(*)		
SSCI 2005	(a)	.45(*)	.95(**)	.64(**)	.49(*)	.58(*)	.93(**)	.88(**)	.47(**)	
	(b)	.51(*)	.95(**)	.64(**)	<u>.40</u>	.58(*)	.93(**)	.90(**)	.59(**)	
	(c)	<u>-.17</u>	<u>.60</u>	<u>.33</u>	<u>.43</u>	<u>-.14</u>	.82(**)	.74(**)	<u>.12</u>	
	(d)	<u>-.19</u>	<u>.70</u>	<u>.42</u>	<u>.32</u>	<u>-.14</u>	.84(**)	.80(**)	<u>.14</u>	
Theoharakis & Hirst 2002	(a)	.56(**)	.96(**)	.86(**)	.65(**)	.64(**)	.88(**)	.81(**)	.73(**)	<u>.34</u>
	(b)	.53(**)	.96(**)	.65(**)	.65(**)	.64(**)	.89(**)	.85(**)	.69(**)	.69(**)
	(c)	<u>.13</u>	.86(*)	.75(**)	.60(*)	<u>.30</u>	.76(**)	.63(**)	.50(**)	<u>-.01</u>
	(d)	<u>.08</u>	.91(**)	.81(**)	.60(*)	<u>.30</u>	.80(**)	.71(**)	<u>.44</u>	<u>.33</u>

KEY: Data sets rows: (a): 121 titles, (b) 36 frequently ranked titles, (c) 121 titles minus the top 10, (d) 36 titles minus the top 3

** significant at the 0.01 level

* significant at the 0.05 level

non-significant results underlined

Discussion

The results reveal a level of consistency across ranking studies that is remarkable given their diverse methodologies and origin of data sources. The rankings for the top journals in particular were very stable. A look at older ranking studies suggests that the top marketing journals have changed little over recent decades: Six of the top ten from this study were in Coe and Weinstock's (1983) top ten and eight appear in Luke and Doke's (1987) top ten. The top five journals from both the Jobber and Simpson (1988) and Pecotich and Everett (1989) studies appear in the top ten from this research. Browne and Becker's (1991) top ten journals included five of the titles from the current study, including the same top three titles; and Heischmidt and Gordon (1993) also had the same top three journals as the current study, and six other titles from the aggregate top ten appeared in their top eleven.

The aggregate list of ranked journals shown in Table 1 can in a sense be considered superior to single-study lists because triangulation through the use of a variety of data sources is believed to enhance validity and reliability (Perry, Riege, & Brown, 1998). However, the issue of construct validity of ranking studies remains. One may question what criteria journals are being ranked upon that enables the lists to remain consistent across the years, across the world, and across ranking methods despite changes in editorial boards. One explanation is that the quality of the articles is consistent, leading to the journals being seen as high quality regardless of the measurement method applied. There is evidence that in other disciplines well ranked journals do not contain articles of a consistent standard (Seglen 1997; Teevan 1980; Weale, Bailey and Lear 2004), but research of this kind has not been carried out on marketing journals. An alternative explanation for the consistent rankings is that a journal's reputation may sustain their rank through variation in the quality of content. Empirical work in consumer marketing has demonstrated that time lags of five to seven

years can occur between changes in objective quality and resultant change in perceptions of quality, and the lag is longer for high reputation brands (Mitra and Golder 2006).

If journal rankings in marketing were found to be based on reputation rather than the quality of current content, it would be tempting to seek other research assessment aids. However, to be viable in the large assessment exercises, quantitative measures would be needed and all are subject to criticism. Large bodies of literature exist on limitations of citation counts, including perfunctory and negative citations (Martens 2003; Small 1982); biases in citation data base coverage (Klein and Chang 2004; VSNU, KNAW, and NWO 2003); and the influence of journal circulation on citation (Day, 1996; Starbuck, 2003). It is also recognised that many articles are used but not cited (Armstrong 2002; Cote, Leong, and Cote 1991). A practical alternative to journal rankings is not immediately apparent.

Conclusion

This study used data from ten journal ranking studies to explore consistency between rankings of marketing journals. Contrary to criticism of journal ranking studies, significant correlations were found across the diverse ranking studies suggesting that such studies produce stable and consistent lists of marketing's journals.

While the basis of the consistent rankings is uncertain, in the absence of further investigation journal rankings remain a convenient tool for assessing research performance. Furthermore, reliance on journal rankings may be inevitable in a broadly-based discipline like marketing: With a myriad of marketing specialisations, it is arguably difficult for many marketing academics to understand and assess the content of many of the discipline's journals.

In the absence of a viable alternative, journal ranking lists are likely to continue to be employed as a tool for the assessment and funding of academic research. While this may not be a popular state of affairs, there is an undeniable symmetry in having the reputations of marketing academic being intrinsically linked to the reputations of journals.

Selected journal ranking studies covering marketing titles

(Full citations in the reference list on the following page)

Journal Ratings/Rankings Based on Measures of Use

(Based on data capturing a specific use of journals, such as citation analysis or RAE submission data)

Jobber and Simpson 1988

Pecotich and Everett 1989

Zinkhan and Leigh 1999

Tahai & Meyer 1999 (in Harzing 2006)

Baumgartner and Pieters 2003

Easton and Easton 2003

Geary, Marriott & Rowlinson 2004

Thomson ISI *Social Science Citation Index* 2005

Journal Ratings/Rankings Based on Opinion Surveys

(Use traditional method survey methods, usually subjected to peer-review)

Coe and Weinstock 1969, 1983

Fry Walters and Scheuermann 1985

Luke and Doke 1987

Browne and Becker 1991, 1985

Heischmidt and Gordon 1993

Lancaster University Management School 1994 (in Harzing, 2006)

Nottingham University 1995 (in Harzing 2006)

Hult, Neese and Bashaw 1997

Koojarenprasit, Weinstein, Johnson and Remington 1998

Vereniging Samenwerkende Nederlandse Universiteiten 1994,1999 (in Harzing, 2006)

Theoharakis and Hirst 2002

University of Aston 2003 (in Harzing, 2006)

Mort, McColl-Kennedy, Kiel, 2002 & Mort, McColl-Kennedy, Kiel, & Soutar 2004

Journal Ratings/rankings Based on Institutional Assessment

(Selected staff at one institution grade journals based on attributes they consider important. Usually not subjected to peer review.)

Bradford Appendix 1997 (in Harzing, 2006)

Hong Kong Baptists University School of Business 2000 (in Harzing, 2006)

Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien 2001 (in Harzing, 2006)

Cranfield University School of Management 2004 (in Harzing, 2006)

Multi-method

(Use more than one methodology or compile other rankings)

University of Queensland 2003 (in Harzing, 2006)

Other Ranking Methods

(Miscellaneous less common approaches to ranking)

Virginia Commonwealth University 1998 (in Harzing, 2006) *(uses author affiliation indices)*

Polonsky, Jones and Kearsley 1999 *(based on library holdings)*

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