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Design-Related and Design-Focused Research: A Study of Publication Patterns in Design Journals

Abstract In this paper we examine publication patterns in peer-reviewed journals that publish design research. Our data consists of 4727 articles and their citations as published in 11 journals over a ten-year period (2000–2009). These 11 journals are classified as either design-related or design-focused, depending on whether they specialize in design research or related disciplines. Our research findings suggest that the research community publishing in design-related journals is, for the larger part, made up of different institutions and scholars than the research community focusing on design-focused journals. The design-focused journals seem to be less impactful than the design-related journals. Top authors from the design-focused community tend to publish more papers in the design-related journals than the other way around.

Keywords

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Introduction

The discipline of design is relatively young, but has rapidly matured in recent decades. This is evidenced by an increase in the number of design journals and dedicated design conferences since the late 1980s, and by an increase in the amount of attention being paid to design in journals from other academic fields like innovation and marketing.¹

As the body of design research develops and expands, it is interesting to examine the publication patterns of institutions and researchers publishing in the field of design. In other research fields, studies providing rankings of schools and scholars on the basis of the number of papers published, and the citations of these papers, are relatively common.² In this paper we also recognize the performance of those universities and scholars that have made a significant contribution to the academic development of the design discipline. Another major aim of this paper is to provide insight into the publication patterns of leading institutions and scholars.

A recent study provided a list of 14 journals considered to be leading in industrial design research.³ When examining the nature of these 14 journals, a distinction can be made between so-called *design-relevant* journals and *design-focused* journals. Design-relevant journals focus on a disciplinary area such as ergonomics or human-computer interaction. Design researchers use insights from these fields in their design research, and contribute to these fields when publishing their work in these journals. However, if design research is understood to focus on the development of and human interaction with products and services, as in Gemser et al.'s study, some of the papers being published in these design-relevant journals cannot really be called design research. Design-focused journals, on the other hand, do specifically focus on design research – even though they do cover a broad spectrum of design aspects.

In this paper, we show there is a substantial difference in ranking in terms of top design schools and scholars according to the type of journal – design-relevant or design-focused – they choose. Our data consists of articles and their citations as published in six design-related and five design-focused journals over a ten year-period (2000–2009). In the next three sections of this paper, we will elaborate on the methods used to collect and analyze this data and present our findings. In the concluding section, we will discuss the implications and limitations of our study.

Research Method

In this paper, we examine publication patterns in design research by examining articles published in peer-reviewed journals over a 10-year period (2000–2009). The peer-reviewed journals included in our investigation are a subset of the 14 journals identified as leading in the industrial design field in Gemser et al.'s study in 2012. In that article, the authors defined and delimited design research as “research on developing and interacting with products and services.”⁴ Because we used this subset as our sampling frame, the present research on publication patterns in design research observes the same delimitation and thus excludes design research on architecture or landscape design, for example. For three of these 14 leading design journals – *Journal of Design History*, *Design and Culture*, and *Journal of Design Research* – there was no reliable information on citations, since these journals are not included in either Scopus or Web of Science.⁵ Because citation data is necessary to assess the impact of institutions in the design field, we decided to exclude these journals. The 11 remaining top design journals included in our study are listed in [table 1](#). As noted earlier, we make a distinction between design-relevant and design-focused journals, thus [table 1](#) specifies to which category the different journals belong.

To examine publication patterns in design research, here we build on existing

1 For example, in the *Journal of Product Innovation Management* one editor calls for more papers from the domain of design research, saying “[I] would like to see continued growth in submissions from our colleagues in other functional areas, particularly strategy and design.” Wim Biemans, Abbie Griffin, and Rudy Moenaert, “Twenty years of the Journal of Product Innovation Management: History, Participants, and Knowledge Stock and Flows,” *Journal of Product Innovation Management* 24, no. 3 (2007): 193–213.

2 For innovation management, see for example Pianpian Yang and Lei Tao, “Perspective: Ranking of the World’s Top Innovation Management Scholars and Universities,” *Journal of Product Innovation Management* 29, no. 2 (2012): 319–31; Jeff Thieme, “Perspective: The World’s Top Innovation Management Scholars and Their Social Capital,” *Journal of Product Innovation Management* 24, no. 3 (2007): 214–29. For marketing, see for example Louis TW Cheng, Kam C. Chan, and Ricky YK Chan, “Publications in Major Marketing Journals: An Analysis of Research Productivity of Asia-Pacific Universities,” *Journal of Marketing Education* 25, no. 2 (2003): 163–76; Scott J. Vitell and Gregory M. Rose, “Publications in Major Marketing Journals: An Analysis of Scholars and Marketing Departments,” *Journal of Marketing Education* 22, no. 2 (2000): 99–107. For finance, see for example Kenneth A. Borokhovich, Robert T. Bricker, Kelly R. Brunarski, and Betty J. Simkins, “Finance Research Productivity and Influence,” *The Journal of Finance* 50, no. 5 (1995): 1691–1717; Kam C. Chan, Carl R. Chen, and Thomas L. Steiner, “Who is Publishing? An Analysis of Finance Research Productivity in the European Region,” *Journal of Business Finance & Accounting* 31, no. 3–4 (2004): 401–437; and Elvis Jarneć, R. Segara, L. Segara, and J.P. Westerholm, “The Scholarly Output of Universities and Academics in the Asia-Pacific Region Who Publish in Major Finance Journals: 2000–2007,” *Australasian Accounting Business and Finance Journal* 2, no. 3 (2008): 2. For educational psychology, see for example M. Cecil Smith et al., “Productivity

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