

Quality perceptions of design journals: The design scholars' perspective

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The primary objectives of this study were to identify a set of journals that report on industrial design research and to propose quality rankings of those journals. Based on an online survey, design journals were assessed in terms of two quality metrics: popularity and indexed average rank position. We find that both general and specialized design journals are highly valued and that geographic origin and academic background can be related with journal rankings. The results of the study offer a guide to both evaluators and those evaluated when judging or selecting research outlets.

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Industrial design, a discipline focusing on product and service development, is relatively young as an academic field of study. In the U.S., the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh was the first academic program in the field, starting in the early 1930s (Lesko, 1997). The British Royal College of Art, founded in 1837 as the Government School of Design, took on university status in 1967. The Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering at Delft University of Technology was started in 1969. Most of today's respected institutions entered the field of industrial design much later. In their early years, the academic institutes of design tended to focus on teaching rather than research, educating thousands of design professionals. Today, there are several thousand design schools offering programs in industrial design, and design courses are taught in schools and faculties of business, engineering, technology, information science, and more, as well as in interdisciplinary programs.

A scientific discipline is about theories and methods that accumulate through academic research and reflection. The first academic journals reporting on research in the field of industrial design appeared in the late 1970s and 1980s: *Design Studies* began to publish in 1979, *Design Issues* was launched in 1984

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and the *Journal of Design History* in 1988. Since then, design research has only expanded. This is demonstrated by the increasing growth of academic journals of design research, such as the *International Journal of Design*, established in 2007, and new design research conferences such as those organized by the Design Research Society, the Design Society and the Design and Emotion society. In 2005 the Design Research Association and the Asian design research societies formed the International Association of Societies of Design Research (IASDR), establishing a global platform for design research.

Developing new products and services requires exploring and exploiting many different types of knowledge and insights. [Blevis, Lim, and Stolterman \(2006: 2\)](#) describe the challenge:

“For something to be designed well, it needs to have been designed in consideration of more than mathematical integrity, cognitive models of ‘users,’ or usability—it needs to have been designed in consideration of contexts, environments, inter-relations, markets, emotions, aesthetics, visual forms, semiotic references and a whole host of considerations that are part of the assumed nature of successful designs.”

Not surprisingly, design researchers address design topics from the perspectives of different foundational disciplines, including engineering, psychology, anthropology, sociology, arts, management, computing, information science, economics, and more. While this may lead to anxiety on the part of the insecure, others recognize this as a necessary outcome in an interdisciplinary field ([Friedman, 2003: 508](#)).

Given that design research is interdisciplinary in nature, design researchers must frequently choose whether to publish their work in design journals or in journals outside of the design field. Since promotion and pay for university faculty generally depends on publication performance ([Coe & Weinstock, 1984](#); [Gomez-Meija & Balkin, 1992](#); [Linton & Thongpapanl, 2004](#)), ambitious design researchers may prefer to publish in journals with high impact factors. The impact factor of a journal is a measure reflecting the average number of citations to articles published. Many design journals are not included or have a relatively low ranking in journal impact factor analyses. As a result, design researchers may be tempted to send their best work to journals outside the design field. National research funding programs often encourage this trend because many research funding schemes favor researchers and institutions that have an established publication track record when allocating research funds.

Impact factor deserves more attention than we can give it here. The common perception is that impact factor is a major differentiator among journals. This is open to debate. [Leydesdorff and Bornmann \(2011\)](#) argue convincingly that current impact measures do not reflect the real impact and value of some journals. In his ongoing study of citations and impact among management

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