

**Where Do Nonprofit and Civil Society Researchers Publish? Perceptions of
Nonprofit Journal Quality**

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Abstract

The field of nonprofit and civil society studies has seen tremendous growth in the past few decades and scholarly journals have played a central role for this growth by facilitating circulation of research in the academic community. To date, only three nonprofit journals have an impact factor and are indexed in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI). However, there are several other journals serving the nonprofit and civil society academic community that do not appear in the SSCI. Thus, focusing solely on impact factors is unfeasible for creating rankings or to assess journal quality, as doing so fails to capture these other outlets. Seeking to surmount some of the shortcomings of relying merely on impact factors, this exploratory study uses survey data collected from nonprofit and civil society researchers in the United States and Europe to capture which journals they perceive to be quality outlets in the field. Findings show that impact factor is not necessarily the most common indicator for journal quality, instead newer outlets without impact factor are also perceived as potential viable outlets for publications with (at least) second tier if not top tier quality rating.

Keywords

Journal quality, nonprofit and civil society, perceptions, stated preference ranking

Introduction

The field of nonprofit and civil society studies has seen tremendous growth in the past few decades, prompting some scholars to say the state of knowledge production has reached a point of maturity (Ma & Konrath, 2018). Scholarly journals such as *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* (NML), *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* (NVSQ), and *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-Profit Organizations* (Voluntas), have played a

central and critical role for the growth and maturity of the nonprofit and civil society studies field by facilitating and promoting the “circulation of literature on nonprofits in the academic community, which can help to form a scholarly identity of nonprofit studies” (Ma & Konrath, 2018, p. 1146). While many would agree having a robust set of quality journals is essential for the dissemination and accumulation of scholarly knowledge, it is surprising that only a few studies have attempted to assess the perceived quality of nonprofit and civil society journals.

The three journals mentioned above are all indexed in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), a multidisciplinary index containing over 3000 social science journals and being made available through Web of Science. The SSCI uses impact factor as the main indicator to rank journals and to provide comparison of the quality of journals vis-à-vis other journals in the respective fields such as economics, political science, and management. However, there are several other journals serving the nonprofit and civil society academic community that do not appear in the SSCI. In other words, relying solely on the impact factor as the principal indicator of journal quality might conceal the presence of other journals nonprofit and civil society scholars consider to be high-quality outlets for their research. Seeking to surmount the limitations of the impact factor approach, this exploratory study uses survey data collected from nonprofit and civil society researchers in the United States and Europe to capture which journals researchers perceive to be quality outlets in the field.

The notion of journal quality

Academic journals started to emerge toward the end of the 17th century, and one of the earliest scholarly outlets was *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, which was created in the mid-1660s (Andrade, 1965). Over the past 350 years, academic journals

have consolidated their central position in both the natural and social sciences as an effective means to disseminate scholarly work and research findings. According to Schaffner (1994), academic journals play a number of key roles in the scholarly communities, including building and communicating a collective knowledge base, validating the quality of research, and building scientific communities. Indeed, in most scientific fields, publishing an article in a top-tier peer-reviewed journal is considered a contribution to disciplinary knowledge that stands above other forms of scholarly outlets (Seipel, 2003). Furthermore, publications in academic journals play a vital role in the promotion and tenure process for many scholars (Gomez-Mejia, & Balkin, 1992; Seipel, 2003). Having authored an article published in a high impact-factor, peer-reviewed journal is often considered the most credible evidence of scholarship and sends a strong signal of thought leadership and research competence, qualities that many universities wish to see in their faculty members (Park & Gordon, 1996).

The quality and impact of a journal is often based on how widely it is read, how often it is cited, and how it is perceived in the scholarly community (Bradshaw & Brook, 2016). Quality and impact of journals are commonly quantified by their *Impact Factor*. The impact factor is calculated by counting all citations articles have received published by the journal in the preceding two years and dividing this count by the number of articles the journal published in those two years (Baum, 2011; Garfield, 1999). Originally intended to sort journals by citation rates to support the selection of journals into library collections (Garfield, 1999, 2006), the journal impact factor is now predominantly used to classify journals and compare their relative quality. Using the impact factor to rank journal quality has some distinct benefits such as creating a tool to compare research performance (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992). However, the impact factor is also used in ways that were not intended and, as such, may have negative

consequences. For instance, the impact factor is frequently considered in hiring, evaluation for promotion and tenure, and to make grant decisions (Adler & Harzing, 2008; Baum, 2011; Nkomo, 2009) as well as pay increases (Adler & Harzing, 2008; Baum, 2011; Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992). Since the impact factor has tangible consequences for researchers, scholars frequently use impact factors as deciding factor in where to submit their manuscripts (Garfield, 2006) leading others to argue the impact factor is “a powerful incentive in academia [that] has taken a role as the new currency for scientists [and, therefore] has the potential to deeply change the motivational forces of scientists” (Paulus, Rademacher, Schäfer, Müller-Pinzler, & Krach, 2015, p. 1-2). As such, some researchers tend to modify their research questions as well as research design to appeal to high impact-factored journals (Baum, 2011). Related, Adler & Harzing (2008) find scholars may not elect to send their research to new and innovative journals that do not (yet) have an impact factor, since publication in those outlets is not valued by universities. Finally, there is a tendency to use journal rank as proxy for high quality articles published in said journal. As such, “it has become common to refer to a scholar’s worth by saying that he or she has two AMJ’s [*Academy of Management Journal*], ... Without ever mentioning the content, quality of impact of the article itself, the implication is that the scholar must be good” (Adler & Harzing, 2009, p. 78). However, doing so leads to judgment errors as many influential articles are published in less highly ranked (or not ranked at all) journals while many less influential articles are published in highly ranked journals (Singh, Haddad, & Chow, 2007; Aguinis, Cummings, Ramani, & Cummings, 2019)

Journal rankings based on the impact factor and relying on citation analysis, as described above, are classified as revealed preference rankings (Tahai & Meyer, 1999; Walters, 2017) and the most common way to rank journals (Tahai & Meyer, 1999). Aside from this approach,

scholars identify a second approach—stated preference rankings of journals, which captures the preferences, perceptions and choices of academic experts and scholars in the respective field (Tahai & Meyer, 1999; Walters, 2017; Bernick & Krueger, 2010). This approach “has gained recognition because the resulting list reflects the cumulative opinion of active scholars who produce and consume research published in journals being ranked” (Serenko & Bontis, 2018, p. 749). Rather than relying on statistics generated through citations, this approach integrates the perceptions of research-active individuals in the respective field and, therefore, allows to capture other aspects of journal quality aside from impact factor. Stated preference rankings are used in fields with relatively small audiences and fields with relatively poor coverage in mainstream citation databases (e.g., SSCI). The stated preference approach towards ranking journals seems to be appropriate in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies, as we will describe below.

Nonprofit and civil society journals: Previous inquiry and research questions

This study focuses on nonprofit and civil society studies, an interdisciplinary field that draws from areas such as political science, political administration, management, sociology, social work, and education (Shier & Handy, 2014; Ma & Konrath, 2018). Over the past three decades, the study of nonprofit and civil society has been an area that has witnessed substantial growth in both academic and educational attention (Brudney & Herman, 2004; Mirabella, 2007). As a result, there has been a tremendous expansion in knowledge production in the nonprofit and civil society field as indicated by a proliferation of scholarly publications (Ma & Konrath, 2018) as well as a growing number of dissertations and theses (Shier & Handy, 2014). Furthermore, the number of journals targeting nonprofit and civil society studies has increased significantly. Before 1990, there was only one peer-reviewed journal devoted exclusively to nonprofit and civil

society topics, including voluntary action, citizen participation, philanthropy, and nonprofit management. Today, there are more than sixty journals that include terms like nonprofit, third or voluntary sector, philanthropy, civil society, social economy, and social movements, in their journal name (Smith, 2013).

Despite the proliferation of scholarly outlets, relatively few inquiries have sought to assess the quality of nonprofit and civil society journals. Smith (2013) provides a comprehensive overview of the wide spectrum of outlets for nonprofit and civil society scholarship (what Smith refers to as *altruistics*). In total, more than one hundred active and inactive generalist and specialized academic journals were identified having published articles related to nonprofit organizations and civil society. However, beyond basic descriptive information, Smith's article does not include any discussion about journal quality. Ma and Konrath (2018) utilized the core list from Smith (2013) to evaluate knowledge production in nonprofit and philanthropic studies from a quantitative and thematic perspective. After evaluating the core list, they decided to shorten it from sixty-one to nineteen since many of the journals on the core list are published irregularly and "deviate greatly on quality" (p. 1142). Unfortunately, Ma and Konrath (2018) neither list the names of the nineteen journals nor engage in an explicit discussion about differences in quality among the journals.

Brudney and Herman (2004) conducted a rare study that purposefully included a quality indicator when comparing nonprofit and civil society journals. They asked 186 members on the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) and International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR) listserves to answer questions about (among other things) readability, relevance for practice and theory, utility, and perceived quality of the articles. However, Brudney and Herman's (2004) study only targeted three journals:

NVSQ, *NML*, and *Voluntas*. Clearly, these three journals are key to any discussion about outlets for nonprofit and civil society scholarship. At the same time, they are not the exclusive outlets for nonprofit and civil society research.

Nonprofit journals traditionally have not been included in research of journal quality in the field of public administration. More recently though, Bernick & Krueger (2010) surveyed editors and board members of 39 public administration journals including *NVSQ* (overall rank of 23) and *NML* (overall rank of 35). Their subfield analysis of nonprofit management indicates that aside from *NVSQ* and *NML*, *Public Administration Review* (*PAR*), *Administration and Society* (*A&S*), and the *Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory* (*JPART*) were in the top five. However, “a number of respondents indicated that they felt uncomfortable ranking nonprofit journals [...] because they did not consider themselves knowledgeable about the quality of [...] nonprofit journals (Bernick & Krueger, 2010, p. 104). We therefore believe, the time is ripe to survey those knowledgeable about nonprofit journal quality: researchers in the field. Specifically, we are taking a stated preference approach to journal rankings and focus on perceptions of journal quality rather than using the objective, but highly criticized impact factor. This exploratory study, therefore, seeks to examine two basic questions: *which scholarly journals do nonprofit and civil society scholars perceive as the most relevant and viable outlets for their research? Of the identified journals, which scholarly journals are perceived as being most prestigious and of highest quality (top tier) and which scholarly journals are perceived as second and third tier?* Thus, our study focuses on both the identification and perception of quality of journals in the nonprofit and civil society research context.

Taking a stated preference approach has distinct advantages (Walters, 2017). First, this study proposes an alternative approach to impact-factor-based rankings, since “many

subdisciplines are underrepresented in the databases used to calculate the most commonly used, and supposedly ‘objective’ measure of journal ‘quality’: the ISI journal impact factor (which actually measures influence, not quality” (Adler & Harzing, 2009, p. 80). Particularly, for the field of nonprofit and civil society studies, newly emerging journals without impact factor such as *Nonprofit Policy Forum* (NPF) or the *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs* (JPNA) are not covered by the impact factor as measure. Second, solely relying on impact factor to rank journals or, by extension, the quality of the author, runs the risk of assuming that only journals with high impact factors are publishing high quality work (Adler & Harzing, 2009; Singh, Haddad, & Chow, 2007, Aguinis et al., 2019). Third, we agree with Serenko & Bontis (2018), who argue that “it is extremely difficult to deliberately influence the journal quality perceptions of a large group of independent scholars, whereas citations may be dramatically boosted in the short term by means of questionable practices such as forced citations or excessive self-citations” (p. 749). As such, we deem the stated preference approach superior for the purposes of our study, since developing a revealed preference journal ranking may not only be difficult to achieve given the interdisciplinary nature of nonprofit and civil society studies, but is also not desirable given the limitations of those rankings as discussed above.

To summarize, although the field of nonprofit and civil society studies has seen tremendous growth, including the number of outlets, only a handful of journals have been captured in revealed preference rankings (Ma & Konrath, 2018). Moreover, journals publishing related research are ranked under different categories such as social issues, public administration, or management (Journal Citation Reports, 2018), which makes it difficult to compare their quality directly. The absence of a ranking leaves tenure seeking nonprofit and civil society scholars in a bind, since scholars oftentimes work in departments where journal rankings are

used to assess the quality of one's publication record. One goal of this study is therefore to provide tenure seeking faculty with evidence to contextualize their choice of publication outlets and to make their case for promotion and tenure.

Methodology

Studying perceptions of journal quality is a fairly new endeavor in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies. Given the exploratory nature of the research question and following other scholars studying journal quality (Meggs, Greer, Bian, & Gustina, 2017), this study uses a convenience sample drawn from three different groups. The first group included administrators of nonprofit degree programs that belong to the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC). The list of administrators was collected using contact information provided on the NACC website. The second group included North American nonprofit and civil society scholars. The list of scholars was obtained by identifying the leading nonprofit programs using the 2018 US News & World Report ranking, and visiting each program's website to collect contact information and names of scholars identified by the authors. For the two groups, a total of 123 individuals were identified. We received 63 responses (a 51.22% response rate). The third group included a small number of European nonprofit and civil society scholars identified by the authors. Individuals in the European group were also asked to share the survey link with others they deem knowledgeable about the subject¹. The sample consisted of 19 European nonprofit scholars responding to the survey. Before analyzing the data, we excluded 13 observations with all missing data (9 from the US group and 4 from the European group). The final sample size was 69. Data were collected in October 2018.

¹ Before collecting data, the university Institutional Review Board reviewed this study and classified it as exempt from Human Subject Review.

Survey Instrument

The individual's perceptions of journal quality were assessed by asking each respondent to think about journals that, in their opinion, serve as the most viable outlet to publish nonprofit and civil society research. Each respondent was then asked to write the names of the journals and to classify each journal mentioned based on how the respondent perceived the quality of that journal (1= Top tier / most prestigious / high quality, 2= Second tier / somewhat prestigious / medium quality, 3= Third tier / less prestigious / lower quality). A few considerations went into the decision not to provide respondents with a predetermined list of journals. First, we decided against providing respondents with a list of journals to rank, to avoid biasing respondents. Allowing the option to free-write may elicit journal mentions that are not part of a predetermined list (Walters, 2017). Second, since there is no dedicated ranking of journals in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies, compiling a list would have been challenging. Similarly, existing lists—such as the one proposed by Smith (2013)—may exclude new journals, may not be comprehensive with regards to coverage (Walters, 2017) or could be outdated (Ma & Konrath, 2018).

To determine whether there are differences between subgroups, we collected a range of demographic and background variables. Particularly, respondents were asked about their gender (1=female, 2=male, 3=non-binary, 4=prefer not to say), age (in years), tenure status (1=tenured, 0=untentured), main areas of research (1= Nonprofit Management, 2=Governance, 3=Human Resource Management, 4=Fundraising/Development, 5=Marketing, 6=Collaboration, 7=Social Entrepreneurship/Social Enterprise, 8=Volunteering, 9=Finance/Economics, 10=Philanthropy, 11=NGOs/International Civil Society, and 12=Other), whether they serve as an editorial board

member of a journal (1=yes, 0=no), and whether they hold an administrative role with regard to a nonprofit or civil society program in their school (1=yes, 0=no).

To evaluate to which extent, if at all, schools consider particular journals when making decisions for promotion and tenure, we asked: “Is there a list of journals that your department/school considers when evaluating tenure decisions for these faculty?” Answer options were yes = 1 and no = 0, with the option to elaborate if lists were available.

We also asked an open-ended question (“Is there anything else you would like to share with regards to your perceptions of journal quality in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies?”) at the end of the survey. Responses to this question will be used to contextualize our findings, where appropriate.

Findings

The average age of the respondents was 45 years (Median=42.5; s.d.=9.09; min=30, max=70). About half of the sample was female (50.72 %), one person preferred not to say, the remainder of the sample was male (47.83%). Approximately 58 % of the respondents were tenured, and about 39 % indicated serving in an administrative role with regard to a nonprofit or civil society program. More than half of the respondents (56.5 %) indicated they currently serve as a member of a journal editorial board. Most of the respondents (58.8 %) reported three or more research areas, 23.5 % reported to have two main areas of research, and 17.6 % of the respondents reported having a single major area of research. The maximum number of research areas reported was six. Nonprofit management (50 mentions), NGO/civil society (28 mentions) and governance (21 mentions) were the three most often mentioned research areas (see figure 1 for total breakdown of research areas).

[Figure 1 about here]

Respondents mentioned 75 different journals². The average number of journals mentioned was 6.48 (s.d.=4.45), and the median was 5 (the mean is considerably larger due to four respondents mentioning over 15 journals each). Forty-five journals received only one mention (60%). These statistics point to the extensive field of journals that nonprofit and civil society scholars deem viable outlets for publications. A full list of mentioned journals can be obtained from the authors.

Table 1 shows journals being mentioned at least three times and illustrates the perceived quality of the respective journals as indicated by the respondents. We supplemented table 1 with information on the total number of volumes, number of issues published yearly, impact factor (where applicable), whether or not the journal is peer-reviewed, and whether or not the journal is an open access journal. Journals are sorted by highest overall mentions (column: “count”).

[Insert Table 1]

Voluntas received the highest number of mentions (69; 100% of respondents) closely followed by *NVSQ* with 68 mentions (98.6% of respondents) and *NML* with 62 (89.9% of respondents) mentions. As indicated by the high volume numbers, these three journals have been in operation for quite some time. Respondents were almost unanimous in rating *NVSQ* as top tier publication outlet (98.53%). Responses for *NML* and *Voluntas* were more dispersed; 64% rated *Voluntas* as top tier and 35% as second tier outlet, *NML* was rated top tier by 55% of the respondents and 42% rated it as second tier outlet. This first group corresponds to the journals mentioned above that are listed in the SSCI.

² Six entries had ambiguous abbreviations and were excluded.

This first group of journals is followed by a second group of journals with considerable less mentions (17-24; 24.6-34.8% of respondents): *NPF*, *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership (JNEL)*, *Voluntary Sector Review (VSR)*, *JPNA*, and *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing (IJNVSM)*. This group is very diverse as indicated by a mix of open access and non-open access journals. Notably, though, journals in this group have not been around for as long as the first group and none of the journals has an impact factor. Particularly remarkable is *JPNA*, which received 18 mentions while being the ‘youngest’ journal in the list with four volumes. The perceived quality of journals in this group was, on average, not as high as for the first group.

The third group consists of *Journal of Civil Society (JCS)*, *Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing (NPSM)*, *PAR*, and *Public Performance and Management Review (PPMR)*; journals in this group received 9 to 14 mentions (13.0 – 20.3% of respondents). Especially the latter three have been around for longer (30, 78 and 41 volumes respectively). *PAR*, in this group, is perceived as top tier journal (92%), but was only mentioned by 12 respondents. It seems that *PAR* is considered top tier outlet for nonprofit and civil society researchers, but may not be as viable judging from the lower number of mentions.

Journals in the last group *Foundation Review (FR)*, *JPART*, *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research (ANSERJ)*, *Journal of Public Affairs Education (JPAE)*, *Nonprofit Quarterly (NQ)*, *Community Development Journal (CDJ)*, *Human Service Organizations (HSO)*, *Nonprofit Times (NT)*, *Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR)* were mentioned considerably less (3-5 mentions; 4.3 – 7.2% of respondents) and are quite diverse in terms of their age and open-access policies as well as their perceived quality.

We also asked the respondents whether or not their department/school explicitly listed specific journals to guide and evaluate candidates for promotion and tenure. Nearly three out of four (72.46%) said no such list existed. Furthermore, of the respondents answering yes, the basis for the listed journals varied significantly – from being based on impact factor, to rankings available in other disciplines, to informal criteria decided by the individual department/school. It is also worth noticing that the presence of lists for promotion and tenure were more common among the European respondents (53.33%) than among the US respondents (20.37%)

Aside from the description above, it is important to note that table 1 consists of a diverse range of journals that are both peer-reviewed and non-peer reviewed, open and non-open access, and with and without impact factor. In fact, a majority of journals perceived to be viable outlets in the field do not have an impact factor. In cases where journals have an impact factor, the impact factor does not necessarily serve as a good indication for overall mentions of the particular journal. This is notable as publishing in journals with impact factor is oftentimes an important factor in achieving tenure (Gomez-Mejia, & Balkin, 1992). Two of our open-ended responses captured the choices researchers face when considering where to submit their work for publication.

“The highest quality journals are not necessarily those with the highest (or any) impact factor. For example, Nonprofit Policy Forum has no impact factor but publishes work by highly esteemed scholars and is the only journal focused on the intersection of nonprofits and public policy. The articles in NPF are, in my opinion, consistently high quality” (female, untenured).

“The more practitioner-oriented journals like Nonprofit Quarterly, Stanford Social Innovation Review, and Chronicle of Philanthropy also serve as important outlets for scholars although publishing in these venues counts less toward tenure” (male, tenured, editorial board member, administrator).

To further investigate whether the perceptions of journal quality are different for certain sub-groups, we modified table 1 and present group 1 and 2 journals (top 8 with regards to number of mentions) by tenure status of the respondents (table 2), main fields of research (table 3), and service role (table 4).

Table 2 presents findings comparing nonprofit and civil society scholars with and without tenure. Overall, respondents with and without tenure agreed on the quality of the listed journals. However, a few statistics are worth mentioning. *NPF*, a newer outlet in the field (table 1) was perceived as top outlet by 12.5% of both tenured and untenured respondents; however, further classification into second and third tier differed between the groups. Whereas 25% of tenured respondents perceived *NPF* as second tier outlet, 62.5% of untenured respondents did. Similarly, *VSR* and *JPNA* were perceived as top tier outlet by 6.7 % of tenured respondents but no untenured respondent rated these journals as top outlet. Interestingly, *VSR* was overall rated as third tier journal (60%) by untenured respondents, while tenured respondents rated it overall as second tier (87%).

[Insert Table 2]

Table 3 presents perceptions of journal quality by the three most often mentioned areas of research: nonprofit management, NGOs/civil society, and governance. As respondents were able to indicate multiple research areas, these categories are not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless,

there are some trends that are worth elaborating. Whereas there does not seem to be differences in the pattern among the three journals in group 1, group 2 journals were rated differently depending on research focus. For instance, 28.6% in the NGO category rate *JNEL* as belonging to the top tier, but none in the governance category do. This is an interesting observation as *JNEL*, among other things, focuses on leadership. We found similar trends for *NPF* and *VSR*.

[Insert Table 3]

Table 4 presents findings of administrators and those who serve on the editorial board of a journal in the field. The sample contained 20 respondents who served as editorial board member, 11 administrators, and 16 individuals who held both roles. Similar to the previous findings, there were no notable differences in the perceptions of journals in group 1 by editorial board members and administrators. Interesting differences emerged among group 2 journals. For instance, editorial board members tended to perceive *NPF* of higher quality indicated by the higher percentages in both the top tier and second tier categories. Moreover, administrators regarded *VSR* as more prestigious as compared to editorial board members.

[Insert Table 4]

Main Takeaways and Future Research

Academic high-quality, peer-reviewed journals represent one (albeit not the only) essential outlet for scholars to present and distribute their work. However, as we have illuminated in this article, what is to be considered a high-quality journal in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies is neither straightforward nor apparent. This exploratory study proposes a different avenue to identify viable outlets in the field of nonprofit and civil society (Nkomo, 2009). Particularly, this inquiry asked nonprofit and civil society scholars in both Europe and the

US to name journals they consider the most viable outlets for their research and to indicate how they perceive the quality of the mentioned journals.

Our research utilized a stated preference approach by studying perceptions of journal quality rather than a revealed preference approach that identifies journals in the field and ranks them by their impact factor (Tahai, & Meyer, 1999; Walters, 2017). By inviting nonprofit and civil society scholars to free-write journal names instead of presenting them with a list, we are able—alongside journals with impact factor—to capture journal outlets that may not (yet) have an impact factor as well as those who do not aim to achieve one (Serenko & Bontis, 2018). Those journals are, on average, newer and may be more specialized (Adler & Harzig, 2009). Thus, we are able to, in addition to illuminating where scholars look to publish, more accurately capture the reality of which journals scholars in the field perceive as being quality outlets. As indicated in our data, newer outlets without impact factor such as *JPNA* or *NPF* are perceived as potential viable outlets for publications with (at least) second tier if not top tier quality rating.

Our findings indicate that the perceptions of nonprofit and civil society scholars converge with regards to the three journals: *Voluntas*, *NVSQ*, and *NML*. These journals are all well-established (*NVSQ* created in 1972, *Voluntas* and *NML* in 1990). As illustrated in tables 3-5, this finding holds across sub-samples of tenured/untentured respondents, main research areas of nonprofit management, NGO/civil society, and governance, as well as across service roles of administrators and editorial board members. Finding these three at the top of our list may not surprise scholars in the field as they have long been viewed as core journals for nonprofit and civil society scholarship (Brudney & Herman, 2004; Ma & Konrath, 2018). Still, these three journals are never directly showcased or compared in revealed preference rankings such as the ones provided by SSCI. Whereas *Voluntas* and *NVSQ* are ranked in Social Issues, *NML* is ranked

under both Public Administration and Management categories (Journal Citations Report, 2018). Despite their appearance in different sub-categories, nonprofit and civil society scholars clearly identify those as leading in the field.

We also uncovered a wide variety of additional outlets that scholars deem viable for their publications beyond *NVSQ*, *Voluntas*, and *NML*. Many of these journals come from neighboring disciplines such as public administration (e.g., *PAR*) or social work (e.g., *HSSO*). As noted by Smith (2013), the study of the nonprofit sector and civil society has significant breadth, which translates into an interdisciplinary field of inquiry. Indeed, our research reflects the multi-disciplinary span of research areas among a majority of the respondents as indicated by the range of research areas listed (see figure 1). A noticeable finding is that nonprofit and civil society researchers perceive journals and their quality differently depending on their main area of research. Overall, this differentiation did not apply to journals in the top 3, but differences occurred among the other journals. We suggest future research to further investigate the mechanism between research area and perceptions of journal quality. Future research should also more intentionally incorporate other potential publication outlets that researchers seek out in their fields of study. For instance, those studying social entrepreneurship may seek publication in outlets like the *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* or *Social Enterprise Journal*, whereas those studying human resource management may submit their research to outlets such as *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, or *Review of Public Personnel Administration*. To date, we lack a good understanding of the decision-making processes leading faculty to seek publication in a journal targeting nonprofit and civil society research vs. journals in their content area. Learning more about the decision-making processes between nonprofit and civil society journals vs. journals in the content area is important because readership and, thus, the audience

consuming, using and building on research findings differ. It may also be that certain schools such as business schools encourage publication in content journals whereas public affairs schools may not have such a preference.

Our findings also show that tenure status does seem to play some role with regards to perceptions of journal quality. Given the relative absence of explicit lists showcasing preferred journal outlets, if tenured faculty perceive some outlets as being of higher quality but untenured faculty do not, how can faculty on the tenure track know that these are appropriate outlets for their research? This is a particular issue for tenure-track faculty members of interdisciplinary schools where performance, promotion and tenure evaluations are made by tenured faculty with different scholarly backgrounds and foci. This issue becomes further complicated if some of the outlets perceived by tenured faculty as being of higher quality lacks indicators such as an impact factor score. Furthermore, gaining more insight into what senior (tenured) faculty consider to be high-quality journals will be of importance to junior faculty seeking promotion and tenure since, given the relatively small size of our field, the senior faculty members are likely to end up serving as external reviewers in the promotion and tenure process. However, it also may be the case that tenured faculty—for their own research—seek out these outlets because they apply different selection criteria for journal submissions than individuals on the tenure track. It may also be that untenured respondents perceived journal outlets that are peer-reviewed and/or with impact factor differently as promotion and tenure guidelines may require publications in higher quality journals, whereby quality is frequently measured using impact factors (Adler & Harzing, 2009). As we can only speculate at this point, given the data we have, future research should further investigate the decision-making processes of faculty when selecting and evaluating journals by specifically considering rank.

As a final point, our study also has the potential for providing administrators and departments with information on the diversity of potential outlets in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies, which may contextualize the choices faculty have and make when considering where to send their manuscripts. Administrators wanting to develop publication guidelines for junior (and senior) faculty could draw on this research to offer a better outlet “compass”. This would certainly be preferable compared to having junior faculty rely on anecdotal testimonies as such informal guidance does not necessarily help and support their journey toward seeking tenure.

Conclusion and Limitations

Many studies emphasizing the perceptions of journal quality have used predetermined lists which respondents are asked to rate (Catling, Mason, & Upton, 2009; Meggs, et al., 2017; Serenko & Bontis, 2018). But in order to be able to rank journals from a list, it is important that the respondents know the journals to be ranked (Walters, 2017). Since the field of nonprofit and civil society research is interdisciplinary in nature we were not in the position, nor was it our intention, to create a comprehensive list for ranking nonprofit and civil society journals. Moreover, we also did not want to bias respondents by (unconsciously) excluding journals from such a list. Still, we would encourage future research to build on our findings and take steps towards building such a list, and in doing so not solely build the list around impact factors but incorporate the diversity of outlets perceived as viable for publication in the field. As we have described in this paper, there is some indication in the data that viable journal outlets vary by research area, rank, and service on an editorial board of a journal, and we therefore encourage future research to particularly integrate these aspects.

As highlighted earlier, researchers on a tenure track are generally evaluated by the quality of their publications in peer-reviewed journals – preferably those with an impact factor (Gomez-Mejia, & Balkin, 1992). As a consequence, non-peer reviewed outlets (e.g., journals and magazines with a practitioner focus) may count less towards promotion and tenure. However, we find that non-peer reviewed outlets, for example the *NQ* and *SSIR*, were still mentioned by a number of scholars in our sample. One interpretation of this finding is that publishing in non-peer reviewed journals may provide the opportunity to impact practice in more tangible ways. Based on this finding, we propose that, as a field, we need to have discussions about what we mean by ‘having an impact’. Impact is multidimensional and, as such, research findings influence other academics as well as those outside academia (Aguinis, Suárez-González, Lannelongue, & Joo, 2012). Promotion and tenure processes have clear criteria to evaluate scholarly impact on other academics (frequently measured in number of publications in top journals as well as number of citations), but impact outside of academia is not well assessed and rewarded (Aguinis et al., 2012). A discussion about what impact means for the field must involve multiple stakeholders from within and outside academia, including scholars, educators, administrators, and those impacted and/or seeking to apply findings from the scholarly community. We believe that the major membership research associations—ARNOVA and ISTR—will likely play an important role in this discussion. After all, these institutions are meant to be platforms for debates about where we want scholars to publish to have the greatest impact on society while also making sure their work is valued by the institutions for which they work.

This exploratory study comes with key limitations, especially with regards to the sample size, which only included a small number of European scholars. Future studies could focus on attendance lists of major nonprofit and civil society conferences or drawing on listserves similar

to Brudney and Herman (2004). Moreover, the stated preference approach to capture perceived quality of journals can be prone to bias (Tahai & Meyer, 1999). For instance, scholars tend to give preference to journals with which they are familiar (Walters, 2017) and are also influenced by their personal research interests (Serenko & Bontis, 2018). Future studies, therefore, should include measures of familiarity and should better disentangle and control for the influence of personal research interests.

Still, our objective has not been to test hypotheses nor to make generalizations beyond the discrete group of nonprofit and civil society scholars surveyed for this study. Rather, our purpose has been is to take important first steps towards understanding the perceptions of journal quality in the field of nonprofit and civil society studies. To nonprofit practitioners, and others outside academia, the notion of journal quality may seem extraneous. However, to nonprofit and civil society academics—doctoral students and junior faculty in particular—having a better understating of what is perceived as a high-quality journal is a matter that can cannot be understated.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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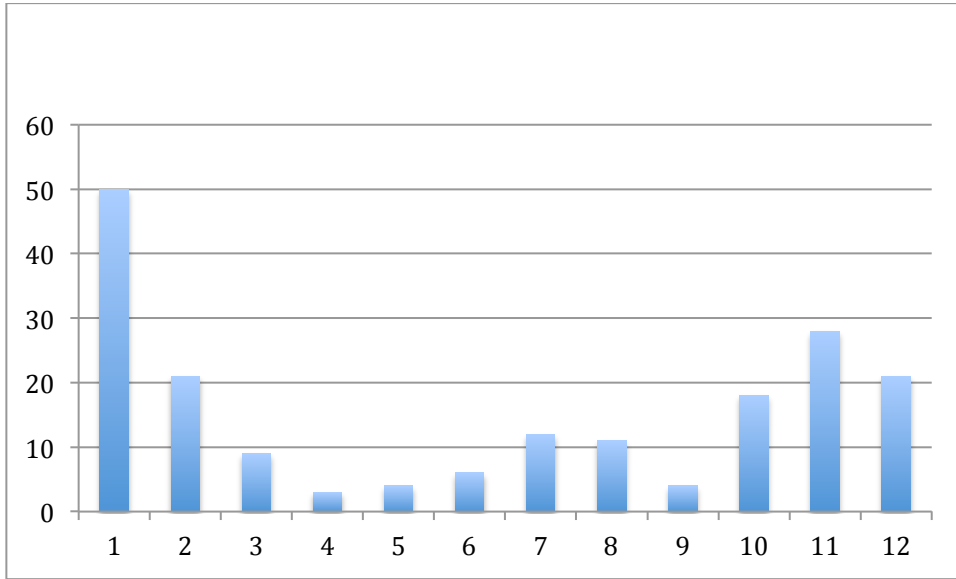
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Figure 1: Research areas by mentions



Notes: 1= Nonprofit Management, 2=Governance, 3=Human Resource Management, 4=Fundraising/Development, 5=Marketing, 6=Collaboration, 7=Social Entrepreneurship/Social Enterprise, 8=Volunteering, 9=Finance/Economics, 10=Philanthropy, 11=NGOs/International Civil Society, and 12=Other (e.g., Evaluation, Leadership, Advocacy).

Table 1. Journal Mentions (by tiers)

Journal Name	Count	Top tier / high quality	Second tier / medium quality	Third tier / lower quality	Total # of Volumes	Issues per year	Open Access	Peer review	2017 IF
Voluntas	69	63.77%	34.78%	1.45%	29	6	N	Y	1.273
Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly	68	98.53%	1.47%	0.00%	47	6	N	Y	1.932
Nonprofit Management and Leadership	62	54.84%	41.94%	3.23%	29	4	N	Y	1.633
Nonprofit Policy Forum	24	8.33%	58.33%	33.33%	9	4	Y	Y	n/a
Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership	23	13.04%	26.09%	60.87%	8	4	N	Y	n/a
Voluntary Sector Review	20	5.00%	75.00%	20.00%	9	3	N	Y	n/a
Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs	18	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	4	3	Y	Y	n/a
International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing	17	17.65%	52.94%	29.41%	23	4	N	Y	n/a
Journal of Civil Society	14	15.38%	46.15%	30.77%	14	4	N	Y	n/a
Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing	13	14.29%	64.29%	21.43%	30	4	N	Y	n/a
Public Administration Review	12	91.67%	8.33%	0.00%	78	6	N	Y	4.591
Public Performance Management Review	9	55.56%	44.44%	0.00%	41	4	N	Y	1.197
Foundation Review	5	0.00%	20.00%	80.00%	10	4	N	Y	n/a
Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory	5	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	28	4	N	Y	3.907
Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research	4	0.00%	75.00%	25.00%	9	2	Y	Y	n/a
Journal of Public Affairs Education	4	0.00%	75.00%	25.00%	24	4	N	Y	n/a
Nonprofit Quarterly	4	25.00%	75.00%	0.00%	-	-	N	-	-
Community Development Journal	3	0.00%	33.33%	66.67%	53	4	N	Y	0.750

Human Service Organizations	3	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	42	5	N	Y	0.836
Nonprofit Times	3	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	-	-	Y	-	-
Stanford Social Innovation Review	3	33.33%	0.00%	66.67%	-	-	N	-	-

Note: journals with 3 or more mentions shown. Volume numbers as of December 2018.

Table 2. Journal Mentions (by tiers and tenure status)

Journal Name		Count	Top tier / high quality	Second tier / medium quality	Third tier / lower quality
Voluntas	Tenured	40	67.50%	30.00%	2.50%
	Untenured	28	60.71%	39.29%	0.00%
Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly	Tenured	40	97.50%	2.50%	0.00%
	Untenured	28	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Nonprofit Management and Leadership	Tenured	35	51.43%	45.71%	2.86%
	Untenured	27	59.26%	37.04%	3.70%
Nonprofit Policy Forum	Tenured	16	12.50%	25.00%	62.50%
	Untenured	8	12.50%	62.50%	25.00%
Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership	Tenured	16	12.50%	25.00%	62.50%
	Untenured	7	14.29%	28.57%	57.14%
Voluntary Sector Review	Tenured	15	6.67%	86.67%	6.67%
	Untenured	5	0.00%	40.00%	60.00%
Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs	Tenured	15	6.67%	53.33%	40.00%
	Untenured	7	0.00%	57.14%	42.86%
International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing	Tenured	16	18.75%	50.00%	31.25%
	Untenured	1	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%

Note: Only top 8 journals shown (group 1 and 2, 17 and more mentions). Groups of tenured/untenured respondents are mutually exclusive. One respondent did not state tenure status.

Table 3. Journal Mentions (by tiers and three most prominent research areas)

Journal Name		Count	Top tier / high quality	Second tier / medium quality	Third tier / lower quality
Voluntas	NPM	50	70.00%	28.00%	2.00%
	NGO/CS	27	77.78%	22.22%	0.00%
	Governance	21	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%
Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly	NPM	50	98.00%	2.00%	0.00%
	NGO/CS	27	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Governance	21	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Nonprofit Management and Leadership	NPM	47	61.70%	34.04%	4.26%
	NGO/CS	22	54.55%	40.91%	4.55%
	Governance	19	63.16%	26.32%	10.53%
Nonprofit Policy Forum	NPM	20	5.00%	65.00%	30.00%
	NGO/CS	10	20.00%	60.00%	10.00%
	Governance	7	0.00%	57.14%	42.86%
Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership	NPM	20	15.00%	30.00%	55.00%
	NGO/CS	7	28.57%	28.57%	42.86%
	Governance	5	0.00%	40.00%	60.00%
Voluntary Sector Review	NPM	16	6.25%	75.00%	18.75%
	NGO/CS	6	16.67%	33.33%	33.33%
	Governance	10	0.00%	80.00%	20.00%
Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs	NPM	14	0.00%	57.14%	42.86%
	NGO/CS	6	0.00%	33.33%	66.67%
	Governance	3	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing	NPM	14	21.43%	64.29%	14.29%
	NGO/CS	5	0.00%	80.00%	20.00%
	Governance	6	16.67%	66.67%	16.67%
Journal of Civil Society	NPM	9	0.00%	88.89%	11.11%
	NGO/CS	11	36.36%	45.45%	18.18%
	Governance	4	0.00%	75.00%	25.00%
Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing	NPM	12	25.00%	50.00%	25.00%
	NGO/CS	3	33.33%	0.00%	66.67%
	Governance	4	25.00%	50.00%	25.00%
Public Administration Review	NPM	8	87.50%	12.50%	0.00%
	NGO/CS	1	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Governance	2	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Note: Only top 11 journals shown (12 and more mentions). Research areas not mutually exclusive; N=50 study NPM, N=28 study NGOs/Civil Society, N=21 study Governance.

Table 4. Journal Mentions (by tiers and service role)

Journal Name		Count	Top tier / high quality	Second tier / medium quality	Third tier / lower quality
Voluntas	Admin.	27	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%
	Edit. Board	36	66.67%	30.56%	2.78%
Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly	Admin.	27	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Edit. Board	36	97.22%	2.78%	0.00%
Nonprofit Management and Leadership	Admin.	26	53.85%	42.31%	3.85%
	Edit. Board	33	60.61%	36.36%	3.03%
Nonprofit Policy Forum	Admin.	7	0.00%	57.14%	42.86%
	Edit. Board	16	6.25%	68.75%	25.00%
Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership	Admin.	13	15.38%	30.77%	53.85%
	Edit. Board	14	14.29%	7.14%	78.57%
Voluntary Sector Review	Admin.	6	16.67%	83.33%	0.00%
	Edit. Board	15	0.00%	86.67%	13.33%
Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs	Admin.	8	0.00%	37.50%	62.50%
	Edit. Board	11	0.00%	54.55%	45.45%
International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing	Admin.	7	14.29%	42.86%	42.86%
	Edit. Board	11	9.09%	45.45%	45.45%

Note: Only top 8 journals shown (group 1 and 2, 17 and more mentions). Groups of administrators and editorial board members are not mutually exclusive.