

# When Shorter is Not Better: The Case of Economics Journals

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The ranking of economics journals as outlets of professional research activity is often used in constructing the rankings of economics departments. It has been suggested that journals with longer titles tend to be less influential. For example, *American Economic Review* and *Econometrica* are always at the top of any ranking, while *International Journal of Industrial Economics* tends to be ranked considerably lower. However, no empirical study exists that confirms or dispels this supposed relationship. The most recent ranking of refereed journals is found in Kalaitzidakis et al. [EER, 1999], who use an innovative methodology to construct an index of journals adjusted for their age, size, and self-citations. Since the rankings are based on the number of citations, older journals tend to rank higher *ceteris paribus*; also, journals tend to cite their own articles more often. Additionally, bigger journals have more citations.

The underlying theory tested here is summarized as follows: journals with longer titles are ranked lower. However, older journals are likely to have shorter, simpler titles whereas the titles of newer publications tend to be longer and more specialized. One would expect the length of the publication's title to be correlated with the unadjusted (for the age of the journal) rankings. On the other hand, if any relationship exists, it should be caused by older journals having brief, more general titles; that is, controlling for the journal's age ought to reveal no residual relationship.

The number of words in the title of each of the top 100 economics journals was recorded. The unadjusted Journal of Citation Reports (JCR) ranking was regressed on a constant and the length of the title (absolute t-stats in parentheses):

$$\text{JCR} = 18.266 - 2.196\text{WORDS} \quad .$$

(3.683)    (1.795)

The coefficient estimate on *WORDS* is negative, as expected, and significant at the 0.1 level. When the age- and size-adjusted ranking is substituted for the JCR index, the estimates are as follows:  $\hat{\alpha} = 16.296$  ( $t = 3.679$ ) and  $\hat{\beta} = -1.617$  ( $t = 1.48$ ). The coefficient on the length measure in the adjusted ranking regression is not statistically significant, indicating no relationship between longer titles and lower ranks among journals. Other measures of title length—such as characters and characters including spaces—as well as other functional forms were also attempted, but yielded no interesting results.

The results reported here suggest that while longer-titled publications on average rank lower in the perceived significance of their contributions, this effect disappears when the age and size of the journal are considered. In other words, newer journals, which tend to have titles with more words, are not automatically destined for lower ranks. (JEL A11); *Atlantic Econ. J.*, 31(3): p. 289, Sept. 03. ©All Rights Reserved