DESINGULARIZATION AND DEQUALIFICATION: A FORAY INTO RANKING PRODUCTION AND UTILIZATION PROCESSES

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Abstract

Although some authors highlight the benefits of journal rankings, previous research is often highly critical of them, insinuating that they can lead to desingularization of academic journals (i.e., their impoverishment and standardization) and dequalification of researchers (i.e., a weakening of researchers’ ability to evaluate academic research). However, as very few authors have empirically assessed these presumptions, we aim to address this gap in the literature. Based on Lucien Karpik’s notions of singularities, judgment devices, forms of involvement, and emulation and rivalry, we assess whether the processes surrounding the production and use of journal rankings might lead to desingularization and dequalification. Our findings support previous research by highlighting that processes where passivity and heteronomy (i.e., lack of autonomy) prevail, are conducive to desingularization, rivalry and dequalification. Our findings, however, introduce some nuances into the debate by underscoring instances where emulation logic is employed instead of mere rivalry logic, and where substantial judgment devices and active involvement are mobilized in the production and use of rankings, thereby somewhat alleviating the spread of desingularization and dequalification. Ultimately, our study raises questions that point to a need for serious collective reflection within the academic community on the processes by which published research is evaluated.

Keywords: Journal rankings; Desingularization; Dequalification; Karpik; Singularities.
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Introduction

Journal rankings are often viewed as one of the most pre-eminent tools available for measuring academic performance (Vanholsbeeck, 2012). Consistent with the growing influence of New Public Management principles and market economy ideals (Chiapello, 2017), these evaluation tools became increasingly popular as an alleged response to the difficulties involved in evaluating the work of researchers. In qualifying academic journals, rankings offer, at least in principle, a convenient yardstick for the quality of published research (Galvez-Behar, 2010). In a very short time, rankings have become almost indispensable for many actors in academia, increasingly used to evaluate research proposals as well as in tenure and promotion cases (Beattie & Goodacre, 2012; Gendron, 2015).

If journal rankings today are more and more significant in the assessment landscape (Pontille & Torny, 2012), these indicators of the ‘quality’ of published research are nevertheless a source of endless discussions in academia (e.g., Giacalone, 2009) – especially in the domain of business research, where journal rankings found a particularly fertile ground. Rankings have been the object of recrimination in the business literature, but two recurrent lines of criticism dominate.

The first is directed at the producers of rankings, who are criticized for relying excessively on bibliometric data – for example, the number of citations or the impact factor of Clarivate Analytics¹ – to qualify journals (e.g., Hussain, 2011; Mingers & Willmott, 2010). Indeed, ranking production is commonly viewed as being based on a dominant logic of journal list construction

¹ The impact factor is produced through the Clarivate Analytics’ SSCI database. The two-year impact factor corresponds to the average number of citations received, in year X, by the articles published in a given journal in years X-2 and X-1. It is worth noting that other tools to measure the impact of academic journals have been developed over the years, such as Elsevier’s CiteScore. In this paper, we focus on the impact factor of Clarivate Analytics.
centered on citations and impact factors, resulting in a list that ‘privileges journals publishing widely researched topics in which commonly used methodologies are deployed and well-established traditions and perspectives are engaged’ (Willmott, 2011, p. 431). Journal ranking producers have therefore been criticized for participating in the impoverishment and standardization of academic journals through their alleged preference for highly cited generalist research journals at the expense of journals dedicated to emergent research areas (Hussain, 2011; Mingers & Willmott, 2010; Parker & Guthrie, 2013). Impoverishment and standardization of journals, which Karpik (2010) views as ‘desingularization’, are at the core of one of the main criticisms directed at ranking producers.

The second oft-cited criticism concerns the deleterious effects ensuing from excessive use of rankings in academic evaluation processes (e.g., Adler & Harzing, 2009; Gendron, 2008, 2013, 2015; Guthrie & Parker, 2014; Humphrey & Gendron, 2015; Nkomo, 2009; Parker & Guthrie, 2013). In particular, these authors claim that excessive use of rankings ‘undermine the very purpose of universities and university scholarship’ (Adler & Harzing, 2009, p. 74), that it ‘may be altering the very substance of the knowledge we produce’ (Nkomo, 2009, p. 106), or that it ‘changed the research discourse from a language of a discipline subject, discovery, and implications to a language of journal hits, journal scores, journal ranks’ (Parker & Guthrie, 2013, p. 7). Arguably, excessive reliance on rankings also contributes to the impoverishment and standardization of research as published in academic journals (i.e., desingularization). But more importantly, this shift in research evaluation practices also favors the dequalification of users of rankings (Karpik, 2007), a phenomenon under which academics progressively lose their ability to assess the quality of a research paper based on its content as opposed to the identity of the journal in which it is published. Some academics argue that dequalification today is quite prevalent among younger researchers as, from their entry into academia, they are often surrounded with discourses emphasizing mechanical
reliance on rankings in choosing which journals to read and target as authors (Malsch & Tessier, 2015; Raineri, 2015).

From this perspective, the production and use of rankings could outweigh academic culture, which almost certainly leads to a degradation of research, not least in terms of diversity and innovation (Karpik, 2011). In particular, the spread of a ranking culture sustains waves of isomorphism in research topics, methods, and ways of claiming contributions to the literature.

In contrast, some articles underline the benefits of journal rankings, particularly as a pragmatic evaluation tool (e.g., Hussain, 2001; Morris, Harvey & Kelly, 2009; Rowlinson, Harvey, Kelly, Morris & Todeva, 2015). According to these authors, rankings may help researchers, university managers, and funding agencies in coming to a variety of decisions: ‘[Rankings’] value lies in making it easier for researchers to identify with confidence journals that might […] publish their work; in helping academic managers to make staff selection, development, promotion, and reward decisions; and in enabling librarians to make the most of acquisition budgets by securing access to the most appropriate journals’ (Morris et al., 2009, p. 1442).

All in all, notwithstanding some alleged benefits attributed to rankings, most of the academic literature in business is highly critical of them. However, in spite of the intensity of the debate, very few studies have analyzed the processes by which journal rankings are produced; as a result, empirical evidence is scant regarding the desingularization and dequalification thesis. To our knowledge, only the Association of Business Schools’ (ABS) ranking production process has been documented in detail, principally by its executives (Morris et al., 2009; Rowlinson et al., 2015). Empirical studies seeking to document the use of journal rankings are also rare. One exception is Reinstein and Calderon’s (2006) study, which examines the extent to which American accounting departments rely on academic journal rankings, and to what ends they use them. As Marsh and Hunt (2006, p. 302) argued:
Although many people accept the idea of publication ranking as a fact of scholarly life, not all members of our community are equally familiar with the issue or have the same level of understanding of how journals are ranked or how formal and informal journal ranking influences individual scholars and the research community.

The objective of this paper is to address this gap in the literature. We first examine the extent to which processes surrounding the production of rankings might lead to the desingularization of academic journals – i.e., their impoverishment and standardization. We then assess whether the processes around the use of rankings might strengthen the desingularization of journals while encouraging the dequalification of researchers – i.e., the loss of the ability to evaluate academic research. Our investigation is predicated on the following research questions in the context of rankings in the business and accounting areas:

**RQ1:** How does the production of journal rankings contribute to the desingularization of journals, i.e., the impoverishment and standardization of academic journals?

**RQ2:** How does the use of journal rankings contribute to the desingularization of journals and the dequalification of researchers, i.e., the loss of the ability to evaluate academic research?

It is not our intention to debate the pros and cons attributed to rankings but to move to another level of analysis, which may help us better understand how the production and use of rankings can contribute to the above-mentioned problems.

In our investigation, we rely on empirical material composed mainly of 26 interviews with producers of influential journal rankings, and researchers involved in committees that aim to assess publication records. The data are analyzed through theoretical concepts developed by Karpik (2007, 2010, 2011). In particular, we mobilize the notions of singularities, judgment devices, consumers’ involvement, emulation and rivalry, as well as desingularization and dequalification in order to contextualize and build a theoretical framework for our investigation. Karpik’s work provides a relevant framework for the analysis of evaluative judgments in contexts where quality is uncertain.
Drawing on our findings, we reflect on the extent to which the production and use of rankings are likely to contribute to the desingularization of academic journals and the dequalification of researchers. We also aim to make the processes involved in the production of rankings – and their use – more transparent, especially for younger researchers who often struggle to find their way through the labyrinth of information and opinion on the matter (Raineri, 2015). Further, we would like to prompt established researchers to reflect on how they use rankings in the evaluation of published research, how they engage in this exercise and the possible consequences ensuing from their level of involvement.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: first, we introduce Karpik’s theoretical concepts as well as the method we used to carry out the investigation. Next, we draw on these analytical tools to examine how journal rankings in business academia are produced. We then investigate how journal rankings are used to evaluate published research and the researchers themselves. Our findings point to a trend toward desingularization ensuing from the production and use of rankings, as suggested by previous research. We also bring to the fore a dequalification tendency emanating from the use of rankings. We introduce nuances into the debate by highlighting some instances where substantial judgment devices are used in conjunction with rankings. We also identify a number of situations characterized by a degree of autonomous and active involvement – which aim to take into consideration the specificities of journals. Finally, we conclude and discuss the main implications of our study.

**Lucien Karpik’s Economics of Singularities**

Lucien Karpik is a French sociologist whose work broadly aims to develop a sociological understanding of markets. He is considered a pioneer in new economic sociology, and the publication of his book *L’économie des singularités* in 2007 (*Valuing the unique: The economics*
of singularities, 2010) has engendered much thought and discussion in the field (Steiner 2008). Karpik offers a set of original tools to understand the functioning of markets in which ‘singularities’ are involved.

**Singularities**

Singularities are goods and services with three main features: (1) they are multidimensional, consisting of various overlapping dimensions; (2) they are incommensurable because there is no common and obvious measure that enables an indisputable evaluation of their quality; and (3) they are characterized by uncertainty, as evaluating the quality of singularities is complex and often cannot occur until the good is used or the service provided (Karpik, 2010). In short, singularities are goods and services whose quality is not the result of observable and commensurable technical characteristics. Instead, quality results from an overall judgment (characterized by uncertainty) that strives to identify what is ‘good’ or ‘right’ – for example, a ‘good’ wine or the ‘right’ accountant. With the economics of singularities, Karpik introduced a theoretical perspective to analyze markets for singular goods and services which escape traditional methods of economic analysis – for instance, the research market. According to Karpik (2011, p. 3), the economics of singularities ‘was developed to account for goods and services that present the same specific features as scientific goods and services’. Karpik (2011) argued that scientific articles published in academic journals are singularities:

Like a painting or a film, a scientific article is a *singularity* defined by three concurrent characteristics: multidimensionality, incommensurability, and radical quality uncertainty. *Multidimensionality* means that the scientific article is a configuration of qualities, that it is composed of heterogeneous and interdependent elements. *Incommensurability* refers to the absence of equivalents between symbolic worlds endowed with the same status, which in no way excludes a comparison from a particular point of view. And, just as the quality of a doctor or lawyer’s services can only be known after paying for them, a *radical quality uncertainty* refers to the impossibility of predicting by any means (including probabilistic calculation) the
emergence of a new scientific theory or a new interpretation of an old theory. Similarly, it is impossible to predict whether an article will be among those articles that are neglected upon their publication but become famous after a time or, conversely, whether it will be touted at first only to fade from memory later on. (Karpik, 2011, p. 11)

Several authors maintain that the ‘quality’ of published research today is largely assessed through academic journal quality indicators (e.g., Beattie & Goodacre, 2012; Pontille & Torny, 2012; Vanholsbeeck, 2012). From this perspective, the qualification of both the journal and the article are entangled; in practice, the quality of the former is often understood as a relevant indicator of the latter’s quality. Following Karpik, we consider both academic articles and journals as singularities. Indeed, academic journals may be viewed as multidimensional, characterized by particular editorial policies and, consequently, publishing articles on distinct subjects using diverse methods and theoretical frameworks. Further, it is reasonable to maintain that no homogenous measure can be used to evaluate the quality of the content that journals publish: journals and their articles, as Karpik noted, may be considered as incommensurable. Lastly, evaluating the quality of academic journals is without any doubt a complex and uncertain task, as it relies on the judgment of actors, who all have different expectations for, and perceptions of, journal quality, varying with their requirements and specific tastes.

Scientific articles and scientific journals, as singularities, engender one particular issue for researchers, namely, how to evaluate the quality of these singularities. Many researchers feel they need help to distinguish between what is relevant and what is not; Karpik argued that help can be found in judgment devices.

**Judgment devices**

Sustained by a range of developers and proponents (producers, marketers, public authorities, etc.), judgment devices provide tools and guidance to judge singularities and render ‘reasonable’ choices
(Karpik, 2010). Karpik identified two categories of judgment devices according to the nature of the knowledge provided: substantial and formal devices. Devices are substantial when they relate to the specific content of a given singularity, the focus being on the singularity’s particular characteristics. Conversely, when devices are formal, they privilege the relative position of singularities without focusing on their respective peculiarities. Rankings are the best example of a formal device. Since rankings are used to qualify a given singularity with respect to other singularities without considering their specific characteristics, they give no place to substantial or essential features of this given singularity.

**Forms of involvement**

If, to qualify a singular product, consumers tend to rely on different devices, their judgmental process is also variable. To account for this, Karpik (2010) introduced a topology of consumer involvement, drawing up portraits of model consumers in the singularities market. The consumer may first be actively or passively involved in gathering information (from judgment devices) to find the ‘good’ singularity. The active consumer devotes time to consulting and comparing different judgment devices. This process may translate into a more nuanced evaluation, sensitive to the specifics of the object under consideration. The passive consumer will delegate evaluation primarily through reliance on expert or numbered rankings; this may engender dysfunctional consequences in the long run, notably the erosion of critical thinking in matters of evaluation. The consumer may also be autonomous or heteronomous in choosing the ‘good’ singularity. The autonomous consumer will affirm her/his personal tastes and conserve some independence in formulating a judgment (thereby favoring pluralism), whereas the heteronomous consumer will

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2 While Karpik stresses the notion of consumer commitment, we prefer the notion of consumer involvement which, in our opinion, more adequately reflects the substance of our empirical data.
endorse the tastes reflected by the judgment devices consulted (thereby favoring conformity). Heteronomous evaluation tends to ignore quality criteria that go beyond the preferences of the majority. As a result, heteronomous evaluation distances itself from a complex and multidimensional view of singularity and instead privileges a one-dimensional and univocal environment. In other words, heteronomy disfavors difference and originality (Karpik, 2010).

From a conceptual viewpoint, it might be expected that active consumers tend to be autonomous while passive consumers are more likely to be heteronomous. However, according to Karpik (2010), consumers can also be at once active in consulting and comparing multiple judgment devices, but heteronomous by setting their own tastes aside. For instance, when choosing a movie at the cinema, consumers can read articles by reputed critics, examine comments on well-known movie blogs, and look up which awards the movie has received (e.g., Oscar), without affirming their own personal tastes – i.e., what kind of film they prefer. Conversely, one’s own passive involvement will not necessarily preclude a certain amount of autonomy in affirming personal taste: a consumer may also challenge the outcomes of rankings. Searching for a good film, consumers can consult the number of stars that critics have given the film or look up the box-office list. But before making a choice, these consumers can also take into account their preferences for certain kinds of movies – for example, action or drama – or even their preferences for certain actors.

These forms of involvement constitute ideal-types that help us to understand, in some way, how consumers behave in the singularities market. Without ever being completely active, passive, autonomous, or heteronomous, the consumer, according to personal preferences, background, and context, will be more or less on one side or the other of these boundaries. In our case, these forms of involvement can be applied to individuals participating in the production of rankings or in the latter’s “consumption” (i.e., their actual use in the field).
**Emulation and rivalry**

The distinctions between substantial and formal judgment devices and between forms of involvement are important as their effects and consequences on academia are distinctive. According to Karpik (2011), substantial devices, activity, and autonomy tend to favor emulation, i.e., the importance of scientific discovery and a focus on originality. On the contrary, formal devices, passivity, and heteronomy favor rivalry, meaning a competitive arena defined by the scope of rankings, an erosion of traditional academic values, and a tendency toward desingularization.

**Desingularization**

Desingularization implies singular products that become increasingly similar, losing their specificity. This translates into commodification and the downplaying of difference – the antithesis of customized evaluation. More precisely, desingularization involves impoverishment, standardization, and dequalification. The first term refers to the reduction of originality, leaving more conformity and clichés in the field. The second term signifies ‘uniformization, redundancy, imitation, repetition, homogeneousness – everything that favors interchangeability’ (Karpik, 2010, p. 243). The third term indicates a transformation that amounts to a loss of identity – either of the singular product or of the consumer – and intertwines with the two previous processes. More specifically, the dequalification of consumers (in our case, researchers) implies the gradual loss of the ability to gather multiple sources of information and the capacity to form an autonomous judgment of the quality of the singularity that is under consideration.

With the help of Karpik’s theoretical tools, we endeavor to further our understanding of the extent to which the production and use of journal rankings in the areas of business and accounting are contributing to the desingularization of journals, and ultimately to the dequalification of researchers – i.e. the loss of the ability to evaluate academic research. While Karpik’s views have
had a major influence on economic sociology and the sociology of the professions (Steiner, 2008), few accounting and business studies draw significantly from his theoretical concepts. Apart from Bialecki, O’Leary and Smith (2017) who used Karpik’s concept of judgment devices to examine how management accounting information is used when evaluating singularities in the domain of popular culture, we are unaware of any previous work that draws on Karpik to investigate rankings. Without claiming to present Karpik’s concepts down to the smallest detail, we offer a ‘translation’ of his analytical tools to examine the production and use of rankings in business academia.

Method

Sources of data

Our data consist primarily of 26 interviews carried out between 2012 and 2014 with producers of rankings and researchers involved in assessing publication records (through their involvement as members of tenure and promotion or research funding adjudication committees).

Production of journal rankings

We gathered data on five influential rankings in business academia to offer a credible picture of the processes surrounding the production of journal rankings. Eight interviews (see Table 1) were conducted with executives and evaluation committee members of two national rankings: the British Association of Business Schools (ABS) and the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC). These rankings were selected as they are both well-established in the business academic community (Gendron, 2015).

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3 The ABS ranking is now known as Academic Journal Guide (AJG). The change occurred after our data collection had been completed.
4 While anonymity is an important concern for us, it would have been difficult not to mention the names of the ABS and ABDC rankings because, as national rankings, the mere mention of the participants’ country would have easily allowed readers to identify the rankings in question. The measures taken to protect the confidentiality of the collected data are discussed below.
Three interviews were conducted with individuals involved in the production of a well-known ranking within a specific business school (hereafter ‘Business School X’). These interviews allowed us to better understand the production of a ranking developed at the institutional level, a process likely to differ from that of national rankings. Further, this ranking is relatively important in academic arenas, as it is among the sources for Harzing’s *Journal Quality List* (2016), a compilation of influential journal rankings in business.

We also examined the *Financial Times* (FT) journal list and the *Social Sciences Citation Index* (SSCI) and its sub-product, the *Journal Citation Reports*. Both are influential journal rankings in the field of business. As our requests for interviews with the administrative bodies of these rankings were unsuccessful, we collected a series of documents describing the process of putting these rankings together.\(^5\) Regarding the FT ranking, we gathered information from the websites of the FT (FT, 2010, 2016; Gans, 2014; Palin, 2014) and McMaster University (2018), where information on the creation of the ranking was found. For SSCI, we examined a series of documents produced by Clarivate Analytics\(^6\) and analyzed two interviews (publicly accessible via Nicholson, 2011 and Thomson Reuters, 2008) with James Testa. At the time, Testa was Thomson Reuters Director of Editorial Development and is now Vice President, Editorial Development & Publisher Relations at Clarivate Analytics. In these interviews, he describes some of the procedures used to determine which journals to include in the Index.

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\(^5\) In total, 25 people who had collaborated in developing an influential ranking were contacted: 11 accepted our invitation to be interviewed; four declined citing a lack of time; and ten people gave no response to our interview request.

\(^6\) In October 2016, Thomson Reuters sold its scientific division to Onex and Baring Asia. The new independent company managing the Web of Science is known as Clarivate Analytics (Clarivate Analytics, 2016a).
Assessment of publication records

In total, we interviewed 15 researchers from different geographic and institutional areas involved in the assessment of publication records. The interviews were held in an effort to draw a broader portrait of the different evaluation processes. Apart from one individual (interviewee 20), all interviewees are experienced researchers who frequently evaluate published research.

Specifically, we interviewed nine seasoned researchers who participate in promotion and tenure decisions at their universities and have several years of experience on journal editorial boards. These interviewees could be considered ‘key informants’ (Patton, 2015) especially knowledgeable on the evaluation of publication records. We also interviewed the director of a publishing house that owns business journals, in order to have the perspective of a non-researcher on the process of evaluating published research. Finally, we interviewed five academics who had been, at one time or another, members of at least one funding agency adjudication committee, tasked with the evaluation of research project funding proposals. Note that a significant proportion of interviewees, at the time of their interview, were or had been business journal editors.

Data collection and analysis

The interviews, lasting on average 60 minutes, were mostly conducted by telephone or via Skype as the interviewees came from different countries. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face and one was conducted by email, i.e., a list of questions was submitted to the interviewee. The goal of these interviews was to learn about the processes used to evaluate academic journals and publication records – without imposing a tight structure on participants. Producers were asked to discuss the context that led to the establishment of their ranking and the process of its development,

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7 We contacted 26 people via email who participate in tenure committees and/or research funding adjudication committees. Overall, 15 people granted us an interview, six refused alleging either a lack of time or confidentiality concerns, and five did not respond to our interview requests.
including the devices used to evaluate journals. Researchers were asked to reflect on the influence that journal rankings have on their activities and in their respective institutions.

All interviews were conducted by the first author and digitally recorded with the permission of participants. Each interview was then transcribed and the transcript sent to each person interviewed. Interviewees were given the opportunity to make changes or add explanations to the transcript to ensure they were comfortable with their comments. This approach constituted a form of member-checking opportunity, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Measures were also taken to ensure the anonymity and trustworthiness of the collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Anonymity was guaranteed to interviewees at the beginning of the interview. Further, to protect interviewee identities, interview extracts are not associated with the individuals described in Table 1. Instead, the following categories were used: ranking executive, advisory panel member, adjudication committee member, and researcher.

To analyze the data, the first author gave each transcript a preliminary reading to gain a general understanding of the evaluation processes of published research. A detailed analysis was then performed in light of Karpik’s concepts and interview extracts were recopied into distinct thematic files. These thematic files were reread several times in order to conserve only the most significant extracts for the purposes of this article. Original transcripts were also reread when deemed necessary.

The first author also collected and analyzed a number of documents, such as reports produced by the ranking organizations we studied. Documents produced by academic institutions and funding agencies were also examined to deepen our understanding of how rankings are used in the evaluation of published research. The objective was to identify any recurrences, differences, or

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8 Eleven interviewees sent a modified version of their transcription. Only minor changes were made to clarify and add information regarding the evaluation process. We used the modified transcriptions in our data analysis.
inconsistencies between the documents and the experiences described by interviewees (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). Final interpretations were discussed and agreed upon by all three authors.

**Production of academic journal rankings**

If the general criteria used to produce academic journal rankings are not actually secret, process details are often opaque and not well known. Only those who participate in the process and its deliberations have a deeper understanding of the backstage mechanisms. Our analysis sheds light on some features of these processes.

**FT50: ranking the ‘best’ academic journals**

Since 1999, the FT has established a list of academic and practitioner journals used in business school research. This list was created to evaluate – and ultimately rank – MBA programs (Palin, 2014). As West (2016) explained, FT ‘counts the per capita faculty publications in these journals to calculate the research ranking of faculty, and this research score accounts for 10% of the Global MBA, Executive MBA and Online MBA rankings.’ The ranking passed from a top 35 to a top 40 list in 2003 and, in 2010, the organization decided to add five journals to create a top 45 (Free, Salterio & Shearer, 2009). Recently, the number of selected journals went up to 50 (FT, 2016), including six accounting journals. The objective of this ranking is pure rivalry as the purpose is to comparatively assess existing university programs.

*Judgment devices.* To determine the 50 ‘best’ academic and trade journals, the FT solicits the opinion of those it considers to be worthy representatives of academia: the deans of business schools. As Della Bradshaw, Business Education Editor of the FT, noted, ‘This list [FT50] is determined not by the FT, but by those business schools that participate in the MBA and EMBA
rankings. […] If your business school participates in the MBA and EMBA rankings then it will be able to participate in the voting process’ (quoted in Gans, 2014).

Thus, to take part in developing the FT50 ranking, one must first participate in the organization’s MBA rankings where eligibility criteria include the following:

To be eligible to participate [in the FT MBA rankings], a school should be accredited by AACSB or EQUIS; it must have a programme that has been running for at least four years; and it must have graduated its first class at least three years before the ranking publication date. (FT, 2010)

Thus, it appears that the FT is convinced that only those business schools holding AACSB or EQUIS accreditations are in the best position to determine the quality of journals. International accreditations and the FT50 list are therefore directly connected to each other and highly interdependent as the journal list ‘use[s] the boundaries set by accreditation in [its] own boundary-work’ (Wedlin, 2006, p. 139). Once these business schools are selected, the FT surveys their deans to know which academic and trade journals are considered the ‘best’ in business, all sub-disciplines combined (McMaster University, 2018). The data obtained from this inquiry are then compiled, so as to retain only the ‘best’ journals (FT, 2016).

For instance, in order to identify the additional journals to include in the list (augmenting the FT list from 45 to 50), ‘the 200 odd business schools that take part in either the FT Global MBA, Executive MBA or Online MBA rankings were invited to submit up to five new journals to include and five journals to exclude from the previous list. A total of 140 schools submitted their votes, a response rate of 67 per cent. […] Out of the 150 new journals suggested, the nine journals with the most votes were added to the list’ (FT, 2016).

**Forms of involvement.** Even though this process involves the use of a substantial judgment device, i.e. deans’ opinions, the FT organization is obviously passive in gathering information on

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9 It is worth noting that deans may rely on different judgment devices in developing the recommendations they send to the FT organization.
journals, relying entirely on these alleged ‘experts’. Furthermore, the FT journal list evaluation process leaves little room for autonomy as it endorses the tastes of the deans it surveys. This heteronomous involvement is coherent with the journal list purpose which is ultimately to provide an ‘objective’ ranking of MBA programs.

*Emulation and rivalry.* In this process, a logic of rivalry is arguably implicit in the substantial judgment device combined with the heteronomous and passive involvement described above. Indeed, the business deans involved in the process are competing. They have a vested interest in selecting journals in which their faculty members publish to influence the evaluation of their own MBA programs in a favorable way (Beattie & Goodacre, 2006). We are therefore confronted by a circular situation where the ‘best journals’ are determined by the largest business schools offering the ‘best MBAs’ and whose faculty happen to publish in those ‘best journals’. The largest business schools are thus granted the power of determining what counts as good research.

*Desingularization.* The FT ranking is therefore elitist, constrained to a few dozen journals in the business field. Paradoxically, some of these journals do not operate through a double-blind evaluation process. Through the discourse surrounding the FT organization, it seems to us the latter has sought to develop a list that is perceived as unbiased and that represents the preferences of top business schools (West, 2016). Nonetheless, in presenting a list of ‘top journals’ without rank or grade, the FT marginalizes a plethora of research journals, blatantly ignoring the heterogeneity and diversity of the field’s journals. Thus, a process of desingularization is thus clearly at play in this process.

*SSCI – JCR: ranking through the number of citations*

Following the establishment of the Science Citation Index in 1963 (Gingras, 2014), the SSCI, created in 1973, is a social sciences journal database now produced by Clarivate Analytics which
The SSCI was initially developed by Eugene Garfield to facilitate library management and provide a pragmatic tool for researchers – allowing them to create a ‘solid’ bibliography on a given topic:

I propose a bibliographic system for science literature that can eliminate the uncritical citation of fraudulent, incomplete, or obsolete data by making it possible for the conscientious scholar to be aware of criticisms of earlier papers. It is too much to expect a research worker to spend an inordinate amount of time searching for the bibliographic descendants of antecedent papers. […] Even if there was no other use for a citation index than that of minimizing the citation of poor data, the index would be well worth the effort required to compile it. (Garfield, 1955, p. 108)

This initial objective was arguably geared toward emulation as the index aimed at assisting researchers in handling their scientific discoveries. Today, however, SSCI is mainly used as an instrument to measure scientific productivity, made possible by its sub-product, Journal Citation Reports (JCR) and its impact factor (Garfield, 2007). The aim has thus drastically changed from emulation to rivalry as it now sustains a highly competitive arena in academia. Accordingly, Clarivate Analytics annually publishes the JCR, which showcases a ranking of some 3,000 academic journals contained in the SSCI database, ‘[to measure] research influence and impact at the journal and category levels, and [to show] the relationship between citing and cited journals’ (Clarivate Analytics, 2017b).

*Judgment devices.* First and foremost, the process followed by Clarivate Analytics is founded on a judgment that only a certain number of journals should be considered in its ranking. It allegedly wants to cover the most important and influential journals in the academic world without considering all publications (Clarivate Analytics, 2016b). This judgment is reportedly based on Bradford’s Law:

It would appear that to be comprehensive, an index of the scholarly journal literature might be expected to cover all journals published. It has been demonstrated, however, that a relatively small number of journals publish the majority of significant scholarly
results. This principle is often referred to as Bradford’s Law. […] Bradford understood that an essential core of journals forms the literature basis for all disciplines and that most of the important papers are published in relatively few journals. (Clarivate Analytics, 2016b)

Yet the process by which journals are selected for inclusion in the database is particularly nebulous (Annisette, Cooper & Gendron, 2015). The scant selection information available suggests that three main judgment devices are used in this respect: basic publishing standards (substantial), editorial content (substantial), and citation analysis (formal). Publishing standards include the application of a peer-review process, the adoption of ethical publishing practices, the timeliness of publication, and the application of international editorial conventions (Clarivate Analytics, 2016b). While some may think these standards play a minor role in determining the importance of academic journals, James Testa, Director of Editorial Development at Thomson Reuters Web of Knowledge, disagreed. In an interview with Wiley Publishing, he underlined that publishing in a timely manner is an essential criterion in selecting academic journals for the SSCI:

The most fundamental aspect of the evaluation of journals for coverage in Web of Science [SSCI] is establishing that the journal can produce issues/articles in a timely manner according to its stated frequency. If this is not in place we hesitate to move forward with other aspects of the evaluation. (Testa in Nicholson, 2011)

It seems necessary in the eyes of Clarivate Analytics to confirm some mechanical aspects of the journal’s functioning before proceeding with a more in-depth evaluation. Journals respecting the basic publishing standards then pass to the second step: the evaluation of editorial content. This step aims to determine whether the content of an academic journal enriches the SSCI database:

As mentioned above, an essential core of scientific literature forms the basis for all scholarly disciplines. However, this core is not static — scientific research continues to give rise to specialized fields of studies, and new journals emerge as published research on new topics achieves critical mass. Our editors determine if the content of a journal under evaluation will enrich the database or if the topic is already adequately addressed in existing coverage. […] our editors are uniquely well positioned to spot emerging topics and active fields in the literature. (Clarivate Analytics, 2016b)
Clarivate Analytics therefore claims to rely on the judgment of experts – namely, its editors – to select the journals included in the SSCI. These editors are described as people who ‘have educational backgrounds relevant to their areas of responsibility [and] they are also experts in the literature of their fields’ (Clarivate Analytics, 2016b). However, as Klein and Chiang (2004) underlined, how they formulate their judgment is kept secret: ‘[…] the records and reviews are concealed […] and there are no descriptions of the process’ (ibid., pp. 142-143).

These two substantial judgment devices are thus used in the initial identification of the journals that may be included in the ranking. The last judgment device considered in the selection process, citation analysis, is the most important as it determines the journals that will appear in the final ranking:

We use Citation Analysis to determine the importance and influence of a journal in the surrounding literature of its subject. […] We analyze Total Citation counts to determine the integration of the journal into the surrounding literature over its entire publishing history. We use Impact Factor to determine the recent effect of the journal on the literature of its subject. (Clarivate Analytics, 2016b)

Once the citation analysis is completed, selected journals are finally ranked one against each other based on the number of citations and their impact factor. The ensuing JCR offers ‘a systematic, objective means to evaluate the world’s leading scientific and scholarly journals’ with statistical information based on citation data (Clarivate Analytics, 2017b). With this ranking, Clarivate Analytics claims to offer an objective way to determine the quality of academic journals using statistics based on the number of citations.

In claiming they privilege the number of citations, the producers of JCR suggest they remove any human intermediary from the process and, therefore, that the ranking is an objective tool for journal evaluation. However, this claim to objectivity is questionable, because behind these statistics lies a process of journal selection that takes into account more than just citations.
Unfortunately, no detailed information exists on the processes by which journals are selected for inclusion on SSCI.

*Forms of involvement.* The above analysis shows there is, to some extent, active involvement in selecting the journals since multiple judgment devices are considered. However, given the ultimate emphasis attributed to citation number, the JCR is mostly passive and heteronomous, as it is based on a single formal judgment device which is claimed to represent collective rather than individual preferences.

*Emulation and rivalry.* Although emulation was the initial goal of Eugene Garfield in the establishment of SSCI, rivalry is clearly at play nowadays as the evaluation process described above suggests. Competition is now the driving force surrounding JCR.

*Desingularization.* The intention of providing a ranking that is ‘representative’ of scientific literature is not without consequences. Through the assumption that a ‘law’ of nature applies to academic publishing, Clariviate Analytics seeks to identify the journals that publish what it considers to be the most influential work. Also, the JCR presents a hierarchical ranking of journals that is allegedly based on the preferences of all researchers, as long as one recognizes that these preferences are reflected in the number of citations received. This ranking therefore produces a form of knowledge that aggregates individual judgments, under the condition that the number of citations received and quality are two sides of the same coin (for a criticism, see Beattie and Goodacre, 2006 and Karpik, 2011). As such, the SSCI is premised on the claim that no mechanism allows for a better adjustment to changes in collective tastes or so simple and rapid an evaluation as the number of citations. This process leads to desingularization as the specific content of a journal is less and less considered important. Technical formalities and the citation numbers prevail in the comparison of journals, to the detriment of their singular characteristics.
Business School ranking: ranking rankings

Business School X’s ranking, selected for the purposes of this study, was introduced in the first half of the 1990s. According to the school’s former associate dean of research, no well known academic journal rankings existed when the ranking was initially put in place. As a result, s/he chose to develop a customized ranking by calling on school members as well as international ‘experts’ from different business disciplines. The goal of the ranking was to encourage the institution’s academics to do more research. The institution wanted to have a ranking to signal the ‘better’ places to publish to its researchers, and to offer them financial compensation for publications:

We developed the ranking to increase research publications which at the time was very, very low and very sporadic. There was a group of researchers – a majority in the school – who never did anything in terms of research. Since we wanted to become an internationally recognized research institution, we decided to develop a program to give compensation based on publications made in journals listed in our internal ranking. (Former associate dean of research)

In other words, the main purpose of the ranking was to encourage and increase research publications in ‘leading’ journals given the aim to develop – and now maintain – the international research reputation of Business School X. The implicit objective of this ranking is thus coherent with a logic of rivalry, as the school is striving to compete at an international level.

Judgment devices. At the inception of this ranking in the 1990s, a multidisciplinary and international evaluation panel had to decide on the quality of academic journals as previously identified by the school’s departments. The panel was tasked not with positioning the journals with respect to one another but with evaluating each journal’s specific content. The use of a panel to establish the ranking is arguably an example of a substantial judgment device as the panel members were assessing each journal by its particular characteristics.

10 We use the term ‘expert’ to mean someone chosen for her/his specific knowledge of a subject.
However, changes to this ranking in recent years significantly transformed the evaluation process to give priority to formal judgment devices. Nowadays, to proceed with the revision of its ranking, the school sets up an advisory panel composed of well-recognized researchers in the institution who are theoretically asked to set aside their interests in order to present a ranking that values ‘excellence’ in research:

Appointed colleagues do not represent their department and do not represent their own interests. They are there to be guardians of excellence in research. Of course, inevitably, they have their specific identities, reference points and histories. But their mission is to defend research excellence. (Associate dean of research)

The advisory panel is entrusted to revise the school’s ranking to take changes in academic publishing into account. In their work, panel members rely mainly on two formal judgment devices: rankings, such as those of ABS and ABDC (see below), and bibliometrics. As mentioned by one panel member, when evaluating a given journal, the panel is given a comparative record of the grades it receives in other rankings. The rankings considered include the following:

As a European school looking to position itself as a school where there is a good level of research at the European scale, we benchmark with our neighbors, so with the ABS list […] but there’s also a French list […] . There’s the Australian list. (Advisory panel member)

Consultation of these lists allegedly allows the panel to determine and justify the grade given to a journal:

I think that at this time, it’s rather difficult to justify that a journal has been properly ranked if it is not at least properly ranked in a number of other rankings that we consider important. (Advisory panel member)

In other words, the exercise of judgment is mostly delegated to rankings because an evaluation running counter to them is hard to justify. The interviewee further specified that the FT ranking and SSCI’s bibliometrics are also considered, especially in identifying the best ranked journals:

There is also the FT [ranking] that comes into consideration. There are journals in the FT that are not ranked at the top, so it’s not a direct matching, but probably 90 or 95%
of the time that’s the case. […] At the level of the Citation Index [SSCI] you’ll have some statistics. So is the journal in the Citation Index? What is its impact factor? What is its rank in the larger field? (Advisory panel member)

As with rankings, bibliometrics provide a template that allows journals to be compared with one another. Comparisons play a chief role in determining grades:

Now, with the experience of the advisory committee, we’re able to position a journal with respect to others. It can’t be imagined that a journal falls from the sky and that you have to give it an absolute ranking. You always have to position them relative to a lot of other journals that we’ve ranked and whose performances we know. (Associate dean of research)

*Forms of involvement.* The constitution of the initial ranking was predicated on the actors’ active involvement because the School devoted time to consult a multidisciplinary group of experts invited to form the panel. However, the evaluation process of the subsequent ranking is relatively passive (in that the gathering of information is limited to some easily accessible rankings and bibliometric data) and heteronomous (in that the actors delegate a large part of their qualifying decision to these formal judgment devices). As a result, the School’s process is viewed as simple, demonstrable, and objective. This weak degree of involvement is not surprising since the ranking is now geared at maintaining Business School X’s international recognition in research.

While generally heteronomous in evaluating journals, the panel occasionally allows in-house preferences to be influential:

At [the school level], we are very interested in corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, and business ethics. We concluded that we should encourage publications in this area a bit further. So, when we looked at the ranking the last time, we found that a very good business ethics journal did not have the same impact factor as other journals. At our discretion, we decided to give it a little help, so we moved it up a notch in the hierarchy to encourage colleagues to publish in this journal, which is consistent with our strategic message. (Associate dean of research)

Therefore, the panel, which normally ratifies the choices of other rankings, occasionally shows some autonomy. The relative autonomy of panel members is also apparent when the grade given to a specific journal differs in the rankings consulted:
When there are significant differences [of grading], the committee discusses and tries to find a consensus regarding the ranking. […] We want to take into account a set of data [i.e., rankings and bibliometrics] but we also want the committee to contribute in determining the list rather than having a simple mechanical process. (Advisory panel member)

In such conflicting cases, the panel maintains some independence in formulating a judgment on journal quality. This sporadic degree of autonomy is in line with the ranking’s objective of encouraging publication in a specific local setting: Business School X. Overall, the School’s ranking implies a conditional delegation of judgment. The evaluation is founded on the grade granted by other experts to produce a ‘reasonable’ ranking, while saving time. This passive and heteronomous evaluation style does not exclude the maintenance of some autonomy; the producers of the ranking sometimes assert their own preferences against the grade proposed by the other rankings they usually follow.

*Emulation and rivalry.* The above analysis suggests rivalry is mostly at play given the School’s objective to position itself favorably in the European scale. Moreover, the use of a series of rankings aimed at ‘benchmarking’ the School’s research production with international competitors is also coherent with a logic of rivalry. Comparisons through rankings played a chief role in classifying journals.

*Desingularization.* While the initial ranking was geared toward the singularity of journals, the subsequent comparison process ignores their unique attributes. Overall, this case, mainly involving the use of formal judgment devices, passivity, and heteronomy is an example of an evaluation process leading to desingularization. Indeed, downplaying differences between journals by comparing them on a single basis reduces originality and favors uniformization.
ABS and ABDC rankings: producing a ‘reasonable’ ranking

ABS and ABDC consist of quality guides that attribute a specific grade to each journal (e.g., A*, A, B, C) based on the judgment of a panel of ‘experts’. ABS and ABDC were put in place in 2007 and 2008 respectively (ABDC, 2013a; ABS, 2010). These associations have established tools that allegedly aim to help younger researchers, university departments, and more seasoned researchers to separate ‘great’ journals from the ‘lesser’ ones (ABDC, 2013a; ABS, 2010). As one ranking executive explained:

We had a situation where we wanted as best as possible to help inform our staff of good places to publish and how to publish. It was really about educating them in the fact that the world of academic journals was […] quite severely stratified and we wanted to inform them about that stratification process and of options for their personal publication strategies. […] What we’ve tried to do is to make the rules of the game more apparent and to publish the rules of the game […]. (Ranking executive)

In other words, these rankings were reportedly developed not only to guide researchers in the identification of ‘good journals’ among the multitude of academic journals available, but also to render the research field more transparent for younger researchers. This aim arguably falls under Karpik’s emulation endeavor given the stated goal of helping younger researchers find a host for their scientific discoveries.

Judgment devices. The first step toward qualifying an academic journal is to set up a panel of experts (ABDC, 2013a; ABS, 2010) which constitutes a major substantial judgment device in the process. However, identifying potential panelists is not as simple as it may seem as the associations must cope with the pressure of being inclusive and forming a panel representative of the different disciplinary fields in business research, as explained below:

We were trying to […] get a reasonable spread of people. First of all, you’re representing the different subfields. That’s important because obviously the traditions

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11 While we cannot rule out the possibility that these interviewees emphasized a reassuring facade in order to secure their organization’s legitimacy in a context of growing criticisms (e.g., Adler & Harzing, 2009; Willmott, 2011), by and large the participants were articulate and provided plausible examples and anecdotes in order to support their views.
are very different in organization studies from finance, for example. So you need somebody in finance, you need somebody in accounting which is a different tradition again. (Ranking executive)

This excerpt suggests that in order to develop a credible and legitimate guide, the associations believe it is important – if not a necessity – to recruit experts representing various disciplines. The associations also seem to grant importance to the overall composition of the panel so that several methodologies and approaches are represented:

Panel members have published research employing a wide range of research methods, including archival, experimental, survey, and case studies. In sum, the panel [members] have conducted both quantitative and qualitative research. (ABDC, 2013b, p. 92)

In selecting experts in ‘a wide range of methods,’ the associations signal their wish to take the specialties and preferences of various researchers into account. The interviewees specified that the evaluation of journal quality reflects panelists’ experience and knowledge of business research fields. For instance, one panelist mentioned the following:

Each member of the committee had been on a huge number of editorial boards. If you go across all of the A* and A journals, they had sometimes been on virtually every [one], at least one person had been on the editorial board of virtually all those journals. All members of the committee had probably over 25 years of research experience. So that was the main thing. It was our own judgments. We had read papers in those journals, we had helped people put papers into those journals. (Advisory panel member)

Furthermore, advisory panel members recognized that their past experience necessarily influences their judgment:

Everyone will be influenced by the type of work they did in their PhD, the type of work they are personally involved in, what sort of research their school does, where they go on sabbatical leaves. So the point probably is true that it’s not completely unbiased but you can attempt to reduce that bias. It would be the way I’ll put it. (Advisory panel member)

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12 The previous guide serves as a starting point in the evaluation process. Consequently, panel members are tasked with the revision of previously given grades, and the assignment of grades to journals not previously included in the guide.
However, during deliberations, panel members are expected to rely not only on their knowledge of various disciplines and their past experience, but also on different judgment devices. Accordingly, ABS’s and ABDC’s official documents suggest journal quality is evaluated by consulting a combination of sources, ranging from the composition of the journal’s editorial board to citation statistics and the opinions of external experts (ABDC, 2013a; ABS, 2010).

Panelists said that they relied on other substantial devices to support their assigned grades, such as the editorial policies of academic journals and external experts. In their view, basic criteria had to be met for an academic journal to be considered a ‘good’ journal:

[…] there are some things which are inherently good to do editorially. They may not produce good research but there are standards of good editorship like double blind refereeing. So there is a range of things, like is it theoretically informed, is there a strong methodology and what’s being done, is it double blind refereed, do referees’ comments get shared with other referees. (Ranking executive)

Thus, their judgment appears to be influenced by expectations regarding a ‘good’ journal’s evaluation processes and editorial practices. One panelist underlined that the reputation and experience of an editorial board influence grading: ‘We particularly looked at the editor and the editorial board. That was important to us.’

Panel members reportedly consult external experts recognized for their in-depth knowledge regarding a specific area of business research. For instance, their opinion is sometimes solicited when panelists have to decide on the quality of a given journal in a domain with which they are unfamiliar:

[…] if we knew the area well, we would be able to handle it ourselves but if it was something that we knew very little about, we would confidentially ask some trusted people for their opinion both in our country and overseas either via email or phone calls. (Advisory panel member)

Reliance on experts can contribute to resolve a dispute between panelists: ‘[…] in the end, for some journals, we still couldn’t settle on. In that case – there were only two or three journals – we sought additional experts to make a comment’ (Advisory panel member).
Without pretending to be ‘completely unbiased,’ panelists mentioned that they strive to support their personal preferences through formal devices understood to be more ‘objective’ and ‘impersonal’: bibliometric data. These measures, among which the best known is the impact factor, are consulted by panelists in order to sustain a discussion on the ranking of some journals. According to one interviewee, ‘We use the metrics in order to be able to establish patterns and positions. So the metrics are important to us but they’re not the final word. But they are important in driving discussion.’ In employing bibliometrics, panel members insisted that they were not seeking to substitute numbers for judgment, but wished to be thought provoking with regard to the ratings given to journals. The stated purpose is to maintain some form of independence, or autonomy, in formulating their judgment. One ranking executive offered a good example of this use of bibliometrics:

I can give you an example. In the accounting field, which I’ve done some work recently based on the 2012 data that I’ve got, there is a 3 star rated journal […]. Well, according to the metrics I’ve done, that should be a 4 star journal. […] I think the fact that the metrics say that raises question which the accountants on the panel will have to answer and we need to look at that journal closely, see what is published. In terms of its citation data, it looks 4 stars but it’s currently 3. […] And I would flag that up. (Ranking executive)

Thus, statistics like the impact factor seem to be but one device among many that guide panel members in their evaluation. The majority of those involved in developing the Australian and British guides with whom we discussed recognized the limits of bibliometrics and the need to make an informed judgment that does not rest only on numbers.

We got the two-year and the five-year impact factors. We had some surprises there. There was at least one journal that surprised us how big their impact factor was. But in the end, it’s a judgment because if you’re only going to use impact factors, you don’t need a panel to do it. You just take the impact factor and rank it. But it was one factor we considered. (Advisory panel member)

**Forms of involvement.** Executives and advisory panel members for the ABS and ABDC rankings all agreed that determining the quality of journals cannot be reduced to the expression of
their individual inclinations. As suggested by panel members, hidden behind these rankings lies a
desire to recognize the multiplicity of tastes and preferences of different groups of researchers.

We talked quite extensively about are we being fair to people that do particular types
of work, for example qualitative work, are we including journals that they would see
as important? (Advisory panel member)

Overall, the process of developing the two quality guides indicates the journal’s grade is the
result of an exercise of judgment influenced by the experiences and tastes of the panel members
but also by the journal’s presentation, bibliometrics, and the opinions of external experts.
Evaluation is not based on just one judgment device; rather, the input from multiple devices is
taken into consideration. As mentioned by one ranking executive:

I think it’s not a list that is produced by a pure metric. When I say it’s a discussion, it’s
a discussion. We don’t sit there taking the Journal of XYZ and say, “All those in favor
of making it a four.” It’s not like that. It’s just not like that. And that would make it a
nonsense. It’s more like, “Here is a series of criteria. Let’s see what the list looks like
if you use those criteria and let’s try to make some overall decisions.” And then,
running the list, the data analyst runs these various different versions and sees what it
looks like and then presents it back until we reach, pretty much, a consensus.

In summary, panel members of the ABS and ABDC rankings search for a ‘reasonable’ rating
of academic journals, reflective of active and autonomous qualification. According to the data we
collected, their evaluation is the product of a discussion; a reflection in which the input of several
judgment devices is considered, and in which ‘quality’ does not rest only on a number but on the
specific contents of journals. Significant efforts are devoted to the collection of relevant data – for
instance through consultation with a number of outside experts. Our analysis also indicates that
panel members strove to weight their personal preferences.

Emulation and rivalry. With regard to ABS and ABDC rankings, the stated aim of educating
younger researchers recalls Karpik’s notion of emulation. Also, our data suggests that the process
is not primarily geared toward rivalry (at least from an ex ante perspective) given the emphasis
placed on substantial judgment devices such as panelist experience, editorial policies of academic
journals, and external experts. The associations seemingly have a clear interest in selecting journals that are representative of business researchers’ various interests, based on each journal’s respective peculiarities.

**Desingularization.** This process contributes to maintain the singular character of academic journals. Notwithstanding the use of bibliometric data in the process, these formal devices are used reflexively and concurrently with substantial devices. Indeed, panelists devote time to consulting and comparing different judgment devices, which translates into more nuanced evaluation (which is more likely to show sensitivity to the specifics of the journals under consideration). Having experts from a variety of subfields on board contributes to the diversity of viewpoints, which arguably helps maintaining the singularity of the journals. By taking into account their own tastes, panelists conserve some independence in formulating a judgment on journal quality, therefore encouraging pluralism.

Although our analysis suggests that the process of producing ABS and ABDC rankings reflects emulation and singularization, the rankings created through these processes might implicitly involve rivalry and lead to desingularization when they are subsequently passively and heteronomously used by academics, as we will discuss in the next section.

**Assessment of publication records**

Academics are often required to take promotion, tenure, or funding decisions that involve the evaluation of publication records (Beattie & Goodacre, 2012). Although this is a challenging task, ‘publications in quality research journals is generally acknowledged to be a fundamental criterion of any research evaluation’ (Brinn, Jones & Pendlebury, 1996, p. 265). This section examines how
rankings are considered in the context of promotion and tenure decisions in research-based departments and research funding preliminary evaluations.\footnote{We recognize that our analysis focuses on accounting academia but we believe similar evaluation processes are likely used in the other fields of business academia.}

**Promotion and tenure decisions in research-based departments: evaluating with rankings**

This section presents a portrait of interviewee experiences regarding promotion and tenure decisions in research-based departments. Although we acknowledge a degree of institutional and contextual variability between respondents, the data we collected shows a number of patterns. Our description allows readers to assess whether these patterns can be transposed to other contexts they might be familiar with.

The objective of the evaluation process is to assess the quality of candidates’ applications for tenure and promotion. This process usually focuses on research work, particularly the journals in which applicants published (Beattie & Goodacre, 2012). Although applicants ‘compete’ for tenure and promotion, rivalry is not necessarily at play at first glance. Emulation might also be at the heart of the process. The following analysis underlines instances of emulation and rivalry.

**Judgment devices.** Most interviewees working in research-based departments cited the importance of formal devices, especially rankings (e.g., ABS and ABDC), in evaluating tenure and promotion cases. For instance, one academic mentioned that ‘in my school, we look at the FT rankings for tenure. […] You need to have at least one or two [FT] over that period’ (Academic, Canadian University). Another one echoed those comments by underlining that ‘when it comes to promotion, [rankings] are the lists that are actually used’ (Academic, British University).

In American research-based departments, without relying on rankings per se, a considerable consensus exists about the most ‘prestigious’ journals in the field. Indeed, consensual lists usually
include the *Journal of Accounting Research* (JAR), *The Accounting Review* (TAR) and the *Journal of Accounting and Economics* (JAE) (Bonner, Hesford, Van der Stede & Young, 2006; Reinstein & Calderon, 2006; Schwartz, Williams & Williams, 2005). Occasionally added to this ‘top three’ are *Accounting, Organizations and Society* (AOS), *Review of Accounting Studies* (RAS) and *Contemporary Accounting Research* (CAR), as this professor, previously employed by an American university, confirmed:

It’s a little bit different in the States because you don’t have a nationwide ranking, so each school basically has its own system for evaluating publications. Almost everyone universally agrees on the top three in US, but it usually doesn’t go beyond five or six. It depends on the preferred methodologies in the university. You always have the top three [i.e., JAR, TAR, JAE] in it and then there’s AOS, RAS, and CAR. If you’ve got more behavioral experimental kinds of researchers in your faculty then you tend to have AOS on the list. If you’ve got more analytical economics types you tend to have RAS on the list but not AOS.

It therefore seems that the quality of research is reduced to a handful of ‘highly reputable’ journals in these departments. The ‘top’ journals serve a gatekeeping function as guardians of ‘quality’, setting, in a way, the boundaries of quality research. This same interviewee insisted it is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain tenure at an American research-focused department with articles outside these ‘top journals’:

In the United States, at my former universities, I would not have gotten much credit for publishing in MAR [Management Accounting Review] because it’s not in the top three, whereas in [Country X] now it is going to be an excellent hit. To my knowledge, most research-oriented state schools in the US would not grant tenure based on four MARs or even six MARs or even eight MARs. […] Even if the publications were in AJPT [Auditing: A Journal of Practice & Theory] which is a US journal – even if I had six AJPTs – I know that I would not have gotten tenure at [University Y].

Consensual lists used in some departments are sometimes even more stringent than those suggested by the FT list:

We had this case several times in the faculty, papers that are published in journals that are in the FT list, for example *Journal of Business Venturing* or *Journal of Business Ethics*, often the evaluation committee would say: “This journal is in the FT list but the journal produces a lot of poor stuff. Therefore, we’re not going to pay attention to that
either.” […] So the rankings are not used in a strict almost mechanical way. (Academic, Canadian University)

In sum, formal judgment devices are used to reach tenure and promotion decisions. For researchers to be perceived as doing quality research, it appears necessary to publish in a restricted set of ‘top’ journals, either those included in external rankings or those emanating from internal consensus. The aura of excellence attributed to these journals thus exerts symbolic power on departments in their evaluations of quality.

**Forms of involvement.** The evaluation process depicted above is mainly passive, organized around rankings or consensual lists that are charged with fulfilling exceptional duties, such as determining ‘good’ academic journals, determining the quality of published research, and evaluating candidates for promotion or tenure. This kind of delegation may not be surprising since the proliferation of business school rankings and business school international accreditations (e.g., AACSB and EQUIS) has put pressure on deans and departments to use journal rankings in the assessment of publication records (Wedlin, 2006). For instance, the 2017 EQUIS standards recommend assessing scholarly research quality ‘by its impact on the international academic community. This impact may be measured by how often a publication is cited by other academic researchers or whether an article has been published in a widely read and reputed journal’ (EQUIS, 2017, p. 43). Although EQUIS does not formally endorse any ranking, it is reasonable to believe journals considered ‘widely read and reputed’ are the ones that are highly ranked. Such constraining modalities may explain why we found that many research-based departments are inclined to use rankings to assess the quality of faculty research for promotion and tenure decisions.

Nevertheless, departments sometimes exert some autonomy through the choice of journals that are considered. For instance,

[In Australia], when you’re hired as the equivalent of an untenured faculty, your contract says that if you want to get tenure, you need to publish a certain number of
papers out of [a] list of journals. The number of articles and the specific journals depend on the person and what role they are being hired for. […] For example, I do healthcare research so presumably if I started and I was going through the tenure process, they might include some medical journals. It’s a negotiation between the department chair and the person who’s being hired. (Academic, Australian University)

Overall, these comments suggest that, to some degree, the preferences of the department’s researchers are sometimes taken into account in the tenure process. Nonetheless, we need to keep in mind that rankings or very limited consensual lists are privileged to evaluate published research.

Emulation and rivalry. In Karpik’s view, this relatively ‘blind’ use of rankings and consensual lists leads to rivalry given the extent of passivity and heteronomy that characterizes the process. Paradoxically, in the eyes of some interviewees, the use of rankings contributes to ensuring neutrality, consistency and protection, which at first glance suggests a logic of emulation. Rankings reportedly allow political deliberations to be removed from the tenure process, thereby providing a degree of neutrality to the decisions:

[Using rankings] is removing the politics from the university setting. Maybe the politics happen outside in terms of what gets on the FT. But certainly tenure becomes less political because you have these, if you want to call it, objective criteria. Objective from the standpoint that we are not involved in determining, we are not interested in determining who’s getting tenure or not because you’ve got a criterion there. (Academic, Canadian University)

Using rankings also helps universities ‘to get consistency across disciplines in their promotion systems’ (Academic, Australian University), therefore simplifying the evaluation process and, perhaps, reinforcing its legitimacy. Finally, rankings provide critical researchers with ‘protection’:

For myself, in some ways, having journal rankings offers me a kind of a level of protection. As long as I can publish in the more highly ranked journals, I can publish quite radical and quite critical things. And as long as they’re published in highly ranked journals, nobody really questions very much what it is that I’m doing. It’s paradoxically a little form of protection for me. (Academic, British University)

It therefore seems that, as a result of such protective mechanisms, the use of rankings can make it easier for some researchers, whose work deviates significantly from the mainstream, to
obtain promotions. Although this protective mechanism might favor emulation by sometimes permitting diversity and innovation, the neutrality and consistency issues discussed above arguably reinforce and reproduce uniformity and desingularization.

Desingularization and dequalification. Overall, when rankings and consensual lists are used as tools to identify a tiny set of ‘best journals’, they can influence the trajectories of research through the promotion of a simplifying template regarding what is meant by quality. Requiring publication in ‘top’ journals for tenure prompts (intentionally or not) aspiring professors to bend to one way of conducting research – perhaps hampering innovation and originality in the field (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). In addition, in granting symbolic power to a handful of journals, departments tend to leave the plurality of ‘peripheral’ academic journals in the shadows, therefore participating in desingularization. Also, delegating judgment to formal devices spares departments from the process of judging quality, which contributes to the dequalification of researchers who are less and less involved in evaluating the particularities of research outputs.

Research funding preliminary evaluations: an informed assessment

Evaluating research projects proposed for funding generally rests on two elements: the research project and the researcher’s publication record. To evaluate the latter, adjudication committee members have to consider the quality of the candidate’s published research. Committee members pointed out that, as the time available to evaluate research proposals is limited, the evaluation of the quality of academic journals in which funding applicants have published facilitates the work.

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14 Most of the interview evidence mobilized in this subsection was gathered with Canadian interviewees.
15 It is important to note that the people working on adjudication committees also occupy other positions in academia, such as journal editors, members of editorial boards, and active researchers. In this subsection, we are interested in what they told us as adjudication committee members. We acknowledge they may think and behave differently in other areas of activity.
16 Given the objective of our study, we focus on the evaluation of the researcher’s publication record. The assessment of the research project is important but falls outside the scope of our study.
Ultimately, the aim in evaluating the researcher’s publication record is to fund only applicants having ‘the potential to contribute to our research field’ (Adjudication committee member, Canadian funding agency). One of the most significant assumptions underlying the funding agency’s mindset is that an applicant’s publication record constitutes a reliable predictor of the researcher’s ability to carry out research and publish it in journals and other venues that allow the research to have an impact on academia and society. While we are aware that the evaluation of a researcher’s dossier ultimately translates into a collective decision influenced by the committee’s group dynamics, our analysis focuses on the preliminary individual evaluation undertaken by each committee member, before the group meets and reaches a decision.

Judgment devices. As one committee member underlined: ‘When the time comes to evaluate the researcher’s dossier, do we really have the time to read the individual’s publications? Honestly, we don’t have the time. It would take ages and we have a lot of dossiers to evaluate’ (Adjudication committee member, Canadian funding agency). As mentioned above, committee members thus focus on journal quality. To determine journal quality, adjudication committee members are expected to rely on their knowledge of the academic arena and judgment devices they consider relevant. Nevertheless, as the following extract reveals, funding bodies refrain from formally suggesting the use of rankings: ‘Here I’ll attest as a committee member for both public and private funding organizations – both of them. I can tell you that rankings are not officially part of the methods used to evaluate dossiers’ (Adjudication committee member, Canadian funding agency). These remarks indicate that consultation of rankings is not prescribed, but it is up to individual committee members to choose whether or not they will use them in making their preliminary judgment. The adjudication committee members explained in the interviews that, with no clear directives from the funding agencies, the use of rankings is debated within committees. The following excerpt illustrates the matter:
On the committees in general it’s a really polarized topic. You’ll have a group of people who will be totally opposed to us looking at rankings or who will tend to say, ‘Not everybody publishes in A journals. Is that what’s really important?’ […] There are two lines of thought. I tend to go to rankings especially in the context of a committee like that because, again, when it’s in Human Resources or Organizational Behavior, I don’t really know the journal rankings. In Economics, there are so many journals that I need to go look at that to give me [an] idea [of the journals]. (Adjudication committee member, Canadian funding agency)

While this excerpt suggests that the use of rankings in evaluation processes is not homogenously supported in committees, the interviewee mentioned a reliance on rankings, in order to assess research files for areas outside of her/his comfort zone. Some panel members reportedly use rankings as an initial tool to ‘get an idea’ about journal quality:

My first instinct will be to go to the rankings. I’ll go see how the journal compares to what I know. […] So yes, rankings will be useful to me when people are publishing in journals that I don’t know. (Adjudication committee member, Canadian funding agency)

Thus, rankings play a key role for one’s initial assessment of journal quality. A phrase such as, ‘I’ll go see how the journal compares to what I know’ suggests that rankings ultimately serve as a comparison basis, without having to take into consideration the peculiarities of a given unknown journal. Conversely, some other interviewees mobilize substantial judgment devices to evaluate journals with which they are not familiar. Their preliminary evaluation is especially guided by the journal’s presentation and editorial policies, which relate to the specific characteristics of a given journal. For example, some people seem to grant importance to peer review, as the following extract underlines: ‘People looking at journals ask, is this a journal with an editorial review board?’ One interviewee also considered the journal’s title: ‘I look to see if it’s peer-reviewed and I look at the title. For example, if it is a Tunisian journal, I don’t need a big ranking to know that it would be surprising if it was highly ranked.’ Thus, journal titles or review policies help some committee members determine the quality of the journals and the applicant’s publication record.
Some adjudication committee members interviewed reportedly base their preliminary evaluation of journal quality on another substantial judgment device: their experience and knowledge of the field as relating to specific characteristics of a given journal. As one committee member explained:

When I publish in a C journal in which everyone in my field publishes, we then have to conclude that it’s a good journal. If you want to be known in that field, you need to publish in it. And I have the impression that the majority of people think that way. It happened before that some people on the committee said, “Listen, this journal, I know it, it’s in my field. It’s more or less good,” or, on the contrary, “It’s a good journal.” (Adjudication committee member, Canadian funding agency)

A number of committee members interviewed, therefore, seem to forge an opinion of journal quality that is influenced by their personal knowledge of ‘good’ journals in their field of expertise.

Forms of involvement. Our findings suggest variability in committee members’ evaluation process. Although some are passive and heteronomous, relying much on rankings, others are quite active as their individual preliminary evaluation takes into account substantial judgment devices (i.e., members’ knowledge and experience, editorial policies) in addition to rankings. They also show a degree of autonomy in evaluating each applicant dossier by mobilizing their own experience and knowledge.

Emulation and rivalry. To some extent, this process is consistent with the ultimate objective of identifying applicants who may contribute to their field of research by publishing in a variety of journals, thereby encouraging the development of different ways of expressing scientific discovery and originality. The overarching rationale is that complex evaluation can hardly be delegated to rankings alone. That being said, we found variability regarding the extent to which the individual member’s personal tastes and preferences are considered, especially when evaluating a publication record outside the member’s field of expertise.
**Desingularization and dequalification.** Given that some adjudication committee members rely on their knowledge of the academic arena and substantial judgment devices to determine journal quality, their attitudes may help to prevent desingularisation. Variability and originality are encouraged as quality is not necessarily limited to a handful of journals. Further, such attitudes may prevent dequalification of researchers. Indeed, a number of committee members mobilize their expertise in formulating funding recommendations instead of blindly relying on rankings. A context of singularity and qualification is also sustained when funding bodies refrain from formally suggesting the use of rankings.

However, other committee members use rankings as a benchmark for initial assessments of journal quality. This attitude can lead to desingularization when the committee member is unaware of the applicant’s research field. The adjudication committee members explained in their interviews that, with no clear directives from funding agencies, the use of rankings is debated within committees. This suggests some academics believe they are not sufficiently competent to evaluate research quality by themselves, which is an indication of dequalification.

In sum, our analysis suggests that there is variability in the importance attributed to rankings by members of funding adjudication committees. Although rivalry is obviously at play when a community of academics competes for funding, emulation and rivalry seemingly coexist among adjudication committee member attitudes toward quality assessment.

**Discussion**

If rankings have been the object of recrimination in the business literature, two recurrent lines of criticism dominate. The first is directed at the producers of rankings, who are criticized for relying excessively on formal judgment devices such as bibliometric data to qualify journals (e.g., Hussain, 2011; Willmott, 2011), hence contributing to the desingularization of academic journals. In this
respect, our study is, to our knowledge, the first to provide empirical support of these criticisms. We find that the processes involved in the production of the FT50, SSCI – JCR and Business School X’s ranking mostly follow a logic of rivalry that entails passive and heteronomous involvement – thereby favoring the desingularization of academic journals. Indeed, rankings of ‘top journals’ such as the FT50, which restrict attention to a small group of publications, obviously cannot reflect the broad spectrum of preferences within the academic community. The same goes for numbered rankings based on citation numbers like the JCR. These rankings take little interest in the specific content of journals, thus downplaying their singularity – as if the ultimate aim of research were to be cited, no matter by who, for what reason, or how. As Alvesson and Sandberg (2014, p. 968) underscored, ‘[…] narrowly defined research fields tend to produce fragmented knowledge, […] harmful protectionism of specific areas and uncreative thinking (at least outside puzzle-solving tasks) which, taken together, generate significant barriers to more innovative and frame-breaking research’. Our findings, however, integrate nuance into the debate by underscoring the substantial judgment devices and active and autonomous involvement mobilized in the production of the ABS and ABDC rankings that somewhat contribute to maintaining the singular character of academic journals, although the subsequent use of these rankings might well be counterproductive to this end.

The second oft-cited criticism concerns the overuse of rankings in the academic community (e.g., Adler & Harzing, 2009; Gendron, 2008) which is allegedly not only conducive to desingularization but also to the dequalification of academics. Our analysis provides empirical support for this criticism. We found that tenure and promotion decisions often follow a logic of rivalry and tend to be blindly supported by formal devices such as rankings and consensual lists that are passively and heteronomously mobilized to assess research quality. Inevitably, this contributes to the desingularization of academic journals and the dequalification of academics who
are no longer significantly involved in assessing the unique qualities of a candidate’s research portfolio. Our analysis, however, nuances previous criticisms by pointing out some instances of the use of substantial judgment devices and active and autonomous involvement by members of adjudication committees in reaching funding decisions. These processes, which are predicated on an emulation logic, somewhat alleviate the desingularization and dequalification phenomena.

Our findings indicate that issues of desingularization are not trivial. Evaluative autonomy is quite constrained as only some producers of national rankings and some funding agency adjudication committee members tend to affirm their personal tastes. Otherwise, heteronomy – i.e., the endorsement of the tastes that underlie the constitution of judgment devices – tends to prevail and privileges a one-dimensional and univocal environment which disfavors difference and originality. In endorsing the tastes of judgment devices, heteronomous evaluations have academic communities run the great risk of seeing research become more homogenous and standardized.

Our findings suggest that issues of dequalification are also significant. While passivity presents practical advantages, it engenders important challenges: that of maintaining the ability to gather multiple sources of information and the capacity to judge quality (i.e., quality of the information collected and quality of the singularity under consideration). Passivity tends to confine individuals and institutions to ‘pre-formatted’ ways of thinking which may engender a loss of reflexive capacity in the long run. Over time, the very idea of judging quality without consulting rankings becomes more and more unrealistic and even ‘abnormal,’ the advantages of passivity being irresistible for many. However, in considering rankings as a predominant judgment device, researchers and producers become less and less competent to gather, consult, and question multiple sources of information. Having become an appendage of numeric and ranked data, passive actors see their capacity to judge journal quality diminished. This situation ultimately leads to the dequalification of academics in evaluating research (apart perhaps from contributions in their own...
specialized niches). From a pessimistic stance, Karpik points out that passivity pressures continue to grow ‘since all powers – state, administrative, scientific, and economic – join forces to relentlessly extend the sphere of calculativeness in the name of order, truth, technology, and economic wealth’ (Karpik, 2010, p. 6). This situation may especially occur in university environments where, in the name of order, harmony and recognition, departments are encouraged to delegate judgment in promotion and tenure processes. Passivity and the underlying lack of reflexivity it promotes may engender dysfunctional consequences in the long run: erosion of critical thinking, tendencies to conform to the dictates of highly ranked journals, reduction in research innovativeness (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012).

Maintaining diversity and singularity requires active effort when undertaking evaluation, as well as the courage and willingness to assert one’s tastes. Active involvement may translate into evaluation being more nuanced and sensitive to the specifics of the object being considered. Some of the evaluation processes we studied reflect a desire to qualify academic journals in a meaningful way. Such is the case of national ranking panel members and some adjudication committee members. In their responses, one perceives a commitment to ask questions, discuss and ultimately make an informed decision. However relevant, we contend that these relatively slow thought processes must face one serious challenge: time. As time pressures are increasingly significant in academia (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013; Berg & Seeber, 2016; Gendron, 2008, 2015) – as today’s race to publication or tenure illustrates – it can be difficult to exercise, or even convince oneself of the relevance of active engagement and autonomous involvement in evaluation processes. Justifying reliance on different judgment devices may be all the more arduous considering that university administrations and international accreditations encourage to some extent the use of rankings – which are considered as tools that offer a ‘turnkey’ evaluation of quality (Parker, 2014;
Wedlin, 2006). However, as Flyvbjerg (2001) and Alvesson and Sandberg (2014) maintained, research in a field ‘progresses’ further when there is a diversity of ways of producing knowledge.

Although our study brings nuances into the debate, our findings support previous criticisms suggesting that desingularization of journals and dequalification of academics are two significant threats to the world of research. These threats run counter to the great values of academic culture: academic freedom, plurality, collegiality, intellectual ambition, the development of one’s creative drive, and the importance of originality (Chomsky, 2003; Humphrey & Gendron, 2015). From this perspective, academics must be particularly wary of influences that push them, sometimes subtly, toward excessive conformity. As maintained by Said (1994, p. xvi), ‘[…] the principal intellectual duty is the search for relative independence from such [institutional] pressures’.

Conclusion

This study has primarily sought to extend the debate on rankings by empirically assessing whether ranking production and utilization processes contribute to desingularization and dequalification phenomena. Karpik’s analytical tools (2007, 2010, 2011) of singularities, judgment devices, forms of involvement, and emulation and rivalry, have helped us to make these processes more intelligible. While providing some subtlety to the debate, our findings, by and large, lend empirically support to previous criticisms of journal rankings.

Ultimately, we hope through this study to provoke reflection among members of the academic community on their ways of evaluating published research and the influence of the context under which their evaluations are done. This reflexivity exercise should go beyond the question of rankings. As one researcher underlined in an interview, the presence of rankings in the academic world is almost inevitable: ‘We can complain all we want but the reality is that rankings are not going to go away.’ It is rather a matter of knowing what objectives we collectively wish to
pursue, as an academic community, on the evaluation of published research and if we are ready to invest in them. As Alvesson and Sandberg (2013, p. 139) underlined, ‘as a collective we control the norms for good research and, thus, to a considerable degree, form, bend, and translate how governments and other institutions’ policies influence the research practice.’ Thus, what may be feared the most is not necessarily rankings, but short-sighted actors who, by ignorance, ease, or personal interest, renounce thoughtful evaluation in favor of rote evaluation (Gendron, 2015).

Readers may find it useful to consider several avenues of research ensuing from our enquiry. Why is active and autonomous involvement so absent when academics assess publication records? Could it be due to pressures for short-termism and research ‘performance’? Or does it ensue from a lack of incentives for greater involvement in the evaluation process?

Also, a case study could examine in greater depth the process of developing specific rankings. For example, limited information exists about the development of the FT50 ranking. A more detailed study could examine how deans identify the ‘best’ journals and those that should be expelled from the ranking. It would also be interesting to investigate how group dynamics influence academic journal evaluation processes. Finally, more research is needed to understand the role international accreditations play in the production and reproduction of what constitutes research quality.

In the end, if we collectively prefer passive and heteronomous judgment to active and autonomous engagement in evaluation, the academic community runs the risk of leaving the task of setting the criteria for quality in the hands of a few ‘experts’, turning them into the gatekeepers of quality itself. But when only a few people decide what a ‘good’ journal is, research has the tendency to become homogeneous. Hence, we hope that the analysis developed in this study will be able to motivate members of the academic community to question their existing practices in evaluating research quality.
Some measures may be taken to promote diversity. For example, researchers could initiate a dialogue with the administrative bodies of their institutions in the hope of fostering some openness to a plurality of tastes and to multivocality in research. Initiatives could also be undertaken to increase the status of rankings favorable to epistemological diversity – in order to counteract the idea that only a handful of journals are worthy of consideration. Also, established researchers could signal their views of journal quality by publishing their work in journals that are not necessarily ranked high in the prevailing rankings or that are currently excluded from citation indexes. Such a move might encourage ranking producers to broaden the list of quality journals subsequently used by researchers in their evaluation processes. Special issues of business journals could also be devoted to research quality assessment to stimulate discussion among scholars.

Collectively speaking, maintaining the status quo will see the quality and diversity of research diminish. Perhaps it is time to go beyond critiquing rankings and to engage in the process of evaluating published research so that it reflects the deeper values of academic culture. As the pithy distillation of Gandhi’s teaching puts it, ‘be the change you wish to see in the world.’
Acknowledgments

We sincerely thank all those interviewed for the time they gave to participate in this research project. We are also grateful for the constructive comments received from Associate Editor Carlos Larrinaga, two reviewers, Marion Brivot, Henri Guénin, as well as participants at the 2016 Alternative Accounts Conference (Ottawa) and the 2016 École de Comptabilité Conference (Québec City). Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
References


Table 1 – Information on interviewees

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