

## **Selecting a Journal For Your AHP/ANP Publication: A Guide for Beginners**

Enrique Mu

Some time ago, a colleague who had submitted a paper to our IJAHP journal asked me about the status of his paper. He told me he needed to publish something as soon as possible because he was about to complete his doctoral studies and needed to show that he had publications. I asked him where he planned to submit job applications, and whether IJAHP was a suitable journal for this purpose. He had a vague idea about the first part of my question, but he was clueless about the second part. This conversation constitutes the motivation for this essay, although I must warn the reader that it is from a mainly U.S. perspective due to the nature of the author's experience.

When selecting a suitable journal to submit our AHP/ANP scholarly work, we may use the same analytic hierarchical approach we use to do our research. At the top level you should decide what the goal of publishing the paper is. Are you publishing to get an academic position, or publishing to divulge an important finding? This distinction may not be obvious to young academics who often jump at the first publishing opportunity, but your top goal makes all the difference when choosing where to submit for publication.

Given that this essay is aimed at young academicians, let's assume that you want to publish a paper based on your dissertation and that you expect your publication to improve your chances of landing your dream academic job upon doctoral graduation. Your criteria should be based on your intended goal. I do not expect to develop a decision model within the boundaries of an essay, but it is possible to discuss some important criteria, in no particular order, to select the most suitable journals in which to submit your research.

First, you must consider the *journal citation indexing requirements* of your target institution. A citation index is a bibliographic database. The top of the line publications for beginners<sup>1</sup> are those indexed in the Web of Science. Next in the pecking order are Scopus indexed publications. These two bibliographic databases are the main competitors, and to be listed in one or both will give a journal a good reputation. In addition to these two indices, there are many other indices such as Copernicus, CiteSeer, DOAJ and Google Scholar. The bottom line is that you must be aware of the indexing requirements of your target institution, otherwise, you risk having a publication that "does not count" for your job application purposes.

Second, the *journal impact factor*, that is, the measure of the average number of citations of recently published papers, also constitutes a common criterion. Basically, this factor is used for assessing the impact of a journal. A journal with a higher impact factor should be a "better" journal to publish in because it will expose your paper to more people than a journal with a lower impact factor. However, impact factor is not as reliable as it seems. The impact factor can be affected by different variables, including editorial policy. For example, if a journal publishes a large number of review articles, it will be certain to have

---

<sup>1</sup> In many institutions, a senior basket of journals is defined for their senior faculty should they want to keep moving up in the ranks beyond associate professor.

a higher impact factor because review articles are more often read and cited than original research articles. Another questionable approach is the practice (by some editors) of coercing its authors into adding spurious citations from the same journal to increase its impact factor. For these reasons, universities (at least in the U.S.) rarely use impact factor as a criterion to judge a faculty publication, although journals promote it to attract authors. The lesson here is that even though a journal with a higher impact factor may be preferable; do not put too much importance on this factor.

Third, you must honestly assess your article's *publication potential*; in other words, what are the real chances that your paper will be published in a given journal. While we may aim at the best fruit, realistically it may be too high in the tree. To assess this you should evaluate the target journal, its rejection rate, and your own self-assessment of the paper. Some elite journals are clearly aimed at senior scholars and may have a rejection rate as high as 95%<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, the probability of being published in such a journal is very remote unless you are really breaking new ground with your research. The self-assessment of your paper can prove to be a bit trickier. Most young researchers confuse the quality of their research, which may be very high, and the quality of their papers which tends to be lower for the simple reason that young researchers still lack the experience of writing in an engaging and convincing way. A paper may have very little chance of being published in journal A, while having a great chance of being published in journal B, and deciding which journal to submit your paper to is a judgment call. If you are not sure, you can always ask the advice of a more veteran colleague or a mentor.

An unfortunate practice, that I certainly do not support, is that of writing similar papers with different titles and cleverly written abstracts to make them appear different, and submitting them to two or more journals at once. Nowadays, there are Internet tools available to journal editors which make it relatively easy to detect this practice, and I can assure you there is nothing that irritates an editor more than finding out that the paper he/she has been working on is being submitted somewhere else. Even without Internet tools, I have had the frustrating situation of a trusted reviewer telling me that he revised the same paper for two other journals (true story!). This practice also becomes obvious when an author decides to withdraw a paper later in the editorial process, arguing for example that there is a need to update the references (really?, do you just realize this now?) as a way of avoiding the embarrassment of having the same paper being published simultaneously in two different journals. In summary, be ethical, be professional, and make sure you know where you want to get your paper published.

Fourth, *journal fit* or how well your topic fits with the aims of the target journal and, most importantly, its fit with past published papers of a journal. Does your application (e.g. supply chain) and methodology (e.g. AHP) fit with previous published papers of a journal? While there is always a first time for everything, if the journal has previously published papers related to your topic, it indicates your scholarship fits the interests of the journal. Similarly, if the journal has previously published articles using AHP/ANP methodology, you will not have to spend the effort explaining what the methodology is and why it is suitable.

---

<sup>2</sup> Some journals report a high rejection rate as a badge of honor, but authors can usually inquire about an estimated rejection rate of a particular journal.

Fifth, you must also consider the *disciplinary scope* of the journal. If your main research area is information technology, you may be expected by your department to publish in journals in this specific area rather than in other non-specific operational research journals. On the other hand, some departments may not make a distinction between these types of journals. Similarly, some departments may encourage inter-disciplinary work while other departments may be more rigid in terms of what constitutes a valid publication in their area. You can always check with your department chair about what they value most in this particular area. You should also do some research into where senior professionals in your school have published, and read their articles to educate yourself. After all, writing and publishing research papers also involves experience. You should also consider what kind of professionals you would like as readers. For example, if my AHP/ANP study is about how to prioritize environmentally vulnerable forests, I would probably want a journal that is mainly read by environmental scientists and forestry experts rather than professional decision-making experts. On the other hand, if my approach is breaking new ground in the use of AHP/ANP, I would consider a decision-making journal as a suitable outlet. In summary, ask yourself who and where you would like your readers to be.

Sixth, *journal coverage*, that is, where most of the journal readers are located is also very important. I can see my readers shaking his/her heads and saying, “C’mon! Most journals have international coverage nowadays.” This may be true in theory; after all, how many journals have the word “international” in their names? Open access journals are accessible everywhere, however, if you look more carefully, you may notice that an International Journal in Mongolia is read mainly by people in the region (I know I am using an extreme example, but I want you to get the idea). One simple way to check a journal’s coverage is to look for your target journal in the library of the academic institution you are interested in joining, or to mention the journal to the people that have the potential of becoming your colleagues and see what response you get.

Finally, you must also take into account your *degree of fulfillment*. Which journal would you like to see your name associated with? I know, this may be in contradiction to your current or future department preferences, but this is why AHP/ANP deals with multi-criteria decision analysis. After working so hard to complete a study, and even harder to write your paper (believe me, doing the study is the easiest part many times), where do you want to see your paper published? Imagine a conversation with a colleague in which you say, “I have recently published a paper in...”. What journal would you like to see your name associated with? This is quite subjective, and you as an author must make this decision.

I realize that I have not been comprehensive in my discussion of journal selection criteria for your AHP/ANP academic output, but I hope that I will have fulfilled my goal of making you reflect on why and where you want to publish your paper!