Beyond Topic: How Readers Choose Which Articles to Read

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The Question:

When faced with numerous articles on their topic, how do scholars make the decision of which articles to read?

A study funded by:

Research Team: Carol Tenopir, Donald W. King, Suzie Allard, Ben Bates, Ken Levine, Ben Birch
International survey with 442 responses from 12 countries
Ranking Article Characteristics

Respondents were asked to rank the importance of seven article characteristics from 1-7 where 1 is “most important” and 7 “least important.”

- Article topic  
- Online accessibility  
- Source of article  
- Journal title  
- Author  
- Publisher type  
- Author’s institution
Topic = Number 1 Ranked Characteristic

![Bar Chart]

Rank

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

0
100
200
300
400
Next Most Important:

Accessibility

(this could range from online articles available at no personal cost to an article available online at modest personal cost to being available only in print)
Online Accessibility (Score 3.27)
Also Important:

• **Source of article** (top refereed journals to non-refereed or unpublished articles not in a journal)

• **Journal Title** (title that you regard highly to a title you find acceptable to a title unknown to you)

• **Author(s)** (from top scholars to those completely unknown to you)
Source of Article (Score 3.46)

Rank
Journal Title: (Score 3.58)
Author(s): (Score 4.07)
The Least Important:

• Type of Publisher (5.21)
• Author’s Institution (5.82)
Type of Publisher: (Score 5.21)
Author(s)' Institution: (Score 5.82)
Other Important Characteristics:

- Readability/Design (font, layout, clarity, good graphic design) \( n=49 \)
- Editing Quality \( n=21 \)
- Impact factor/citation counts \( n=14 \)
## Ranking of Article Characteristics by Discipline

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Humanities</th>
<th>Sciences</th>
<th>Medical</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>Engineering</th>
<th>Professional</th>
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Conjoint Analysis

- Statistical technique used in market research
- Preferences for different attributes that make up a product or service
- For example: when buying a car: importance of price, style, gas mileage
- Aka
  - “trade-off analysis”
  - “stated preference analysis”
Profile 1
How likely are you (on a scale of 1 to 10) to read an article with these characteristics?

Written by an author I recognize as a good (but not top) scholar, in a peer-reviewed journal outside the top tier, and available online at no personal cost [to reader].
Absolutely would not read→ 1…2…3…4…5…6…7…8…9…10←Absolutely would read

Profile 13
How likely are you (on a scale of 1 to 10) to read an article with these characteristics?

Written by an author I recognize as a good (but not top) scholar, from a source other than a journal, and available online at no personal cost.
Absolutely would not read→ 1…2…3…4…5…6…7…8…9…10 ←Absolutely would read
Top Rated Profiles (only ones to be scored 7 or better)

- Profile 7 (TOP RATED PROFILE score of 9)
  - Written by an author I recognize as a top scholar, in a top-tier peer-reviewed journal, and available online at no personal cost.

- Profile 1 (RATED 2nd score of 7.7)
  - Written by an author I recognize as a good (but not top) scholar, in a peer-reviewed journal outside the top tier, and available online at no personal cost.

- Profile 3 (RATED 3rd score of 7.6)
  - Written by an author I don’t recognize, in a top-tier peer-reviewed journal, and available online at no personal cost.
Importance Scores

1. Access
2. Author
3. Journal Source
Access Utility Estimate

Online no personal Cost  1.604
Online personal Cost    -1.107
Print Only              -.497
Author Utility Estimate

Top Tier 1.412
Good .386
Weak -1.193
Unknown -.605
Journal Utility Estimate

Top Peer   1.113
Other Peer .376
Not Peer   -.971
Not Journal -.519
The Question Answered?
When faced with numerous articles on their topic, how do scholars make the decision of which articles to read?

• Topic, but also a mix of many other things, including:
  • Accessibility at no personal cost
  • Top or good author
  • Peer reviewed journal
(% change in ave # of Article Readings/Year & Ave Minutes/Reading by University Faculty in the US)