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Research Article

An advanced meta-ranking for the expanding international business field – Journal status and future trajectories



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ABSTRACT

We re-examine and advance the landscape of academic journal publishing, specifically focusing on international business (IB) journals. While previous journal rankings have identified sixteen domain-specific IB journals, a renewed look at the journal space shows that the landscape of publications for IB has grown, while at the same time, mostly, retained or even improved its quality propositions. Utilizing state-of-the-art machine learning methods including Classification and Regression Trees (CART) and random forests next to data envelopment analysis (DEA) for performance evaluation as well as fuzzy clustering methods, our meta-ranking identifies opportunities for mid-range journals with potential for ascension to higher quality clusters. Comparative analysis further suggests Journal of World Business (JWB) as a candidate for future inclusion in elite journal lists such as the FT50 list, alongside the Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS). Overall, our results show the IB journal landscape is developing towards a quality-based growth trajectory. This advancement has the potential to bolster the long-term competitiveness of the discipline by expanding the scope of its scholarship. Furthermore, it enhances the discipline's influence within the broader management and business ecosystem.

1. Introduction

Business and management scholars simultaneously critique and take part in discussions about the value of specific journals and journal rankings. The debates are a function of the increasing “mediatization of higher education”, a process by which higher education institutions and the actions of actors become increasingly influenced and shaped by the media and communication technologies (Stack, 2016). LinkedIn posts and social media commentaries of senior academics, regarding which journals “real academics” need to have published in, resemble populist politics and reinforce the acquiescence to a system which may have little resemblance with traditional norms and practices of advancing human knowledge through Humboldt's principles (c.f., Günther, 1988; Sinkovics & Schlegelmilch, 2000).

The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) (The

American Society for Cell Biology, 2012) was set up to counter such developments. It intends to improve the ways in which the outputs of scholarly research are evaluated and emphasizes assessment of research and scientific content on its own merit over publication metrics. DORA challenges the reliance on journal ranking lists and is particularly concerned with the use of the impact factor as surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles and related performance evaluations (Schmid, 2017). In the United Kingdom, DORA, in tandem with the Leiden manifesto for research metrics (Hicks et al., 2015) triggered a lively discussion around the ‘metric tide’ (Wilsdon et al., 2015) and established the importance to shift institutional cultures, practices and incentive frameworks which sustain damaging and irresponsible use of scientific metrics (Wilsdon, 2017).

Yet, even when acknowledging the unintended consequences of a metrified journal landscape and its associated ‘journal fetishism’

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(Willmott, 2011), engagement with journal rankings is going to continue for several reasons. First, despite DORA and calls for responsible metrics, journal rankings offer a convenient shortcut to intricate and complex and time-consuming challenges of reading, subjective assessment and communication of academic output (cf. Morgan-Thomas et al., 2024). Second, they contribute to career advancements and prestige, as publishing in high-ranking journals increases researcher's visibility and feeds into career advancement and engagement with funding bodies and external societies. Third, through careful benchmarking and selection of journals best suited to target as outlets for their publications, scholars themselves seek to maximize the exposure to and impact of their work and contribute to the mediatization of their environment. Fourth, business school deans and their executive who usually only have narrow expertise in a particular domain, despite their responsibility over multiple disciplinary domains, use journal rankings to inform decisions about resource allocation, staff recruitment and program development. Hence, despite their imperfections, institutions and individuals deem journal rankings practically useful and will continue to 'dance with the devil' (Serenko & Bontis, 2024).

In this paper, we take a performative approach that suggests continued engagement with the criticism of journal rankings by refining and improving journal rankings further. To capture the multifaceted work of scholarly research more accurately, we advocate for the development of more nuanced and robust indicators. We advance journal evaluation through a comprehensive meta-ranking approach that includes a more significant empirical foundation and list of journals than the work previously presented. This allows us to widen our lens by acknowledging that the International Business (IB) journal landscape, as represented through international academic journals, is expanding. We revisit previous insights regarding the standing of IB journals in a global landscape (Tüselmann et al., 2016) and update their trajectories in light of emerging developments. Given the time that has elapsed since the last ranking study, we are able to incorporate a dynamic perspective, where we reevaluate existing quality rankings. Through this analysis, we show the competitive positioning of core IB journals and illustrate the organic growth of the subject area within high-quality journals. This provides insights into the evolving landscape of IB research. Furthermore, this opens the potential of an expanding IB journal presence in future reshuffles of elite journal lists, such as the FT50.

2. Methodology

We employ the methodology developed by Tüselmann et al. (2015) for meta-ranking of scholarly journals, which was later employed (2016) to examine the standing of IB journals in a broader landscape of business and management disciplines. As the present study includes an update on the latter, we therefore outline the existing methodology in this section in a summative form and refer the reader to the earlier studies (2015, 2016) for a detailed exposition. However, we explain new elements of the methodology below in greater detail.

Meta-ranking approach to journal ranking has recently gained popularity in a variety of academic disciplines, as it seeks to produce a balanced view of journal reputation and influence by consolidating a comprehensive selection of existing, reputable journal rankings, thus aiming to produce a balanced and reproducible outcome and addressing key shortcomings of purely citation- or opinion-based approaches (Bornmann et al., 2018; Vana et al., 2016). The meta-ranking methodology developed by Tüselmann et al. (2015) involves two major exercises: (i) imputation of missing rank data by means of *Classification and Regression Trees* (CART) and *random forests*—state-of-the-art machine learning methods, and (ii) aggregate rating and ranking of journals by means of *data envelopment analysis* (DEA)—a state-of-the-art method of performance evaluation. Specifically, imputation of missing data in (i) is required due to a considerable number of void rank gradations in the data set, emerging because of collating several existing ranking lists which typically differ in their selection of journals. To this end, CART

and random forests are employed to learn association between different ranking lists from the existing data and through that, impute missing ranking gradations across the data set. As non-parametric methods, CART and random forests do not require making distributional assumptions on the data; at the same time, they naturally permit probabilistic imputation of rank gradations, which thus avoids point-wise predictions. In (ii), the data set thus completed undergoes aggregation by means of ordinal DEA which combines rank gradations of each journal across different lists to a weighted average. In the spirit of DEA, the method avoids subjective choice of rank weights by the analyst but instead allows journals to choose such weights on their own and cross-evaluate each other, which yields an aggregate score for each journal on a ratio scale between 0 and 1, termed *DEA rating score*.

This methodology compares favorably to other existing meta-ranking approaches (Halim & Khan, 2019; Rosenthal & Weiss, 2017) as it maintains a broad coverage of journals, subject areas, and underlying ranking lists while avoiding overreliance on citation data and using state-of-the-art approaches to missing data imputation and data aggregation. It has been used by Tüselmann et al. (2016) to produce a meta-ranking of 819 journals in business, management, and related disciplines based on ten existing, reputable ranking lists included in the 55th edition of the Journal Quality List (JQL) (Harzing, 2020) and, in addition, the Impact Factor. Furthermore, they have used the classification of journals by subject area offered by the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) Academic Journal Guide⁴ to support imputations of missing data as well as to conduct comparative analysis of IB journals vis-à-vis other subject areas. We advance their study in the present work as follows.

First, we expand the scope of subject areas to Business and Taxation Law, previously not included in Tüselmann et al. (2016).

Second, we omit those ranking lists used in the previous study which were produced prior to 2020 and which have not been updated since then and/or are discontinued, and have included a Nordic ranking list (JUFO) (Pölönen et al., 2021) to further increase geographical coverage. Table 1 provides an overview of the journal ranking lists used in our meta-ranking.

Third, we expand the data set by including, in addition to the Impact Factor, a second citation-based indicator: Scopus' SNIP (Moed, 2010)—which adjusts journal citations for different citation habits in different disciplines and thus supports fairness of comparison between journals in

Table 1
Target lists.

No.	Title	Abbrev.	Year	Journals	Ranks
1.	Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Section Économie / Gestion)	CNRS	2020	837	5
2.	Australian Business Deans Council Journal Quality List	ABDC	2022	2657	4
3.	Publication Forum of the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies (Panel 16)	JUFO	2023	1758	4
4.	Erasmus Research Institute of Management Journals List	EJL	2024	245	5
5.	Association of Professors of Business in German-speaking Countries	VHB	2024	1021	5
6.	Chartered Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Guide	CABS	2024	1822	4
7.	Impact Factor from the Journal Citation Reports	IF	2023	21,787	n.a.
8.	SNIP indicator from the Scopus Source List	SNIP	2023	27,570	n.a.

⁴ We use throughout the paper the commonly abridged term "CABS List".

a cross-disciplinary data set. As a result, our data set comprises six ranking lists and two citation-based indicators, which are referred collectively to as *target lists*, see Table 1. This mix strikes a better balance between the subjective peer-review rankings and objective citation metrics, compared to Tüselmann et al. (2016). To support missing data imputations, we additionally use seven *secondary lists*: Impact Factors 2018–2022, and Scopus' CiteScore and SJR 2023.⁵

Fourth, a substantial number of journals were not covered by CABS and therefore lack CABS subject area classification. We employed the CART and random forests methods to learn the association between the subject-area classifications offered by the different target lists and based on that, impute the missing CABS classifications using a missing data imputation procedure similar to the one outlined above. Imputation has not been possible for some journals due to their existing subject-area classifications being too broad to map reliably onto the CABS classification; such journals have been excluded from further consideration. Following Tüselmann et al. (2016), we further apply a threshold that requires journals' presence in at least 25 % of the target lists to be included in the aggregate rating.

This has resulted in a data set comprising 2927 journals, which represents an increase by the factor of 3.6 relative to Tüselmann et al. (2016). This expansion is explained by a combination of inter alia: (i) a considerable increase of new journals admitted in recent versions of journal ranking lists; (ii) the inclusion of *all* journals contained in the target ranking lists rather than only the *selective* number of journals contained in JQL which formed the basis for the meta-ranking dataset of Tüselmann et al. (2016);⁶ (iii) the addition of JUFO and Scopus citation indicators; and (iv) Clarivate's expansion of the Impact Factor to all Web of Science Core Collection journals in 2023, adding a substantial number of journals to the mix. At the same time, 794 of the 819 journals from the previous meta-ranking (i.e. 97 %) are retained in the current meta-ranking.⁷ Thus, the considerably expanded set of journals in the meta-ranking, whilst retaining currency with the dataset of the previous meta-ranking, provides an inclusive and comprehensive perspective on journal reputation and influence, embracing a more diverse and broader variety of academic journals.

DEA has been applied to 2927 journals for rank aggregation across the eight target lists (see Table 1), following Pishchulov et al. (2014). The resulting DEA rating scores vary in the range from 0.63241 to 1, the latter showing journals with the strongest reputation and influence. Still, such a narrow range of rating scores may be difficult to use with an extensive number of journals. For this reason, we expand the original

⁵ As in Tüselmann et al. (2016), we further employ the journal subject-area classification as per the CABS List. The resulting data set thus comprises 16 variables. Appendix A presents the results of cross-validation of missing data imputations in variables 1 to 6 (see Table 1), referring to CABS List as illustrative example. Table A.1 demonstrates that error rates are comparable with those reported in Pishchulov et al. (2014), and in some cases noticeably improved (CNRS 2020), despite the increase in the number of journals by the factor of 3.6. Fig. A.1 reveals that JUFO 2023 and ABDC 2022 are the most influential predictors of rank gradations in the CABS List, followed by SJR 2023. Figure A.2 further indicates that there is a fraction of journals whose CABS rank gradation is repeatedly mispredicted. Given the uncertainty involved in the pointwise predictions, we employ probabilistic rank imputations and use Brier scores to gauge and calibrate their accuracy. Table A.2 demonstrates that these are comparable with Pishchulov et al. (2014), despite a much longer list of journals, and that the imputed rank probabilities are well calibrated from the outset (cf. Niculescu-Mizil & Caruana, 2005).

⁶ We excluded discontinued journals based on records from recognized academic journal lists. For updates to the journals included in the analysis, when new information is available, see Pishchulov & Sinkovics 2024 at doi:10.17605/OSF.IO/23NRB.

⁷ Twenty five journals previously included were removed from the current study, because they were either discontinued or removed from the recent editions of the target rankings, or due to failure to pass the 25% threshold within the set of target lists in the current meta-ranking, as indicated above.

methodology by proposing three derived measures of journal reputation and influence which are derived from the DEA rating scores and which we employ for the subsequent analysis.

The first such measure, termed *meta-ranking quality score* (MRQS), makes use of the full rating scale from 0 to 1. To illustrate, consider a lower bound L which shall represent the quality of the lowest-rated journal relative to the highest-rated journal, as perceived by the user. We have set L equal to $1/N$, where $N = 2526$ is the number of unique DEA rating scores among 2927 journals—and hence the number of rank gradations among them. This gives $L \approx 0.0004$. Then, we obtain MRQS from the DEA rating scores by stretching their range downwards to L while preserving the proportions of differences between the scores. This has expanded the range [0.63241, 1] of DEA rating scores to a wider MRQS range [0.0004, 1].

Second, to operate with an ordinal ranking scale with a few gradations, we divide journals into several clusters based on the mutual proximity of their DEA rating scores. As a result, the clusters, representing rank gradations emerge naturally from the data. We employ optimal *K-means clustering* (Wang & Song, 2011) implemented in R package Ckmeans.1dpp and obtain $K = 5$ journal clusters, which corresponds to the number of rank gradations used by various journal rankings, such as CNRS and VHB. Table 2 in the Results section outlines the resulting cluster sizes, labels and associated journal quality attributes.

Yet the use of discrete clusters disregards the fact that DEA rating scores may vary considerably for journals in the same cluster. Membership in two bordering clusters may be misleading for borderline journals because their DEA rating scores differ only marginally. To reflect this, we introduce a third alternative measure of journal reputation and influence by defining *fuzzy membership* of journals in clusters. This measure is grounded in the fuzzy set theory which was pioneered by Zadeh (1965) and has since then found application in a broad range of areas (Kahraman et al., 2016). Its key concept is the *membership function* $f_A(x)$ which specifies the degree to which a certain entity x is considered to belong to a certain set A , where $f_A(x) = 0$ designates its non-membership of A , $f_A(x) = 1$ —its full membership, and values in between—its degree of partial membership. An essential step in specification of a membership function is its *calibration*, which uses either a quantitative attribute of the entities or their qualitative groupings to derive their membership degrees (Ragin, 2008). The former approach, termed *direct calibration*, enjoys a widespread use (Pappas & Woodside, 2021) and requires the analyst to choose a shape of the membership function and specify thresholds for full membership and non-membership as well as cross-over points that correspond to $f_A(x) = 0.5$ (Duşa, 2019; Ragin, 2008). In terms of the shape of the function, the analyst can choose from linear and non-linear shapes (Pappas & Woodside, 2021).

We have defined the membership functions of Clusters 1 to 5 using linear and triangular shapes, as follows. First, a journal at the exact center of its own cluster has the full membership of that cluster. Second, journals in the upper range of a cluster share their membership between their own and the next higher cluster (if any). Third, journals in the lower range of a cluster share their membership between their own and the next lower cluster (if any). This is illustrated in Fig. 1. By construction, membership of a cluster is peaking at its center and vanishing towards the center of a bordering cluster. As a result, membership of the top and bottom clusters is captured by linear functions, and that of Clusters 2, 3 and 4—by triangular functions (Duşa, 2019). As the figure demonstrates, journals at the boundary between two clusters naturally demonstrate a similar degree of membership of their own and the bordering cluster. Table 2 indicates the respective thresholds and cross-over points, expressed in terms of DEA rating scores.

The three measures of journal reputation and influence thus complement each other, by letting the user represent journal quality on a continuous scale between 0 and 1 by means of MRQS, or reduce the scale complexity by considering a discrete number of clusters, and further

Table 2
Outcome of the cluster solution.

Cluster	Label	Share of journals (%)	Description	Membership thresholds and cross-over points				
				FNT left	COP left	FMT	COP right	FNT right
1	Elite cluster	4.3	Elite journals, at the very top in terms of reputation and influence.	0.862	0.910	0.959	n.a.	n.a.
2	Outstanding esteem cluster	9.5	Journals that are just a step below the elite but still hold an outstanding reputation and influence in their fields.	0.778	0.820	0.862	0.910	0.959
3	Excellence cluster	10.1	Journals recognized for their excellent reputation and influence.	0.701	0.740	0.778	0.820	0.862
4	Good esteem cluster	36.4	Journals with good but not the upper tiers of recognition and influence.	0.658	0.680	0.701	0.740	0.778
5	Contributor cluster	39.7	Baseline journals with solid, dependable recognition and influence.	n.a.	n.a.	0.658	0.680	0.701

Key: FNT – full non-membership threshold (membership degree of 0); COP – cross-over point (membership degree of 0.5); FMT – full membership threshold (membership degree of 1).

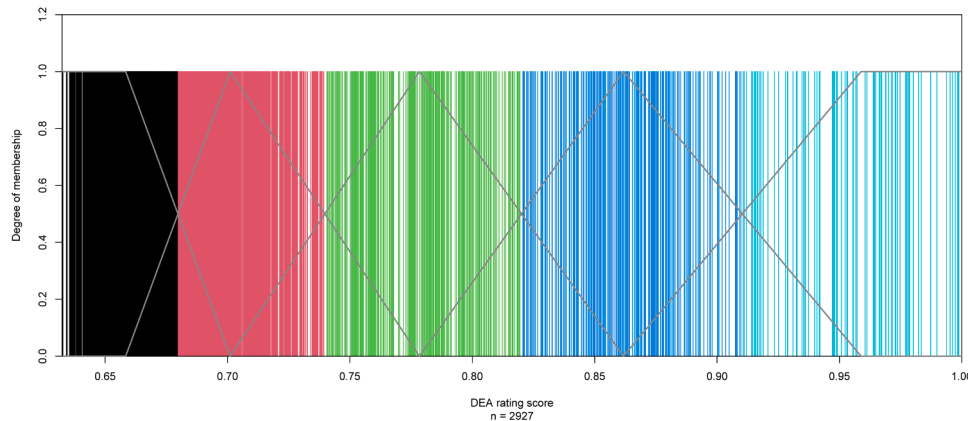


Fig. 1. Journal clusters 1 to 5 (from right to left) and their membership functions

Note: Each vertical bar represents a journal in the meta-ranking. Its position on the horizontal axis corresponds to the journal's DEA rating score. Membership functions of journal clusters are represented by solid straight lines.

represent journals' fuzzy membership in these on the continuous scale from 0 % to 100 %. Fig. 2 depicts an overview of the methodology used.

3. Results and discussion

The methodological approach outlined above allowed us to develop a comprehensive journal ranking list, including a five-cluster solution. In this section, we provide further details regarding the clusters and look at the results through the lens of the IB field. We articulate the standing of IB journals vis-à-vis previous rankings and present a multi-tiered ranking system, with movements at all levels.

3.1. Journal cluster solution

Table 2 presents the cluster analysis results, detailing cluster membership sizes, labels, and descriptions based on journal reputation and influence. While our clusters do not directly correspond to tiers in established ranking systems, they reflect common journal evaluation criteria, such as novelty, rigor, and impact. For example, elite cluster journals tend to publish groundbreaking research that drives field advancement, whereas contributor cluster journals (Cluster 5) make valuable yet more incremental contributions.

Unlike traditional ranking approaches, our meta-ranking clusters do not assume uniform reputation and influence within each cluster. Instead, we introduce a hierarchical structure, enriched by fuzzy cluster analysis, which clarifies the degree to which a journal aligns with its cluster and its proximity to adjacent clusters, as illustrated in Fig. 1. This flexible, nuanced classification allows for overlap between clusters, recognizing that journals may exhibit qualities of neighboring groups and creating a more dynamic categorization system.

Furthermore, this approach mitigates the arbitrary nature often

associated with designating journals as being at the “lower/higher” or “top/bottom” end of a journal grade category. This facilitates the identification of journals that may be candidates for upward or downward reclassification in subsequent updates of ranking lists but also informs decisions regarding the inclusion or exclusion of journals in future adjustments to elite journal lists.

3.2. Overview of global results and the multi-tier IB journal terrain

Table 3 offers an overview of the meta-ranking results. We sort the journals along the MRQS value and organize them within quality clusters. Table 3 shows a subset of the results representing the elite cluster (Cluster 1). The full meta-ranking list is available in the supplementary material section associated with this article, and for the full dataset see Pishchulov & Sinkovics (2024). The composition of our elite cluster shows high concordance with elite journal lists, encompassing 92 % of the journals listed in the UT Dallas List, besides capturing 84 % of the journals identified in the FT50 and 91 % designated as ‘journals of distinction’ (JoDs) in the CABS List.⁸ This alignment not only substantiates the categorization achieved through our meta-ranking method but also resonates with findings from related scientometric studies, such as those conducted by Fassin (2021), thereby reinforcing the validity of our approach.

However, an examination of the journals positioned at the lower spectrum within the elite cluster reveals a more nuanced picture. Specifically, for the 17 journals ranked at the bottom of the elite cluster,

⁸ While the CABS List is not classified among elite journal compilations, we include their JoD category as an ‘elite list’ for our purposes, given its wide international use and currency.



Fig. 2. Overview of the methodology.

their classification is explained by <60 % based on the criteria for the elite cluster, with the remaining 40 % more closely aligning with the characteristics of the immediately lower cluster. This observation also mirrors at the upper end of Cluster 2, with 13 journals at top end of Cluster 2, having 40 % or more of their cluster membership explained by criteria of the elite journal cluster, underscoring the inherent permeability and fuzziness between adjacent quality clusters. Such findings highlight the dynamic nature of journal categorization and reinforce dynamism and changes. These findings further illustrate that while our clusters provide a structured framework for ranking, they also accommodate fluidity that reflects the complex landscape of academic publishing.

Within the elite cluster, comprising 126 journals, the disciplines of Economics, and Information Management are the most prominently represented, contributing 19 and 12 journals, respectively. When adjusting for the relative size of each subject area—based on the total number of subject area journals classified within our framework—Organization Studies, General Psychology, and Organizational Psychology emerge as the fields with a disproportionately high representation in the elite cluster. This shows a significant overrepresentation relative to the expected distribution based on the breadth of their respective academic areas. Further analysis reveals that IB exhibits commendable performance within this distinguished cohort, securing the fifth position among the 24 evaluated subject areas. Notably, this includes the *Journal of International Business Studies* (JIBS), which is ranked 26th, and the *Journal of World Business* (JWB), which holds the 62nd position among 2927 journals in our meta-ranking. This performance underscores the impactful contribution of IB to the landscape of elite academic publishing, reflecting both the quality and the international relevance of its research.

Zooming further in on the domain of IB journals, as demarcated in Table 4, there has been a noticeable expansion in their presence within our meta-ranking list. From an initial count of 16 journals identified in the JWB 2016 meta-ranking (Tüselmann et al., 2016), this number has risen to 28. This increase not only underscores a broader trend observed across all subject areas, as elaborated in the Methodology section, but also reaffirms the dynamic evolution of the IB field over the past decade.

With respect to the journals commonly considered “core” or “essential” to IB, our analysis builds on the “extended core IB” journal list proposed by Tüselmann et al. (2016), with a new addition since their 2016 publication. This extended list encompasses a broader selection of journals beyond those traditionally recognized as the core of IB which have been the focus of earlier productivity and ranking studies within IB (e.g., Chan et al., 2006; Lahiri & Kumar 2012; Treviño et al., 2010). By including journals emphasizing emerging markets and new research areas, as well as recently established IB journals gaining prominence—already located in Cluster 2, our updated meta-ranking not only validates the multi-tiered structure from previous assessment (Tüselmann et al., 2016), but also introduces significant adjustments to the journal hierarchy, detailed in the next section. Importantly, each of the nine journals in the “extended core IB” list (journals in position 1 to 9 in Table 4) has a CABS grade of 3 or higher, highlighting their significant

contribution to the IB research discourse.

JIBS leads as the top IB journal in our analysis, followed by JWB, with both in the elite cluster, fully meeting all elite cluster criteria (see Tables 3 and Table 4). The next rankings include the *Global Strategy Journal* (GSJ),⁹ *International Business Review* (IBR), *Journal of International Business Policy* (JIBP), and *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* (APJM), in descending order within Cluster 2. Notably, GSJ’s classification is supported by 49 % of the elite cluster, while the other journals show a more definitive alignment with Cluster 2. *Journal of International Management* (JIM) is positioned in the upper range of Cluster 3, sharing 45 % of its membership with the next higher cluster.

The experiences of GSJ and JIBP offer valuable insights for advancing IB journals within the competitive academic landscape. Despite being relatively young, both journals have quickly risen to prominence. Established in 2011, GSJ ranked as the third-highest IB journal in the 2016 JWB meta-ranking (Tüselmann et al., 2016) and has maintained this position in the current meta-ranking. JIBP, launched in 2018, is now the fifth-highest IB journal, holding a solid position in Cluster 2. Key contributing factors include their affiliations with major learned societies (Strategic Management Society for GSJ and Academy of International Business for JIBP), their status as sister journals to elite publications (*Strategic Management Journal* and *Journal of International Business Studies*), editorial setups aligned with top IB journals, well-defined scopes, and a robust authorship base extending beyond the initial pipeline-building phase.

Management International Review (MIR) and *Management and Organization Review* (MOR) are within Cluster 4, with both journals positioned within the upper spectrum of this cluster, though with <30 % of their ranks influenced by criteria characteristic of the next higher Cluster 3. This may pose a potential challenge to their status as core journals within the IB community, requiring further investigation in Section 3.3.

Other than JIBP, amongst those journals which are newly added in our meta-ranking, none have secured positions within the top three clusters. Instead, the majority of these additions are within Cluster 5, with half of these in the lower spectrum of this cluster. There is barely any evidence to suggest that these journals display qualities typically associated with the immediately superior Cluster 4, as illustrated in Table 4. While the enlargement of the IB journal list contributes to the breadth of publication venues within the IB field, other than JIBP, it results in only marginal increases in higher-quality journal additions. Conversely, recent additions to the meta-ranking account for well over 90 % of the lowest quality cluster (Cluster 5) across the overall business and management-related subject areas. This figure stands in contrast to 66 % in the IB sector. Looking at this development through a comparative lens, the expansion of the journal list may have a more unfavorable effect on these competitors’ subject areas. The implications of these dynamics will be further explained in Section 3.4.

It is noteworthy that several of the newly ranked IB journals are relatively young—though not nascent (see Table 4)—and may thus lack the established reputation and recognition that older, more mature journals possess. This can pose difficulties in attracting high-quality

⁹ Allocated in CABS List under Strategy subject area. However, as the journal straddles IB and Strategy areas, it has been assigned dual membership in this paper, i.e. as both IB and Strategy journal.

Table 3
Elite cluster journals (126) of the aggregate rating and ranking of 2927 journals.

Journal	Field	MRQS	Rank	Fuzzy membership in the cluster			Inclusion in elite journal lists		
				own cluster	next lower cluster	next higher cluster	UT Dallas	FT50	CABS JoD*
Academy of Management Review	General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility	1	1	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Administrative Science Quarterly	General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility	1	1	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Journal of Accounting and Economics	Accounting	1	1	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Journal of Finance	Finance	1	1	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Journal of Marketing	Marketing	1	1	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Management Science	Operations Research and Management Science	1	1	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Review of Economic Studies	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.99666	7	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	X
Econometrica	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.99606	8	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	X
Journal of Political Economy	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.9953	9	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	X
Quarterly Journal of Economics	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.99258	10	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	X
American Economic Review	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.98953	11	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	X
Strategic Management Journal	Strategy	0.98689	12	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
MIS Quarterly: Management Information Systems	Information Management	0.98284	13	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Academy of Management Journal	General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility	0.97243	14	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Accounting Review	Accounting	0.97243	14	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Journal of Accounting Research	Accounting	0.97243	14	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Journal of Consumer Research	Marketing	0.97243	14	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Journal of Financial Economics	Finance	0.97243	14	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Journal of Marketing Research	Marketing	0.97243	14	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Marketing Science	Marketing	0.97243	14	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Organization Science	Organisational Studies	0.97243	14	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Review of Financial Studies	Finance	0.97243	14	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Journal of Economic Literature	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.96541	23	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Journal of Applied Psychology	Psychology (Organisational)	0.95489	24	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	X
Information Systems Research	Information Management	0.95192	25	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Journal of Business Venturing	Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management	0.94624	26	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	X
Journal of International Business Studies	International Business and Area Studies	0.94624	26	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Journal of Management	General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility	0.94624	26	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	X
Journal of Management Studies	General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility	0.94624	26	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	
Journal of Operations Management	Operations and Technology Management	0.94624	26	100 %	0 %	0 %	X	X	X
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Marketing	0.94624	26	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	X
Organization Studies	Organisational Studies	0.94624	26	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	
Review of Finance	Finance	0.94624	26	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	
Journal of Monetary Economics	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.94197	34	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Research Policy	Innovation	0.94191	35	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	X
American Economic Journal: Applied Economics	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.94102	36	100 %	0 %	0 %			
American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.93963	37	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Review of Economics and Statistics	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.93852	38	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Journal of Management Information Systems	Information Management	0.93751	39	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	
Annual Review of Psychology	Psychology (General)	0.93153	40	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Psychological Bulletin	Psychology (General)	0.93123	41	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	Psychology (General)	0.92867	42	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Academy of Management Annals	General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility	0.92832	43	100 %	0 %	0 %			X
International Journal of Research in Marketing	Marketing	0.92832	43	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Review of Accounting Studies	Accounting	0.92832	43	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	
American Journal of Political Science	Social Sciences	0.92671	46	100 %	0 %	0 %			X

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Table 3 (continued)

Journal	Field	MRQS	Rank	Fuzzy membership in the cluster			Inclusion in elite journal lists		
				own cluster	next lower cluster	next higher cluster	UT Dallas	FT50	CABS JoD*
Journal of Econometrics	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.92609	47	100 %	0 %	0 %			
American Political Science Review	Social Sciences	0.9228	48	100 %	0 %	0 %			X
American Sociological Review	Social Sciences	0.92152	49	100 %	0 %	0 %			X
Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior	Psychology (Organisational)	0.91845	50	100 %	0 %	0 %			
ACM Computing Surveys	Information Management	0.91562	51	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Psychological Methods	Psychology (General)	0.91529	52	100 %	0 %	0 %			
IEEE Transactions on Evolutionary Computation	Operations Research and Management Science	0.91116	53	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management	0.91037	54	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	X
Journal of Product Innovation Management	Innovation	0.91037	54	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Nature Human Behaviour	Psychology (General)	0.90912	56	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Personality and Social Psychology Review	Psychology (General)	0.90828	57	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Health Affairs	Public Sector and Health Care	0.90436	58	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Psychological Science	Psychology (General)	0.90311	59	100 %	0 %	0 %			X
Journal of Information Technology	Information Management	0.90292	60	100 %	0 %	0 %			
European Journal of Information Systems	Information Management	0.90189	61	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Journal of World Business	International Business and Area Studies	0.90142	62	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Journal of Consumer Psychology	Marketing	0.89449	63	100 %	0 %	0 %		X	X
Personnel Psychology	Psychology (Organisational)	0.89449	63	100 %	0 %	0 %			X
Journal of Organizational Behavior	Psychology (Organisational)	0.89248	65	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Journal of Retailing	Marketing	0.89248	65	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Journal of Service Research	Sector Studies	0.89248	65	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Leadership Quarterly	Organisational Studies	0.89248	65	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Organizational Research Methods	Organisational Studies	0.89248	65	100 %	0 %	0 %			
Human Relations	Organisational Studies	0.8835	70	98 %	2 %	0 %		X	
Human Resource Management (USA)	Human Resource Management and Employment Studies	0.8835	70	98 %	2 %	0 %		X	
Journal of Corporate Finance	Finance	0.8835	70	98 %	2 %	0 %			
Journal of Vocational Behavior	Psychology (Organisational)	0.88217	73	98 %	2 %	0 %			
Journal of Economic Perspectives	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.87951	74	97 %	3 %	0 %			
American Journal of Sociology	Social Sciences	0.87896	75	97 %	3 %	0 %			X
Journal of the Association for Information Systems	Information Management	0.87303	76	94 %	6 %	0 %			X
Transportation Research, Series B: Methodological	Sector Studies	0.8729	77	94 %	6 %	0 %			
Psychological Review	Psychology (General)	0.87219	78	94 %	6 %	0 %			
American Economic Journal: Economic Policy	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.87037	79	93 %	7 %	0 %			
Manufacturing and Service Operations Management	Operations and Technology Management	0.86624	80	92 %	8 %	0 %	X	X	
Academy of Management Learning and Education	Management Development and Education	0.86618	81	92 %	8 %	0 %			X
Social Science and Medicine	Social Sciences	0.86186	82	90 %	10 %	0 %			
American Psychologist	Psychology (General)	0.86107	83	90 %	10 %	0 %			
Journal of Urban Economics	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.86066	84	90 %	10 %	0 %			
European Journal of Operational Research	Operations Research and Management Science	0.85862	85	89 %	11 %	0 %			
Journal of Public Economics	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.85791	86	89 %	11 %	0 %			
Journal of Development Economics	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.85704	87	88 %	12 %	0 %			
Annual Review of Sociology	Social Sciences	0.85615	88	88 %	12 %	0 %			X
Management Accounting Research	Accounting	0.84228	89	83 %	17 %	0 %			
Current Directions in Psychological Science	Psychology (General)	0.84157	90	82 %	18 %	0 %			
Journal of Strategic Information Systems	Information Management	0.8391	91	81 %	19 %	0 %			
Information Systems Journal	Information Management	0.83651	92	80 %	20 %	0 %			
Tourism Management	Sector Studies	0.82961	93	78 %	22 %	0 %			
Journal of Environmental Economics and Management	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.82626	94	77 %	23 %	0 %			
Regional Studies	Regional Studies, Planning and Environment	0.82569	95	76 %	24 %	0 %			
Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal	Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management	0.82417	96	76 %	24 %	0 %		X	
Production and Operations Management	Operations and Technology Management	0.82406	97	76 %	24 %	0 %	X	X	

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Table 3 (continued)

Journal	Field	MRQS	Rank	Fuzzy membership in the cluster			Inclusion in elite journal lists		
				own cluster	next lower cluster	next higher cluster	UT Dallas	FT50	CABS JoD*
Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory	Public Sector and Health Care	0.82248	98	75 %	25 %	0 %			
Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews	Social Sciences	0.81704	99	73 %	27 %	0 %			
Computers & Education	Management Development and Education	0.81604	100	73 %	27 %	0 %			
Automation in Construction	Sector Studies	0.81231	101	71 %	29 %	0 %			
American Journal of Public Health	Psychology (Organisational)	0.80655	102	69 %	31 %	0 %			
International Journal of Operations and Production Management	Operations and Technology Management	0.80625	103	69 %	31 %	0 %			
Journal of Supply Chain Management	Operations and Technology Management	0.80625	103	69 %	31 %	0 %			
Long Range Planning	Strategy	0.80625	103	69 %	31 %	0 %			
American Journal of Agricultural Economics	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.80404	106	68 %	32 %	0 %			
Economic Geography	Regional Studies, Planning and Environment	0.79638	107	65 %	35 %	0 %			
Journal of Travel Research	Sector Studies	0.79181	108	64 %	36 %	0 %			
The Yale Law Journal	Business and Taxation Law	0.78455	109	61 %	39 %	0 %			
Journal of Human Resources	Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	0.77938	110	59 %	41 %	0 %			
Transportation Research, Part E: Logistics and Transportation Review	Sector Studies	0.77682	111	58 %	42 %	0 %			
Annals of Tourism Research	Sector Studies	0.77674	112	58 %	42 %	0 %			
Gender and Society	General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility	0.77663	113	58 %	42 %	0 %			
Industrial Marketing Management	Marketing	0.77663	113	58 %	42 %	0 %			
Accident Analysis and Prevention	Psychology (Organisational)	0.77487	115	57 %	43 %	0 %			
Public Administration Review	Public Sector and Health Care	0.77315	116	56 %	44 %	0 %			X
IEEE Transactions on Knowledge and Data Engineering	Information Management	0.77266	117	56 %	44 %	0 %			
Transportation Research Part C: Emerging Technologies	Operations Research and Management Science	0.77119	118	56 %	44 %	0 %			
British Journal of Management	General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility	0.77043	119	55 %	45 %	0 %			
Decision Support Systems	Information Management	0.76935	120	55 %	45 %	0 %			
Annual Reviews in Control	Operations and Technology Management	0.76755	121	54 %	46 %	0 %			
Public Management Review	Public Sector and Health Care	0.76641	122	54 %	46 %	0 %			
Information and Management	Information Management	0.76072	123	52 %	48 %	0 %			
Advances in Applied Energy	Sector Studies	0.7607	124	52 %	48 %	0 %			
Transportation Science	Operations Research and Management Science	0.7582	125	51 %	49 %	0 %			
Environment and Planning A	Regional Studies, Planning and Environment	0.75703	126	50 %	50 %	0 %			

manuscript submissions and citations. However, a substantial portion of these journals have now existed for an extended period without achieving significant impact and recognition. Several journals included in the preceding meta-ranking have remained within the lowest cluster. These appear stuck, unable to ascend in the rankings or gain substantial traction since their initial assessment (Tüselmann et al., 2016). This underscores the challenges faced by some journals in elevating their status within the competitive landscape of academic publishing.

We acknowledge the potential influence of publisher-related factors on journal rankings, though our analysis is necessarily limited by the relatively small sample size of IB journals within the larger meta-ranking. While journal age plays a role, other publisher-specific practices, such as differences in dissemination models (e.g., “online first” policies), marketing, and operational support, can also affect journal visibility and impact. For instance, one of the more recent publishing houses to enter the market still lacks an “online first” option, which may reduce the discoverability of recent research. Other, more long-standing actors in this space have pushed aggressively towards quantity-focused business models or reoriented towards ‘publisher-led’ journals instead of ‘academic community-driven’ journals, which comes at the detriment of quality for some of their publications. Additionally, in an effort to combat predatory publishing practices and mitigate negative

reputational impacts, some publishers are overcorrecting in their enforcement of COPE recommendations (COPE, 2024) without room for contextual flexibility. While well-intentioned, this approach can inadvertently hinder academic progress, diminishing both the quality of scholarly output and the overall publishing experience for researchers. Reputational spillover effects might thus also influence aspects of journal rankings. However, our findings are based specifically on the IB field, and any broader inference to the wider journal landscape would be premature.

3.3. The standing of IB journals: past and present

This section analyzes the evolution within the IB journal landscape, comparing the current meta-ranking with the dataset from a meta-ranking performed approximately a decade ago, as documented by Tüselmann et al. (2016). The analysis reveals that the current iteration includes 794 out of the 819 journals analyzed in the previous study. Despite modifications in the criteria for selecting journals for the meta-ranking and advancements in the methodologies employed between the two periods—as elaborated in the methods section—the comparison, while not directly analogous because of these changes, offers insights into the general trends and shifts within the field. Despite

Table 4
IB journals in the meta-ranking.

id	Journal	MRQS	Rank	Cluster	Fuzzy membership in the cluster			JWB 2016 listed	Year of inception	Publisher
					own cluster	next lower cluster	next higher cluster			
1	Journal of International Business Studies	0.94624	26	1	100 %	0 %	0 %	yes	1970	Palgrave
2	Journal of World Business	0.90142	62	1	100 %	0 %	0 %	yes	1965	Elsevier
3	Global Strategy Journal #	0.7545	127	2	51 %	0 %	49 %	yes	2011	Wiley
4	International Business Review	0.6566	214	2	88 %	0 %	12 %	yes	1992	Elsevier
5	Journal of International Business Policy	0.62043	279	2	98 %	2 %	0 %		2018	Palgrave
6	Asia Pacific Journal of Management	0.59392	316	2	87 %	13 %	0 %	yes	1983	Springer
7	Journal of International Management	0.49861	418	3	55 %	0 %	45 %	yes	2005	Elsevier
8	Management International Review	0.24391	810	4	73 %	0 %	27 %	yes	2006	Springer
9	Management and Organization Review	0.23497	848	4	77 %	0 %	23 %	yes	2005	Cambridge
10	Multinational Business Review	0.19167	1137	4	98 %	0 %	2 %	yes	2003	Emerald
11	International Journal of Emerging Markets	0.18939	1159	4	99 %	0 %	1 %		2006	Emerald
12	Cross Cultural & Strategic Management	0.18235	1225	4	96 %	4 %	0 %	*	2016	Emerald
13	Asian Business and Management	0.16655	1379	4	82 %	18 %	0 %		2002	Palgrave
14	Review of International Business and Strategy	0.16369	1407	4	80 %	20 %	0 %		2016	Emerald
15	Thunderbird International Business Review	0.15836	1453	4	75 %	25 %	0 %	yes	1959	Wiley
16	Asia Pacific Business Review	0.15526	1478	4	73 %	27 %	0 %	yes	1994	Taylor & Francis
17	Journal of Asia Business Studies	0.15059	1536	4	69 %	31 %	0 %		2006	Emerald
18	Critical Perspectives on International Business	0.14982	1541	4	68 %	32 %	0 %	yes	2005	Emerald
19	International Journal of Cross Cultural Management	0.14958	1545	4	68 %	32 %	0 %	+	2001	Sage
20	European Journal of International Management	0.10283	1982	5	73 %	0 %	27 %	yes	2007	Inderscience
21	Journal for International Business and Entrepreneurship Development	0.09688	2073	5	78 %	0 %	22 %		2003	Inderscience
22	International Trade Journal	0.09682	2074	5	78 %	0 %	22 %		1986	Taylor & Francis
23	Transnational Corporations Review	0.09595	2089	5	79 %	0 %	21 %		2008	Elsevier
24	Journal of East-West Business	0.07461	2287	5	97 %	0 %	3 %	yes	1994	Taylor & Francis
25	Journal of Asia-Pacific Business	0.05696	2495	5	100 %	0 %	0 %	yes	1994	Taylor & Francis
26	Journal of Transnational Management	0.05546	2525	5	100 %	0 %	0 %		1994	Taylor & Francis
27	International Journal of Business and Emerging Markets	0.03678	2749	5	100 %	0 %	0 %		2008	Inderscience
28	Latin American Business Review	0.0367	2752	5	100 %	0 %	0 %		1998	Taylor & Francis

Notes: * = in CABS List transferred from General Management to IB & Area Studies; + = in CABS List transferred from HRM to IB & Area Studies; # dual membership both IB and Strategy subject areas.

some differences in terms of methodology and composition, we can ascertain the overarching trajectory of development within the IB journal domain. It serves as a framework for understanding the continuity and change in journal rankings over time, providing a broad perspective on the dynamic nature of academic publishing in the field of IB.

The findings presented in Table 5 highlight a significant improvement of the competitive position of IB journals that were part of the previous meta-ranking. When evaluated against the aggregate performance of journals across all subject areas, IB journals have markedly elevated their standing within the broader context of business and management academic publications. Notably, this improvement spans the spectrum of ranking positions—from the pinnacle to the upper echelons, whilst there has been no uplift in the lower tiers. In stark contrast to the outcomes of the previous meta-ranking, IB now registers above-average performance at the topmost segment of the meta-ranking. This positive trend bodes well for the progression and vitality

Table 5
Ranking distribution of IB journals within subject area in the two periods.

	Uniform distribution	JWB 2016 data period*	Current
Top 10 %	10 %	6.7 %	13.3 %
Top 1/3	33.3 %	26.7 %	33.3 %
Bottom Half	50 %	60 %	60 %

* Data period of Tüselmann et al. (2016).

of the IB field within the global journal hierarchy. It is important to recognize that this macro-level overview conceals significant variances in the trajectories of individual journals, showing diverse shifts in their respective fortunes.

Fig. 3 provides an in-depth analysis of core IB journals, reaffirming JIBS as the preeminent IB journal. JWB has experienced a significant ascent in its ranking, more than doubling its position. This improvement not only considerably narrows the gap with JIBS but, crucially, also reduces the distance to other leading journals in the domain of management, business, and related areas within the current meta-ranking. This underscores JWB's stature as a journal within the elite cluster. Furthermore, the gap between JWB and the subsequent journal, namely GSJ, has widened, as GSJ's rise in ranking was less significant compared to that of JWB.

IBR, JIM, and APJM have improved their rankings among IB journals, while MIR and MOR positions have declined. MIR's position dropped from 6th to 8th, whereas MOR saw a sharper fall from 4th to 9th, marking a significant downturn. This shift also reflects a reversal in the standing of emerging market focused core IB journals, with APJM rising notably from 8th to 6th place, while MOR now holds the lowest rank among the core IB journals.

These changes in the landscape of academic journal publishing are shaped by shifts in journal list grades and citation metrics. JWB, for example has enhanced its visibility and standing through an increased citation frequency and through favorable subjective evaluations, leading

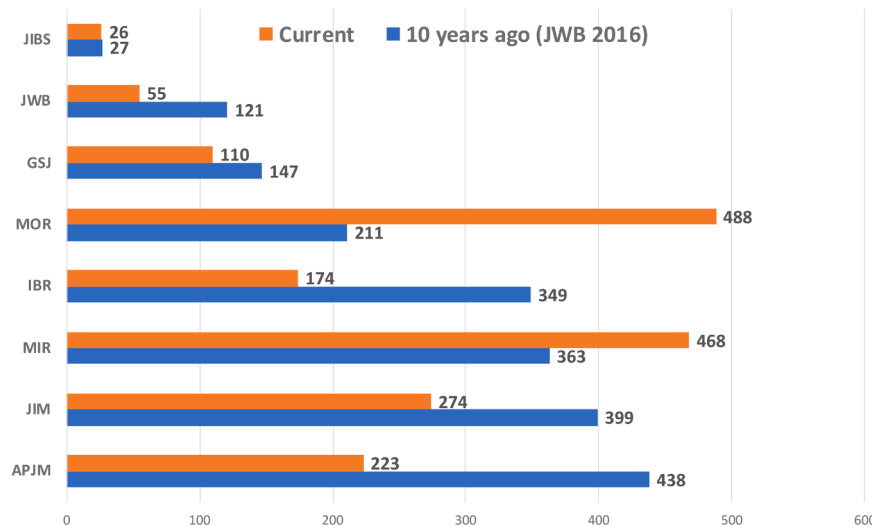


Fig. 3. Comparison of rank of IB journals to their rank in JWB 2016

Note: The ranks are based on all journals in the meta-ranking JWB 2016 (Tüselmann et al., 2016) and the current JWB 2025 (i.e., the matched sample of journals that were both in JWB 2016 and JWB 2025, i.e. 794 of the 819 original ones), “10 years ago” relates to when the data analyses for JWB 2016 were conducted.

to a rise in the rankings of the Erasmus Research Institute of Management (ERIM), the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) and the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) lists. Similarly, APJM and IBR in particular, have improved their citation metrics, with IBR having achieved a higher classification on the CNRS journal list and APJM on the ABDC list. In contrast, MIR and MOR, while stable in their ranking list positions that underpin our meta-ranking, their citation trend over the past decade, put them at the second lowest and lowest position, respectively, amongst the core IB journals in terms of citation performance. Whereas for MIR, this development is characterized by less dynamic growth in citations compared to other core IB journals, MOR experienced a decline in several citation indicators.

The lag between annual citation updates and periodic journal ranking reviews implies that these developments may not yet be fully reflected in current journal ranking lists but may become apparent in subsequent updates. Our results thus signal a need for these journals to address their citation performance to remain competitive with other core IB journals which have recently advanced in ranking.

While a detailed exploration of the specific factors driving changes in journal meta-ranking positions is beyond the scope of this paper, a few key developments may have influenced these movements over the past decade. For instance, IBR’s reform of its editorial board structure to align with those of highly rated journals and JWB’s leadership in phenomenon-based IB research, along with its emphasis on the broader societal impact of IB scholarship and further strengthening of editorial board structure, may have supported advancements in the meta-ranking by increasing citation movements and subjective evaluations. In contrast, MOR, originally established to address the scarcity of international business and management research in a China-focused regional context, appears to have further accentuated its focus, both in terms of paper coverage and editorial structure. MIR, meanwhile, may still be adjusting to its exclusion from FT45. Both journals could potentially benefit from innovations in editorial board structure.

To ensure the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of IB as a scholarly discipline, it is crucial to prioritize the quality of its publication outlets. Addressing the decline in the rankings of certain core IB journals requires strategic interventions, including a thorough review of the factors that contributed to their deterioration. Drawing on insights from journals that have successfully ascended towards higher positions, future research can examine these dynamics and provide actionable recommendations.

For journals intent to halt ranking slippage, as well as for journals

aiming to ascend to the upper tiers of IB publications, a careful realignment of editorial policies and publication strategies with the quality criteria of leading journal rankings is essential. These criteria include a broad and forward-thinking scope, innovative contributions, rigorous selection and review processes, and the international reputation of their editorial boards and authors. Strategic alignment in these areas will be key for advancing reputation and influence of IB scholarship within the broader academic discourse on management and business.

3.4. Comparative performance of IB journals: A quality-based growth trajectory

In our comparative analysis of the performance of IB journals, we focus on subject areas that are commonly addressed in other studies which deal with the dissemination of IB scholarship (e.g., Chan et al., 2006; Treviño et al., 2010). These include both mainstream and generalist areas, as well as more niche and specialized areas, as detailed in Table 6. The comparative performance of journals within a specific subject area is determined by the proportion of its journals that are categorized within a particular cluster, as per the comprehensive ranking of all 2927 journals in our meta-ranking.

Table 6 elucidates that IB performs well within the IB relevant subject areas. Notably, it surpasses the norm in the elite cluster, with 7.1 % of its journals (including JIBS and JWB) being classified within this prestigious group. This is in stark contrast to the 4.3 % average for all journals across the various subject areas included in our meta-ranking. Whilst IB performance is similar to Entrepreneurship, Marketing and Strategy, only the field of Organization Studies boasts a higher proportion of their journals in the elite cluster. When considering the top three clusters combined, IB is only outpaced by Organization Studies and Marketing, whereas in the lowest cluster, only Organization Studies has a smaller proportion of its journals in Cluster 5 than IB.

While the favorable quality profile of IB journals underscores the field’s appeal in attracting high-caliber research, both within the domain of IB and in related areas (encompassing both broad generalist fields and narrower specialist ones), size also plays a critical role. Larger subject areas, characterized by a higher number of highly ranked journals, are inherently positioned more favorably in the eyes of decision-makers at both institutional and national levels, particularly concerning the allocation of funding and other resources, both tangible and intangible. Despite the notable growth in the number of IB

Table 6
Comparison of IB with other management and business and related subject areas (in %).

	IB	Economics	Entrepreneurship	Finance	General Management	HRM	Innovation Management	Marketing	Organization Studies	Strategy
Total number journals (# journals JWB 2016*)	28 (16)	659 (166)	42 (12)	183 (58)	149 (36)	72 (36)	53 (16)	125 (55)	38 (20)	28 (12)
Elite Cluster (Cluster 1) [Number of journals]	7.1 [2]	2.9 [19]	7.1 [3]	2.7 [5]	5.4 [8]	1.4 [1]	3.8 [2]	7.2 [9]	13.2 [5]	7.1 [2]
Top 3 Clusters (Cluster 1 to 3)	25.0	17.0	23.8	19.1	22.1	20.8	24.5	29.6	34.2	25.0
Bottom Cluster (Cluster 5)	32.1	48.9	47.6	50.3	55.0	51.4	47.2	41.6	23.7	35.7

* Study by Tüselmann et al. (2016).

journals—from 16 to 28 since the last meta-ranking—other subject areas with previously fewer journals than IB have witnessed more significant expansions, surpassing IB in terms of size, such as Entrepreneurship and Innovation. Other subject areas, such as Marketing and General Management, have experienced strong increases in their journal counts, rising from 55 to 125 and from 36 to 149 outlets, respectively. This dynamic suggests a shifting landscape within academic publishing, highlighting the importance of both quantity and quality in sustaining and enhancing a subject area's prestige and influence.

The growth of a subject area's journal portfolio can obviously be seen as a sign of its health and vitality. However, such a growth narrative carries inherent perils, particularly when considering the potential impact on quality perceptions. The proliferation of new journals, especially those positioned at the lower end of ranking scales, poses a risk to the perceived academic rigor within a discipline. Indeed, across the overall management and business-related subject areas, over 90 % of the lowest quality cluster (Cluster 5) is accounted for by recent additions to the meta-ranking. Specific areas such as General Management, and Entrepreneurship exhibit even higher proportions of new journals in this cluster—significantly contributing to their substantial presence in the bottom tier, as detailed in Table 6. In comparison, new entries to the meta-ranking make up only 66 % of IB journals within the bottom cluster (Cluster 5), suggesting a discernible balance between quality and quantity that other areas may not have achieved. Given the favorable quality profile of IB journals relative to competing fields, a strategy emphasizing gradual and qualitative growth—rather than an aggressive increase predominantly through lower-tier additions—may better serve the long-term reputation and academic contribution of the subject area. There still is room for further enhancement within the IB discipline.

Future expansion efforts should prioritize organic growth, particularly by attracting higher-tier publications in top-tier outlets but also in the other publication clusters. Attracting top-tier research, from within the IB community and related disciplines, necessitates the strengthening of the whole ecosystem of journal outlets. This requires responsible research and citation methods, avoidance of citation pruning and the recognition of scaffolding impactful research from lower-tier journals in the domain.

Currently, there is a gap in Cluster 3, with only one IB journal (JIM) represented. Our meta-ranking and fuzzy clustering highlight Cluster 4 journals, like MIR and MOR, that show potential to advance into Cluster 3, providing a clear path to strengthen IB's core journal presence, as well as safeguarding the positions of these journals as core IB journals. Notably, IB outperforms in Cluster 2, with 14.3 % of journals there compared to 9.5 % in the broader management field. There is potential to elevate additional journals, such as JIM, which is on the verge of entering this influential cluster, thereby enhancing the profile of the IB discipline on the global academic stage. Beyond the top clusters and core IB journals, our meta-ranking and fuzzy clustering also sheds light on the opportunities and challenges faced by lower-ranked journals striving to advance to higher clusters. Such upward movement would contribute the IB discipline's quality-driven growth and advancement within the global academic landscape.

Given the interdisciplinary focus of top journals and the growing

demand for research addressing global challenges, IB has a unique opportunity to amplify its impact. By enhancing the quality of IB publications and attracting top research from other fields across the whole IB journal ecosystem, IB can solidify its role in addressing pressing societal issues, thereby increasing its relevance and standing within academia and beyond. However, as outlined before, this requires amongst others review and alignment of editorial policies and publication strategies with the well-established journal grade criteria of major journal ranking lists.

3.5. The competitive position of core IB journals in the elite journal list landscape

The increasing pressures faced by management and business scholars to publish in only a small number of top tier elite journals, has triggered widespread acceptance and dominance of “elite” journal lists. Notable among these are the UT Dallas List (UTD, 1990), which comprises of 24 journals, the FT50 List with 50 journals (Ormans, 2016), and the CABS List's JoD category (CABS, 2024) which includes 47 journals. While the CABS List is not classified among elite journal compilations, we include their JoD category as an ‘elite list’ for our purposes, given its wide international use and currency. The ascendance of elite lists, despite prompting contentious debates regarding their supremacy, method of compilation, and overall distraction from serving the greater good (e.g., Harley & Fleming, 2021; Walker et al., 2019), has, for better or worse, established them as a universal benchmark for performance. Researchers perceive these lists as proxies for research quality and acknowledge their tremendous influence on recognizing and valuing individual subject areas within the broader spectrum of business, management, and related disciplines. Consequently, there is competition between subject areas, scrambling to secure a place for their journals on these elite lists.

Our meta-ranking provides a more nuanced picture of the elite list journal publication landscape. It is revealed to be less monolithic and uniform as it might appear. Elite list journals span a broad performance spectrum, largely located in the top half of the elite list, but also extending to lower positions and beyond the elite cluster altogether (see Table 3). Leaving aside well-regarded practitioner-oriented journals such as *Harvard Business Review* and *MIT Sloan Management Review* in the second and first quartile of Cluster 3 respectively, the *Journal of Business Ethics* is the lowest-ranked FT50 journal, placed at rank 153 within Cluster 2. Similarly, *Operations Research* (rank 143) and *Annals of Statistics* (rank 171) are the lowest-ranked journals on the UT Dallas List and in the CABS List's JoDs, respectively. This diversity underscores a wider performance spectrum among elite journals, making our meta-ranking a useful tool for identifying those at potential risk of slipping in rank or even being excluded from elite lists in future evaluations, or potential candidates for inclusion in future elite lists iterations. For core IB journals, which are the focus of this study, this analysis also facilitates a clearer understanding of their competitive position within the elite journals landscape. Fig. 4 shows the competitive position of IB journals vis-à-vis elite list journals. JIBS appears on all three elite lists, underscoring its uncontested standing. Our results demonstrate a strong

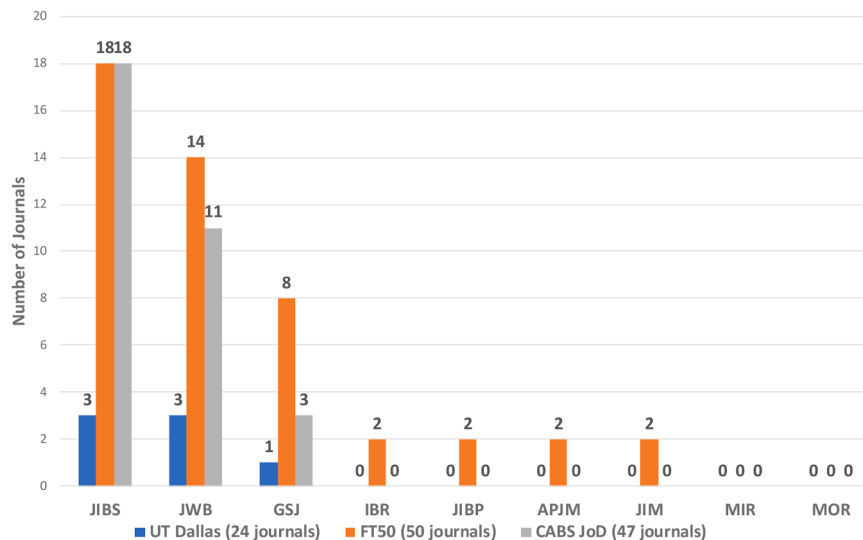


Fig. 4. IB journals and their ranking performance vis-à-vis journals listed in top journal lists: UT Dallas, FT50 and CABS JoDs
 Note: The numbers in the figure above the bars denote the number of elite journals where the IB journal in question is higher ranked in our meta-ranking.

performance of JWB, particularly against FT50 journals, with JWB outperforming nearly 30 % of FT50 journals and nearly a quarter of the CABS List’s JoDs. JWB’s nearest lower ranked neighbors on the FT50 and CABS JoDs is the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* (rank 63), and on the UTD Dallas List — *Manufacturing and Service Operations Management* (rank 80, also listed on FT50). Despite the respectable performance of the GSJ, its current positioning suggests that it has yet to solidify its status as a contender for elite list inclusion. Given its relatively recent inception and that most journals on elite lists are long established journals, the future trajectory of GSJ remains to be seen. Leaving aside the two well regarded *practitioner* journals on the FT50 List (*Harvard Business Review* and *MIT Sloan Management Review*) which do not feature at the top of our *academic* journal quality rating, the other core IB journals, are currently to varying degrees, relatively uncompetitive in the elite journal landscape.

Our comparative analysis reaffirms JIBS’s well-deserved place on the elite lists and identifies JWB as a strong candidate for future inclusion in lists like the FT50 and CABS’s JoD. Such an addition would be highly beneficial for the IB discipline and its journal ecosystem, boosting the field’s visibility, growth, and long-term vitality. Alongside our meta-ranking, this points to a desirable and achievable path forward to strengthen the broader ecosystem of IB journals, as discussed in previous sections.

4. Conclusion and outlook

In this paper, we look at the landscape of academic journal publishing, with a specific focus on IB journals. We discuss the quality and international relevance of research in this field and offer a detailed analysis of the performance and ranking of IB journals. We identify quite different trajectories for individual journals in the IB domain, showcasing upwards and potential downwards trajectories. For instance, JWB has notably narrowed the gap with top-tier journals in business and management, securing a position in the elite cluster of our meta-ranking. However, some core IB journals have seen a deterioration in their standing. Overall, the IB field has experienced growth in terms of its underpinning journals, although not as strongly as other subject areas within business and management. IB stands out with a higher quality profile, suggesting a trajectory of quality-based growth that favors long-term sustainability over rapid expansion of journal numbers. Our meta-ranking further identifies improvement opportunities, particularly for well-regarded mid-range journals that exhibit potential to ascend to higher quality clusters. The comparative analysis reveals JWB as a

potential candidate for future inclusion in elite journal lists. JWB thus could join JIBS, which promises to bolster a quality-driven growth trajectory for the IB discipline and its long-term well-being and competitiveness in the business and management journal landscape.

We highlight the importance of strategically positioning IB scholarship both within its own journal ecosystem and in relation to prominent journals in general management and other business and management subfields. Such alignment will enhance the field’s reputation, visibility, and influence while solidifying its recognition and standing within the broader academic landscape. Extending from the foundational work of Tüselmann et al. (2016), our study introduces a fuzzy clustering approach, which acknowledges the multi-tier structure of journals previously identified. This approach allows us to recognize the dynamic nature of journal categorization, as it captures changes over time, providing a nuanced understanding of the evolving academic publishing environment.

This study underscores the need for deliberate strategic actions to enhance the journal ecosystem within the domain of IB. Firstly, we recommend prioritizing organic growth by attracting high-quality submissions not only to top-tier IB journals but also to other clusters within the discipline. This approach will foster dynamism and inclusive development across the entire spectrum of IB publications. Secondly, adopting a more inclusive citation policy within the IB journal landscape and beyond will facilitate the recognition of emerging knowledge and mitigate the suppression of nascent ideas through restrictive citation practices. Such inclusivity will help combat parochialism and strengthen the discipline. Lastly, reinforcing the journal ecosystem to attract top-tier research from both within and outside the IB community will promote interdisciplinary exchange and enhance the standing of IB journals in meta-rankings. Implementing these strategies will ensure a robust and progressive development of the IB field, with due recognition in other disciplinary areas.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Heinz Tüselmann: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Supervision, Resources, Project administration.
Rudolf R. Sinkovics: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Project administration, Investigation, Conceptualization.
Grigory Pishchulov: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Software, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation.

Supplementary materials

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at [doi:10.1016/j.jwb.2024.101609](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2024.101609).

Appendix A

Table A.1

Error rates of rank prediction, averaged over 10 cross-validation trials.

Rank	CNRS 2020	ABDC 2022	JUFO 2023	EJL 2024	VHB 2024	CABS, 2024
1	0.338	0.182	0.112	0.150	0.523	0.245
2	0.354	0.192	0.280	0.503	0.527	0.210
3	0.246	0.227	0.072	0.517	0.319	0.297
4	0.258	0.298	0.603	0.106	0.407	0.160
5	0.442			1.000	0.876	
Overall:	0.312	0.232	0.141	0.234	0.415	0.220

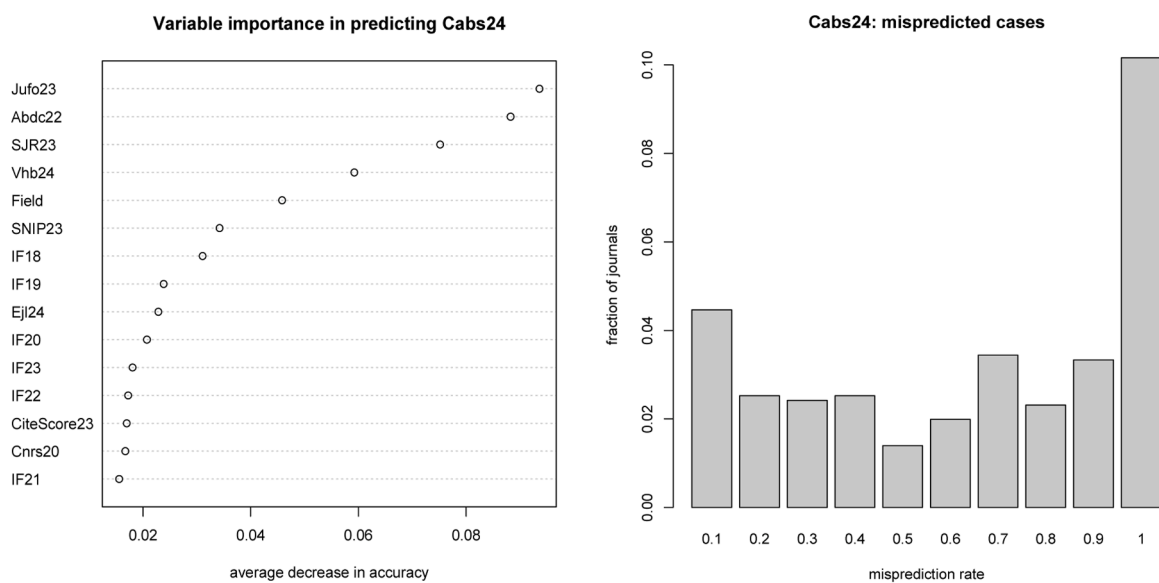


Fig. A.1. Variable importance (left) and fractions of journals mispredicted at different rates (right) in imputation of CABS, 2024 over 10 cross-validation trials.

Table A.2

Brier scores of imputed rank probabilities before and after calibration.

Brier score	CNRS 2020	ABDC 2022	JUFO 2023	EJL 2024	VHB 2024	CABS, 2024
Uncalibrated	0.4369	0.3388	0.2132	0.3261	0.5741	0.3212
Calibrated	0.4313	0.3293	0.2119	0.3222	0.5741	0.3118

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