

Scholarly Book Publishers in Spain: Relationship between Size, Price, Specialization and Prestige

Jorge Mañana-Rodríguez¹ and Elea Giménez Toledo²

²*jorge.mannana@cchs.csic.es*

Centre for Human and Social Sciences, Spanish National Research Council. C/ Albazanz, 26-28. Madrid. Spain.

Introduction

The prestige of book publishers is an important element for the assessment of SSH scholars in Spain. Until 2012, that ‘prestige’ remained based upon subjective, individual judgements from assessment committees’ members. In order to provide a more objective reference for the prestige of book publishers, ÍLIA research group developed a ranking of book publishers (so called SPI) based on the opinion of almost three thousand experts from all SSH fields (Gimenez et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the factors underlying the perceived prestige are unknown. Some authors worked on the influence of marketing on the perception of books. Squires (2007) point out that ‘we should not underestimate the value or efficiency that the association with a specific publisher provides to its contents’. It is hypothesized that three factors (among others) might be related to the perceived prestige: size of the book publisher (number of titles published), specialization (share of titles in each discipline) and price of the books. This research present the results of a correlational study on prestige, size, specialization and price of SSH book publishers in Spain.

The perception of ‘prestige’ strongly differs among different subjects to which the term can be applied. When the object is a product or a brand (with book publisher names as equivalent) the quantifiable variables related to the perception by different subjects of the different levels of prestige is relevant for explaining or defining the construct. The overall number of titles published by a book publisher could act as a reinforcement of the perception of prestige since the frequency with which the reader or consumer will be exposed to the brand is statistically more probable and this could lead to a perception of the publisher as able to publish more and better than others. In many goods, the perception of the prestige of competitors, in a similar way to how multi-branding strategies operate (Rahnamaee, A., & Berger, 2013). A brand prestige might also affected by the price (Yeoh & Paladino, 2013), and so the price of book might partially contribute, in a linear fashion, to the perceived prestige of book publishers.

Finally, specialization, as a factor, which might create a link between a specialized scholar with an specialized publisher, might contribute to influence

the perception of the publisher as more prestigious in absolute terms. Since Scholarly Publishers Indicators (SPI) is being currently used as a source of information for assessment procedures in Spain (in some SSH fields), it is important to know whether the perceived prestige can be attributed to factors unrelated to the essential issues in research evaluation or if, by the opposite, the perceived prestige is not strongly (linearly) associated to these external factors.

Objectives

The objective of this research is to test the hypothesis stating that there is a linear relationship between prestige, size, specialization and price of books of book publishers in the case of Spain.

The information sources are the following:

-Prestige values: Scholarly Publishers Indicators (SPI, 2012).

-Size, price and specialization: DILVE (DILVE, 2013).

Variable definition:

-Prestige: ICEE (Prestige measure based on extensive survey to researchers and lecturers)

-Size: Raw number of different titles in DILVE for each discipline

-Mean price: the average price of all the titles published by the book publisher in the period analyzed.

-Max. Price: the maximum price of a single title in the whole set of titles published by each publisher.

-Specialization: Share of titles of publisher according to DILVE.

Methodology

For a total number of 119 book publishers (this number was fixed so that the number of lost cases is minimized), their ICEE was retrieved from SPI (2014, and the size, mean price and specialization degree obtained from the extensive database DILVE, for the years 2004 onwards up to 2012. The reason for including data from 2004 onwards is the fact that prestige, as other consumer perceptions, are developed over time so a smaller time span would not provide suitable. Data prior to 2004 is not fully consistent in DILVE database when compared with the publishers resulting from the questionnaire on publishers prestige due to the several changes (splits and merges) which took

place sin that date among book publishers, often involving the disappearance of book publishers names as they were and therefore requiring a much more complex codification of the previous names in order to keep the reliability of the data set. After a verification of the non-normality of the distribution of all the variables, using Kolmogorov-Smirnov nonparametric tests, Spearmans' Rho was selected as the appropriate technique contrasting the linear association hypothesis. The correlation matrix for all the variables was calculated using IBM SPSS (v. 19).

Results

Only significant results (p -value = .05) have been considered, since there is no reason for supposing any bias effect of n on the significance of the results (119, in all cases). The following table resumes these statistically significant correlations.

Table 1. Statistically significant correlations (Spearman's Rho).

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| ρ Publisher Prestige, Raw Size | .269; $p < .05$ |
| ρ Publisher Prestige, Max Price | .217; $p < .05$ |
| ρ Raw Size, Max Price | .198; $p = .019$ |
| ρ Raw Size, Average price | -.232; $p < .05$ |
| ρ Raw Size, Max Share | .433; $p < .05$ |
| ρ Max Price, Average price | .593 $p < .05$ |

Conclusions

The main conclusion which can be drawn from the results is the seemingly (at least linear) independence of the construct 'prestige' from all the variables hypothesized as potentially influential in the values given to book publishers by the experts. The correlations of publishers' prestige with Raw Size (Number of Titles) and Max. Price, although statistically significant, are small enough as to suppose that the influence of these two variables in the perception of a publisher's prestige is not strong enough as to make necessary normalization measures. These results also suggest (at least from the perspective of a linear relationship) that the rankings in use are not biased by the possible influence of the great number of books, multiple branding and specialization or prices which sometimes can be displayed by some of the publishers belonging to big publishing houses which occupy the highest positions in the rankings.

Discussion

The fact that none of the variables analyzed is linearly related to the perceived prestige of book publishers is consistent with the multi-component structure generally involved in the composition of a concept such as 'prestige'. Also, since it is hardly

possible to quantify the 'quality' (an also multi-faceted concept, particularly in the framework of research evaluation) of the contents of the books which, escalated to book publisher level of aggregation could contribute to the perceived prestige, the plausible influence of this factor remains unknown, although further research might offer new insight into this particular relationship. The existence of such relationship between the intrinsic quality of the contents and the prestige of a publisher is also plausible given that the use of books by those who have provided the prestige values presumably use the books as a source of information and as a form of scholarly communication where the quality of the contents might be the core of the perceived prestige, leaving behind other subjectively perceived variables. Also, given the relevance of peer review for assessment processes (Verleysen & Engels, 2013) as well as for the quality of the contents, the use of these filters might be related to the perceived prestige of book publishers.

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