Editor's Introduction

Methodological Requirements on Empirical Research Papers

Although most research method textbooks provide very good coverage of key elements of empirical studies, but we still see many papers that are published with incomplete methodological information. In a recent seminar meeting with doctoral students, we found a paper published with no information about how the key dependent variable was measured (not even mentioning whether it's binary or on an interval scale). Except for this missing information, the paper looks perfect, reasonable theories, adequate sample size, excellent model fits, PLS analysis with reasonable justification, significant of most hypotheses except a minor one. Unfortunately, without knowing how the dependent variable was measured, we could not assess whether the research method was appropriate; nor the meaning of the effect sizes in the structural equation model. Embarrassingly, I had to explain why this paper was accepted and published in a reasonably good journal with no reviewer paid attention to the measurement of the dependent variable. In my own experience, there are quite a few other problems such as missing sample size, mismatch between tables and associated texts, etc.. These occur not only in low quality journal papers.

We can certainly blame this kind of mistakes to irresponsible reviewers, but a more positive attitude would be developing a checklist as basic rules for reporting empirical research papers. The following is my own view of the items in the checklist:

1. **Key constructs in the research framework**: The role of every construct should be clearly described – Independent, dependent, moderator, mediator or control variables.
2. **Measurement instrument**: It is also essential to provide the operationalization and measurement instrument of all constructs.
3. **Data collection**: Sample profile, collection procedures, collection time period, effective sample size, and other concerns such as data collection agency.
4. **Data analysis**: Data analysis method, appropriateness of the method, data quality, any pre-processing of the raw data, and the result of data analysis.

The authors and reviewers may use the above checklist as a measurement of the minimum surface validity of a manuscript. Publications without meeting such minimum quality requirement could substantially downgrade the perceived research quality and reputation of the IS field.

About this issue

Two papers are published in this issue. The first one by Jafarzadeh, et al. provides a comprehensive literature review on search engine advertising (SEA). They found an increasing trend of research in SEA and information systems is the main area, followed by marketing, for publishing SEA papers. International Journal of Electronic Commerce and Information Systems Research are the top two journals publishing SEA papers. Regarding research topics, around half of them fall into the behavioral and practical research category, while over one-third is in the SEA mechanism category. The findings provide a useful literature profile for scholars who are interested in this line of work.

The second paper by Elias and Mathew explores the interactions of factors to IT offshore outsourcing between India and New Zealand. It studied the offshore outsourcing from the vendor's perspective and undertook group model building exercises to construct a causal loop model that captured the underlying structure of the system. They identified 25 variables and their complex interactions in the form of eight causal loops that influence the trade in IT between the two countries.

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