



IS Research Perspectives: A Mandate for Scholarly Debate

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An Outlet for Debate and Discussion

“IS Research Perspectives” is a new, special section of the *Journal of the Association of Information Systems (JAIS)* whose overall goal is to publish debate and discussion on critical issues in IS research. Critical issues are not only issues of the day, but also perennial issues that have been with us since our founding as a field of inquiry and teaching. Refereed in accordance with the standards of the highest quality scholarly journals, these articles will be crisp forays into issues that IS professionals in the academy value and talk about in the hallways of their institutions. While most published articles will deal directly with research in the broadest sense, other activities in a professor’s life that have a pronounced bearing on research can also find a home in the section. The simple criterion is that the article must deal with critical issues that shape the research traditions, carry an underlying message for its research mission, and do this in an exciting and thought-provoking way.

The list of objectives for publishable articles offered below is meant to inspire potential submissions. It is by no means exhaustive. Goals include the following:

- to provide research leadership for the IS field
- to take a stance on key IS professional issues, stressing how these directly or indirectly impact research in the field
- to shape future research by formulating new research directions or by evaluating the progress of research-to-date
- to argue for or articulate programs of research
- to critique certain methodological practices or approaches
- to assess the impact of an entire stream of research
- to raise controversial issues that affect the conduct of research in the profession (e.g., ethical issues surrounding IS research, such as under what conditions one should maintain confidentiality of sources or what constitutes self-plagiarism)

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- to debate issues that are critical in determining future research directions (e.g., the perennial relevance versus rigor debate)
- to give new prominence to the issues having to do with IS research policy
- to identify and articulate issues of multidisciplinary discourses or interdisciplinary ties
- to pursue scientometric topics that raise the bar on how we can conduct meaningful “research on research”
- to generate “Letters to the Editor” of responses and clarifications from other IS researchers
- to create excitement about new directions in IS research

The underlying argument in every article to this section should create excitement about how the IS field can thrive. *J AIS* is a primary outlet for research and encourages provoking articles on research. Articles should provide innovative and provocative perspectives from a conceptual, theoretical, methodological, thematic, scholarly or empirical viewpoint. The articles need not be lengthy to have high impact, which is the desired outcome for articles for the section.¹ Although there is no requirement for empirical evidence, empirical reasoning is certainly welcome as long as the essential points are made succinctly. The major evidentiary criteria for successful articles are that they are logical and well written.

To have the impact intended, we expect articles in the section to be a major source for IS doctoral courses and that the issues being debated or introduced in the section will also be spotlighted at our best conferences.

Why this Section?

Momentous changes that affect our research and how we conduct our research are taking place today. But have our IS journals responded to these changes? *ISR* has pioneered “research commentaries” by prominent scholars to raise awareness of key matters of interest to the profession, but these are relatively few in number. *MISQ* has an “Issues and Opinions” section, but, once again, these are published infrequently at best and are not always dealing with research topics, by any means. Other good journals serving the profession are likewise lacking in ongoing forums for debate and argumentation on IS research. Having the slot in place in a journal is not the point. Having a lively forum of “back and forths” is. We hope for success in this area even though this has been long-in-coming in other journals.

Of the journals spawned in the creation of our professional society, the Association of Information Systems (AIS), *Communications of AIS (CAIS)*, the sister publication of *J AIS*, was to be an outlet for issues affecting the conduct of the profession whereas *J AIS* was to be the primary venue for research. Therefore, as these journals evolve and mature, it is most appropriate that *J AIS* take on the role of scholarly debates about research and matters impacting researchers.

¹ As with *Communications of AIS (CAIS)* and other electronic journals, there is no necessity to skimp on space in “IS Research Perspectives.” If authors need lengthy appendices with data or extended reasoning that simply are too long for a conventional journals, we can accommodate that in the electronic format, as well as hyperlinked sources or referent papers.

The creation of the special section "IS Research Perspectives" is in response to what we view as a need, and a pressing need at that. Our responsibility as intellectual leaders in the IS field should be to engage bravely in discussions about how the field should or should not change, and to put these ideas forth in our journal so the community can become engaged in the collective process of thinking, and then so other leaders of the community can respond in kind. Our intent is to maintain high standards for reviewing, and at the same time engender numerous scholarly arguments on a variety of topics.

We welcome authors to take on controversial issues, argue effectively for a certain position, present listeners with pointed examples so the concepts are clear, and then offer constructive directions for the future. We seek articles that provide intellectual leadership. Intellectual leadership is not tied to rank or position in the profession. In short, contributions by faculty of all ranks, doctoral students, and academically-oriented practitioners are equally welcome. All comers will be welcomed for what we plan to be a rapid, but complete reviewing process.

The Inaugural Article by Professors Rudy Hirschheim and Heinz Klein

J AIS is pleased to be inaugurating the section with a stimulating argument by two well published and highly respected IS scholars, Rudy Hirschheim of Louisiana State University, and Heinz Klein of Temple University. They argue that the field is in crisis because we lack a central identity, one that can be diverse, but needs to have some distinctive, core characteristics. This core they refer to as the BoK, or Body of Knowledge of the field. Much or most of this body of knowledge is the product of our research, what we have painstakingly learned over the four decades of the life of the profession. They offer other solutions to the identity crisis, such as mechanisms for transferring IS knowledge among and between stakeholder groups.

Hirschheim and Klein view the crisis in the field as multifaceted. But, constructively, they do not stop at a "doom and gloom" scenario. They offer tangible ways for rectifying the situation.

If they are correct about the crisis, and the community agrees, then change in the directions they propose could be the next steps toward reinstating our position. Of course, even this is a matter of further debate for the field. The article reinvigorates the search for "best practices" for the profession, those that will lead us to prosper as a field in the academy and to find wider audiences for our best research.

I thank Rudy and Heinz for their insightful article. The developmental review process we followed was a good experience for all involved. We invite others who have feelings about this issue to submit their work for review by *J AIS*.

Invitation to Submit to *J AIS* "IS Research Perspectives"

I invite the IS community to submit articles that take a stance on any debatable issue that would be of interest to our community. Issues are by no means restricted to high-level, macro level concerns such as Hirschheim and Klein's identify crisis or Benbasat

and Zmud's *MISQ* article on the IT artifact.² Issues that deal with methodological problems are equally acceptable, especially when they take a position on a methodological approach and mount an effective case for that position. Articles suggesting how we should rate our journals are invited, particularly when authors go beyond simple atheoretical postures and suggest how we can justify the methodologies used and, ideally, how their work fits into a larger picture of theories of scientific communities. Strong cases for how our research can relate better to practice can be valuable, specifically when they offer pragmatic ideas for how to strengthen these connections and promote shared understanding. How do our teaching responsibilities impact our research and how should we wrestle with these trade-offs? There are many fascinating points of view that our future authors could adopt on such a matter.

The overriding objective for the section is to stimulate thinking in the IS field on "things that matter to us" as a scientific community. If you believe that you can present a compelling case on a subject that affects IS professors, please consider the *J AIS* section on *IS Research Perspectives* as a place to publish. Send manuscripts to dstraub@gsu.edu and to JAIS@mcombs.utexas.edu .

² Benbasat, Izak and Robert W. Zmud, "The Identity Crisis within the IS Discipline: Defining and Communicating the Discipline's Core Properties," *MIS Quarterly*, 27, 2, June, (2003), 183-194.