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Editorial

The Year in Review and Path Forward

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Reflections on the Conversations in 2017

As I reflect over my first year as the Editor-in-Chief (EIC) of *Information Systems Research (ISR)*, I want to thank all the authors, reviewers, and editors for continuing to strive to make *ISR* a better journal. At the outset, let me acknowledge that I came to *ISR* with several ideas about what I would want to change and how I might want to take journal to new heights and in new directions. However, this year as I met scholars from the field from all over the world, I am humbled and amazed at the innovative and high quality research being conducted by information systems (IS) scholars from traditional issues of interest such as impact of information technology (IT) on efficiency, productivity, research and development, etc. to the dark side of IT, from issues and improvement in our measures and research frameworks to informing policy and solutions to societal problems in healthcare, food, energy, and much more. One encouraging note is that while most research tackles the “positive” side of IT, increasingly as researchers we are tackling the “negative” aspects and building a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of IS/IT. Overall, during the year I quickly realized that, instead of providing direction, it would be better for me to provide support, encouragement and, perhaps, guidance on how to get this research out both in front of researchers and practitioners.

There are a host of concerns and sometimes misunderstanding of how the editorial process works, concerns regarding the motivations of reviewers and editors and, for some, a belief regarding unsurmountable obstacles in publishing work in *ISR*. I, similar to others on editorial boards, have often brushed aside these concerns as being unfounded. However, these concerns do prevent scholars from even trying to publish their work in *ISR*. In future editorials, along with other editorial board members, I intend to address these issues. My attempt is not to tackle the belief systems but to provide guidance on how the typical challenges in publishing in journals such as *ISR* can be handled, especially by first time authors.

One other set of concerns relate to the content that our top journals publish and continually expanding horizons of IS research. The primary concern being the identity of IS researchers and of the core contribution of

IS research. This view, for example, is very eloquently expressed in Saby Mitra’s perspective that is published in this issue as a departing Senior Editor (SE)—a new feature that is part of my initiative to share a wide spread of opinions and perspective from individuals that ultimately make decisions on what gets published in *ISR*. While my own view is that the expansions of IS research in functional areas of business and, increasingly, research on societal issues is what has brought the field into the limelight in the last 20 years, it is a personal view and not something that I want to espouse as a direction for the field. Instead, as the editor, my perspective is that IS research is what the scholars in the field do and building walls around the topical core could only serve to exclude potential areas of research where our scholars can make significant contributions.

I would like to make three points with regards to concerns regarding the scope of what *ISR* publishes.

- First, the breadth of research is what connects us to scholars in other fields and perhaps will enable us to tackle the wicked problems that technology poses.

- Second, similar to the view expressed by Kartik Hosanagar, I believe that IS scholars should be able to talk to industry leaders and be at the table in discussions about both how technology impacts business but also on what we offer the industry. The question is who should we be talking to. The traditional view that IS research should inform chief information officers (CIOs) is too limited. More technology related investment decisions are now made by Chief Operating Officers and Chief Marketing Officers directly than CIOs in many companies.

- Finally, it appears that many people equate the increasing breadth with decreased focused and, perhaps worse, decreased desirability to publish traditional IS research. Note that journals do not inherently have a quota and a breadth of research does not mean that focus on traditional issues of IS/IT impact needs to be reduced. In other words, the increase in breadth in a growing field does not mean a reduced focus on what the traditional core of IS research is, rather it is an acknowledgment that information systems are the nervous system of business and society and, therefore, any area is a legitimate area of research for IS scholars. We do have to be careful, if the core contributions in the

Table 1. Types of Papers Published in *ISR* in 2017

Topic/Scope	Methodology				
	Empirical			Theoretical	Computational
	Secondary Data	Survey/ Interviews	Experimental	Qualitative/ Cases	Analytical
Research		2		3	2
Methodology					
IS/IT & Firm (Performance, Strategy, etc.)	10	1		4	1
Markets & Market Design	7		2		8
Industry/Society	4		1		1

research domains that IS researchers want to examine (as Saby mentions in his perspective) are being made elsewhere already then *ISR* may not be the right target. However, if the IS researchers are examining and dissecting old beliefs with new technology in any domain, it may be entirely appropriate for *ISR*. In other words, it is going to be the challenge that the editors of *ISR* have to take on and I am confident that they will.

At this point, it might be useful to examine what topical and methodological breadth did papers published in *ISR* last year present. Table 1 provides a snapshot.

Overall, *ISR* published (including the December issue of volume 28) 46 articles in 2017. The table above adds to 49. It is primarily due to a few (three papers) that use multimethod studies. I've included the research topics such as security and open source in the industry/society category. Markets and market design includes papers that focused on e-commerce issues, stock markets, online ratings, etc. Given the nature of the papers, all the papers that may be considered non-traditional IS papers are in the markets and market design category; however, most of them are firmly part of IS literature for more than a decade. Therefore, despite the concerns that we may be publishing a lot of non-traditional papers, in my view there are less than 5% of the papers that do anything beyond what we have been publishing for more than a decade. I'd like to also address a couple of other concerns that I've heard from multiple sources, namely:

1. No qualitative work is published in *ISR*
2. Analytical modeling work is no longer getting published
3. Too many experimental papers are being published
4. Not much design science work gets published

Seven of the 46 papers use qualitative analysis. Given the number of researchers that do qualitative studies in IS, 15% seems like a reasonable number. Certainly, it indicates that the journal does not dissuade qualitative researchers. Again, I would like to reemphasize that *ISR* does not have any methodological bias. I was myself surprised to see that more than 20% of the papers published in 2017 were analytical modeling papers, again reflecting that perhaps the concerns about not publishing enough analytical modeling papers are disproportionate. Given that only three of the 46 papers used

experimental analysis and only two were purely experimental, we certainly don't seem to be publishing too many experimental papers. Unfortunately, among all the papers that we published, I can only consider one that was a design science paper and we would love to see more quality design science papers in the journal.

State of the Journal Submissions and Reviews

ISR continues to grow in its stature and as one of the two premier IS journals continues to be the journal of destination for most academic scholars in the field. Increasingly, it is also attracting authors from other functional areas such as operations, marketing, and strategy. As of November 15, 2017, there were 412 submissions across the three categories: research articles, research commentaries, and research notes. In 2016, the total number of submissions was 392. Given that I have seen an increased rate of submissions in the last month, my estimate is that we will easily cross 450 submissions in 2017. While *ISR* had years with more than 450 submissions, they were typically years when multiple special issues had submission deadlines.

For 2016, there were 392 submissions and 64 acceptances including the acceptance of papers to two special issues. The time to first decision was a little above 100 days. For 2017, the time to first decision is averaging 80 days and has been relatively stable. The final decision time is coming down as well. The editorial board has agreed with me to try and bring down this number continually. Our goal remains to have 80% of the papers reviewed within 90 days, 90% within 120 days and zero above 180 days. The editorial board agrees this is achievable and we will continue to work towards that goal recognizing that exceptions do occur and are an opportunity to learn and avoid such exceptions in the future.

Editorial Changes

INFORMS has a new policy on rotation of editorial boards with the expectation of 50% of the board rotating every three years. While there are many implementation details that still need to be ironed out, *ISR* has

been a leader in the policy of board rotation. Most of the *ISR* SE-board serves one or two 3-year terms with some rotation occurring every year. The *ISR* Associate Editors (AE)-board usually has a 2-year term, with most AEs serving one or two terms with exceptional AEs serving up to 3-terms. As I mentioned above, *ISR* continues to grow in submission rates and the number of manuscripts that each senior editor needs to handle continues to increase. Therefore, I have decided to increase the number of senior editors from 20 to 22. There are two current senior editors who are retiring from the board: Saby Mitra from the Georgia Institute of Technology and Kartik Hosanagar from the University of Pennsylvania. Both Saby and Kartik handled a wide array of manuscripts from practically all areas of research and methodologies. The journal will miss their service, although the current manuscripts that they are handing will keep them involved with *ISR* for the foreseeable future. On behalf of the community, I cannot thank them enough for their service. As a new initiative that seeks to learn from their experience as well as to tap their thought process regarding the field as senior scholars, I have invited them to share their thoughts about their experience as well as opinions about what the field needs to be concerned about. Their thoughts are published in this issue and I hope everyone, especially young scholars, will read their views. We welcome four new senior editors that will start their tour of duty in January 2018:

1. Ahmed Abbasi, University of Virginia
2. Ravi Bapna, University of Minnesota
3. Param Vir Singh, Carnegie Mellon University
4. D. J. Wu, Georgia Institute of Technology

Please welcome them on behalf of the community.

On the side of associate editors, this year we have a large number of associate editors that are retiring after distinguished service of various lengths. Please join me in thanking the following retiring AEs:

1. Ahmed Abbasi, University of Virginia
2. Animesh Animesh, McGill University
3. Xue Bai, University of Connecticut
4. Bin Gu, Arizona State University
5. Jungpil Hahn, National University of Singapore
6. Wolfgang Ketter, Erasmus University
7. Deepa Mani, Indian School of Business
8. Sunil Mithas, University of Maryland
9. Gal Oestreicher-Singer, Tel Aviv University
10. Param Vir Singh, Carnegie Mellon University

We welcome 10 new AEs to the journal:

1. Vibhanshu Abhishek, Carnegie Mellon University
2. Gordon Burtch, University of Minnesota
3. Juan Feng, City University of Hong Kong
4. Kevin Hong, Arizona State University
5. Jeffrey Jiang, Iowa State University
6. Pallab Sanyal, George Mason University
7. Maha Shaikh, University of Warwick
8. Monideepa Tarafdar, Lancaster University
9. Goh Kim Yong, National University of Singapore
10. Sunil Wattal, Temple University

Common Questions/Concerns Regarding the Review Process

Besides the question of review cycle timelines, there are several questions/comments that arise regarding the review process. Some of the most common ones, that multiple people have asked me, are:

1. I know the best SE/AE for my paper, why don't you assign my paper to the nominated SE?
2. Do you have a policy of making a decision in two rounds (three rounds)?
3. I would like to know the chances of my getting a paper through *ISR*, could you share the acceptance rate for *ISR*?
4. Can I resubmit a previously rejected paper to *ISR* even if it did not receive a reject and resubmit?

I suspect the root of the first question lies in the belief that editors are trying to reject an authors' paper. As an editor who assigns SEs, my primary goal is to publish top quality research in *ISR*. Therefore, I assign the paper to SEs that I believe can construct the best review team and have the ability to guide the authors in improving their manuscript. A bulk of *ISR* papers are, in fact, assigned to nominated SEs; SEs then make the best decision regarding the choice of an AE. However, there are times when the nominated SEs (and AEs) have workloads that exceed what we consider reasonable and at other times, while authors may know some of the appropriate editors, there are individuals that are better suited to evaluate a given manuscript. There is no bias in these assignments; if an analysis is conducted on success metrics on nominated SEs versus the ones that were not originally nominated, the acceptance rates would be identical.

In terms of the second question, I am not in favor of a policy where a paper is automatically rejected after x number of rounds. Our metric is that substantial progress is made in each round of review. However, it is highly desirable that papers do not keep on going through four or five rounds of revisions and we try to make every effort for quick convergence.

Since the issue of acceptance rate has come up in multiple forums and I continue to receive requests from authors as well as many schools, let me address the question regarding acceptance rates in a bit more detail. Frankly, acceptance rates convey very little information with respect to targeting or the quality of a journal. It is a flawed metric that is quite susceptible to manipulation. Typically, this metric is calculated by dividing the number of manuscripts accepted in a given year by the number of manuscripts submitted in that year. While there is an obvious assumption about the stability of both the numbers in the denominator as well as the numerator, there are other problems with the metric. Consider the following:

1. When journals have an explicit policy on the number of rounds (e.g., two) to make a final decision, several manuscripts go through multiple submissions (e.g., by inviting manuscripts for resubmission as a new article),

thereby deflating the acceptance rates (since the denominator, i.e., number of submitted papers increase). Some journals believe that keeping the acceptance rate below a certain rate is essential to reflect a high quality journal. A journal such as *ISR* may have a higher acceptance rate than those journals that have explicit policy regarding the maximum number of rounds.

2. The acceptance rate is a flawed metric since it has too many variables that are dynamic. The number of submissions have been gradually increasing in *ISR* and that makes the metric worse because the papers that are accepted are typically from prior years. The number of submissions are highly variable, dependent on the number of special issues as well.

3. The acceptance rates across two journals of different quality cannot be compared. There is a huge selection bias in terms of papers that are submitted to premier journals such as *ISR* and without controlling for these endogenous factors, any decisions based on these statistics will be flawed and providing these would do a disservice to the authors.

ISR is a premier journal and authors should target their best work for publication consideration at *ISR*.

Finally, *ISR* does allow resubmission of articles previously rejected from other journals. Articles could be rejected based on a host of issues and as long as authors have made a diligent effort to improve the manuscript and believe that it is a high quality article, we will look at it. In terms of papers previously rejected from *ISR*, typically articles that have potential but are underdeveloped are identified by editors in the early rounds (initial submission or first round) and may be invited for resubmission if the authors can address the issues. However, if an article is rejected after multiple rounds of reviews, I would discourage authors to resubmit as the article will have to go through detailed advance screening and the likelihood of success is low.

Publication Lags

The current publication backlog for *ISR* has increased from 3-months to about 9-months. We have received additional pages from the INFORMS publication committee and will be working diligently to reduce this backlog to within 6-months next year.

New Initiatives and Special Issues

At the SE board meeting at the INFORMS conference in Houston, the board discussed several new initiatives and proposals for special issues. Below I share a summary of these initiatives.

Increasing the Visibility of *ISR* Content

As Kartik Hosanagar's editorial perspective highlights, it is important for IS scholars to have a dialogue with industry. However, our research gets little exposure beyond academics. As many of you know, Arun Rai, the EIC of *MIS Quarterly* (*MISQ*), started a new initiative

where selective *MISQ* articles are considered for publication as "Frontiers" section articles in *Sloan Management Review* (*SMR*), with reference to the original article. We discussed the possibility of a similar relationship with *SMR* with Paul Michelman, the EIC of *SMR* as well as our SE board and the INFORMS publication office. I am happy to report that we will be launching this initiative as early as the spring issue of *SMR*. I am happy to announce that I have appointed Sam Ransbotham from Boston College as the liaison for this initiative. Sam will serve as the Senior Editor for Research Outreach and along with our relationship with *SMR*, he will work with me to create better visibility for *ISR* content using INFORMS infrastructure as well as other social media platforms. The *SMR* initiative will involve Sam and I proposing a select group of articles for consideration for the "Frontiers" section of *SMR* and then Sam will work with the authors to help them write content suitable for *SMR*. Sam would be happy to serve as coauthor for the piece or act as an editor should authors choose to exercise that option.

Sharing SE Perspectives

While a chief-editor has these editorials to share her/his vision and thoughts, the SEs collectively decide on what gets published in *ISR* and what creates challenges in evaluation and development of papers submitted to *ISR*. From this issue onwards, *ISR* will share SE perspectives on various issues that will provide insights into the inner workings of the editorial process at *ISR* as well as scholarly perspective that they might want to share. As I mentioned earlier, in this issue, our two retiring SEs: Saby Mitra and Kartik Hosanagar are providing their perspective. Each year in the future, the December issue will share the perspectives of retiring SEs. In the June issue, I will invite current SEs to share their perspectives. I would be happy to entertain questions or topics that IS scholars want to pose to our SE board and have SEs respond.

Special Issues

In December of 2016, *ISR* published two special issues. One had seven papers accepted and 66 rejected and the other had six accepted, 29 rejected, and two withdrawn. Another special issue, Digital Infrastructure and Platforms, is currently scheduled for June 2018. *ISR* did not announce any special issues in 2017 as I wanted to evaluate both the organic nature of submissions and the current workload.

There was a vigorous debate in the editorial board meeting regarding the role and need for special issues. The topics and concerns raised ranged from the goal of the special issues (emerging area of research, consolidate knowledge, etc.) to questions regarding the real impact of special issues, quality of papers, and ability to assess quality in emerging areas of research. Ultimately, a majority view (although by no means unanimous) emerged that special issues' impact should be visibility and a continuing impact on future work (5–10 years

down the road). We have approved two special issues with deadlines in 2018.

The first special issue is titled “Fintech – Innovating the Financial Industry through Emerging Information Technologies.” The deadline for submissions for this special issue is June 30, 2018. The Senior Editors for this special issue are:

1. Terrence Hendershott, University of California, Berkeley
2. Michael X. Zhang, Chinese University of Hong Kong
3. J. Leon Zhao, City University of Hong Kong
4. Eric Zheng, University of Texas at Dallas

The Call for Papers (CFP) for this special issue is published in this issue of *ISR* and is available on the *ISR* website.

The second special issue is tentatively titled “Human Computer Symbiosis: Design, Innovations, and Future of Work,” at the point of my writing this editorial. The senior editors for this special issue are:

1. Hemant Jain, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga
2. Balaji Padmanabhan, University of South Florida
3. Paul Pavlou, Temple University
4. T. S. Raghu, Arizona State University

By the time this issue is published, the CFP for this special issue should be available on the *ISR* website. The

intended due date for this special issue is in the last half of 2018.

Concluding Thoughts

I have benefitted tremendously from the advice, sharing of concerns, and opinions over the last 10 months in shaping my own view and in making me rediscover the reason I joined this field with its innovation, fresh ideas, and exciting frontiers. Please keep on sharing your thoughts and sending your advice, it will help me shepherd this journal better.

As the festive season arrives, my heartfelt thanks to all the reviewers, AEs, and SEs whose selfless volunteering of their time makes *ISR* the premier journal it is. It is often a thankless job and on behalf of the field let me extend my sincere gratitude. Hope you have a great holiday season and wishing you all a very happy and productive new year. I would also like to share my sincere thanks to the people in the background that bring the manuscripts to print. In particular, thanks to Frances Moskwa who helps manage the review process and Sandor Roberts, who ensures that the journal publishes on time and, in particular, to remind me continually that I am late.