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Editorial

Editorial Responsibilities and a Note on Research Notes

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When the Senior Editors of *ISR* met at the INFORMS annual meeting in Houston, I committed to provide clarifications regarding the articles accepted under the category of Research Notes. Increasingly, it is being felt that editors are taking an easy way out and accepting papers that just did not methodologically rise to the level of Research Articles. This is not the intention of the category; while many research notes do not indeed have the methodological sophistication of a research article, they compensate for that by having different value propositions such as novelty, important extensions of a well-established theories or methodological frameworks, finding limitations in existing analyses either due to intervention of technology or creating of new modes of interactions, etc. However, first let me address an important issue that has arisen far too often, i.e., that of a lack of understanding of editorial responsibilities and SEs' prerogative with respect to final decisions.

Editorial Responsibilities and Prerogatives

First, as I have done in the past, I would like to lean on *MIS Quarterly* chief-editor Arun Rai and encourage everyone involved in the review process at *ISR* to read Arun Rai's (2017) editorial in the March 2017 issue of *MIS Quarterly* "Editor's Comments: Writing a Virtuous Review."

I have had an unrelenting belief in the IS research community and I have unabashedly campaigned for it at every stage that I have found. As a junior scholar, I was always mystified why many of our senior scholars were so defensive about IS research. In several forums, I have argued that we are the central nervous system of any modern business organization and, therefore, no research topic is beyond the scope of IS research. I did not subscribe to the view that "others" might start doing research in those areas and, therefore, we shouldn't. I believe that at least one of the values MIS provides as a research domain is to pose new questions about old beliefs due to technological advances in IS/IT. We do that because MIS researchers are the first one to embrace technology as a vital business component. Fortunately, over the last 20 years many scholars have emerged that have gained acceptance and, in

fact, leadership positions in not only our field but their own respective "reference" discipline. This has created a rich set of research using a myriad of methodologies that *ISR* publishes. The breadth of topics and functional area applications has blossomed as well. When Vallabh Sambamurthy became *ISR* EIC in 2005, *ISR* used to rarely publish more than five papers in an issue. In fact, due to the review process and lags, it was not until 2009 that *ISR* started publishing more than five papers in a given issue on a sustained basis. The last issue of *ISR* published 11 papers and we have not published less than 10 in more than six years.

However, the field has not necessarily grown (especially the number of senior scholars) in the same proportion and this has put an enormous pressure on providing editorial and review services for the journal. This has led to a different profile of Associate Editors, in particular, at *ISR*. Our associate editors are often less mature and less exposed to the breadth of IS research because, as usual, most of our Ph.D. students do a deep dive in their respective areas and 5–6 years later when they are in editorial roles, they still have not absorbed the richness and breadth of the field. This, ironically, is potentially leading to a similar type of discontent that used to exist in the early days of our major journals when the board was much more limited in its size and exposure—with editorial board members being chosen from a select group of schools—although due to a completely different reason. While there is no magic bullet to solve this structural problem, one thing that I have asked the senior editors to do is to be more involved with the process and have a better dialogue with associate editors before a decision is made. The second challenge that exists in perhaps every major journal is that there are no quick ways of clarifying doubts and concerns for reviewers as well as authors (when revising the papers). An informal set of communications can potentially expedite the overall review time substantially and I encourage the senior editors to be a conduit in that process both for the editors and reviewers and the authors.

From personal experience, as a rather activist associate editor, I overruled the reviewers on more than

half the papers I accepted and about 10% of the papers I rejected. I did not feel that the reviewers did not do their job or were incompetent, rather I felt that the contributions of the paper were substantial enough to merit publication despite some potential shortcomings. However, I sympathize with the SEs, since this activism was difficult for even me as a SE. Part of the difficulty was that associate editors are relatively senior scholars and, often, experts in the methodological domain. Nonetheless, I would like to take the blame and responsibility for what I have asked and am asking the senior editors of *ISR* to do. Specifically, I am asking the senior editors to:

- (a) Not provide a reject and resubmit recommendation if the SEs believe that the paper has merit but they feel that the review team is stuck and will never converge. Instead, I would encourage them to:
 - a. First try to have a dialogue with the associate editor as to what the SE feels are the important contributions and whether there is a path to convergence; and/or
 - b. Engage another SE/AE to get an opinion on the paper and discuss its merits/demerits if the paper is not in a particular SEs methodological area of expertise.

A reject and resubmit recommendation “must” be limited to a manuscript where authors need to do an extensive amount of work (e.g., collect new data, run new experiments, etc.) and where the outcome of this work is highly uncertain.

- (b) Accept papers when, as an SE, they are convinced that the paper makes substantial contributions. In the past, I provided my rationale to the individuals, involved in the review process, in a private email whenever I overruled a reviewer/AE. I encourage the SEs to communicate the rationale of their decision to the reviewers/AEs that volunteer their valuable time to the process. As editors, we must go out a bit on a limb and accept papers that have exciting ideas, good evidence, and potential. It may be that we are wrong sometimes, but to me the opportunity cost of missing out on a truly creative idea is much worse.

Let me be clear, I hope that reviewers and AEs continue to do their job as critical evaluators—as this is their role in the review process. However, what I am advocating is that SEs should act as a neutral judge if not a champion for the papers and exercise their judgment regarding the contribution of a manuscript to the collective knowledge.

The Role of Research Notes

The role of research notes has become an issue since the *ISR* editorial board decided not to include “Research Note” as a prefix for research notes since the first issue in 2017. The role of research notes is well

articulated in the section on instructions for authors on the *ISR* website: <https://pubsonline.informs.org/page/isre/instructions-for-authors>. In addition, the SE board discussed the issue of Research Notes extensively at the board meeting at INFORMS in Houston. I summarize the gist of the discussion as further guidance for authors, reviewers, and associate editors.

The current description of research notes on the *ISR* website defines the role of a research note as “Research Notes promote dialog among the information systems community by incrementally extending well-researched phenomena or providing methodological commentaries.” The SE board believes that more broadly, a research note should highlight a novel issue or a new area. It should provide some direction or present a future challenge. For purely, empirical work a novel interesting phenomenon that challenges conventional wisdom or augments it would be appropriate. Authors of research notes must identify this contribution upfront and identify the challenges or lack of necessity for a full research article for the issues addressed in their paper.

Of course, it is difficult for reviewers and editors to make a distinction when reading an article. Therefore, I would like to offer a couple of suggestions and use two exemplars from two recently published research notes. In terms of broad guidelines on whether a paper is acceptable as a research note, the primary decision criteria are:

- (a) The paper must identify a novel phenomenon, comment and raise a debate on established research practices, identify necessity to extend existing models, etc. The ideas presented should be novel and needed for the IS community.
- (b) The paper must convince the reviewers that the treatment is at an appropriate level and the submission as a research note is not simply due to convenience. For example, if causal mechanisms could be established by careful data collection or using field/laboratory experiments for a novel empirically observed phenomenon, the article should not be accepted as a research note and authors should be encouraged to develop a research article.

I would like to highlight the two research notes published in the March 2017 issue of *ISR* as exemplars of research notes. The first research note, “Providing a Window of Opportunity for Converting eStore Visitors,” by Bhatnagar et al. (2017), creates a novel predictive model of when should an online salesperson (agent) solicit a customer based on their path of arrival to the site and/or frequency of visit. The article provides an interesting and practical analytics approach to create a customizable solution. While generalizability (since the data is based on a particular seller) may be questionable, the novelty of the idea is worth exploring

from a theoretical as well as a practice/relevance perspective. The second research note, “Politics and Information Technology Investments in the U.S. Federal Government in 2003–2016,” by Min-Seok Pang (2017) investigates how the Federal government’s investment in information technology is affected by what combination of political parties are in control of which branch of government and how a delay in appointments of heads of agencies affect this investment. While the theoretical contributions of the work are not novel, the policy implications and findings are and, thus, the publication as a note of this highly interesting article is not only justified but desirable.

I hope that the aforementioned guidelines provide some guidance to the authors and review teams with respect to research notes. However, admittedly it is a judgment call and the SE and AE must discuss whether a given article clears the bar in terms of novelty and/or practical importance of work.

Special Issue Announcement

With machines and artificial intelligence grabbing the headlines and concerns regarding the future of human

labor, it has become imperative that IS researchers examine and weigh in on this phenomenon that is destined to shape the next decade in terms of research, technology, and its usage, and the nature of work itself. I am pleased to announce the special issue on “Humans, Algorithms, and Augmented Intelligence: The Future of Work, Organizations, and Society,” guest edited by Hemant Jain, Balaji Padmanabhan, Paul A. Pavlou, and Raghu T. Santanam. The call for papers is published in this issue of *ISR* and has been available on the *ISR* website. I am aware that much of the work in the area is in its nascent stages and therefore we have the submission deadline in December 2018 to provide a reasonable amount of time to develop new work and submit it to the special issue.

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