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Why is MISQ Considered the Highest Quality IS Journal?

TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract

That MISQ is the highest quality journal is as close to an incontestable fact as we have in the Information Systems field. We have many surveys of the IS field attesting to this fact from over many years that show the invariability of this position. We probably have never heard any argument about it. To even ask the question could be considered ludicrous.

However, there is not a single empirical study that shows MISQ as having the highest quality. Indeed, there isn't even any agreed upon definition for quality. The measures that we use to determine quality are atheoretically derived. In journal ranking studies, we see the concept of quality used in an undefined and implicit manner. The analytic studies (e.g. Lewis, Templeton, & Luo, 2007) examine how similar journal ranking lists are but do not critically examine the quality of the journals. Thus, we are left with the assertion that MISQ is the highest quality journal but no scientific proof that this is in fact the case.

In this paper, we argue that MISQ is considered to be the highest quality IS journal not for any objective reason but because of three interlocking social processes within the IS field: the doctoral training process, the promotion and tenure process and the reviewing process. In addition to these processes is the group of scholars who have achieved significant prestige within the field, the "senior scholars". We provide a model based on transcendental analysis of existing studies to provide an explanation of why this should occur and be sustained.

In the doctoral training process, we are introduced to the "rules" of the profession, part of which includes "how to get on" in the profession. Senior scholars teach us about the promotion and tenure system and how that is driven by our ability to publish in journals, of which MISQ, ISR and JNIS are the top aspiration journals. We are told there that MISQ is the highest quality journal. This uncritically accepted notion is reinforced in the world of academia by the promotion and tenure system. The journals we are told to publish in by our institution are ranked and uniformly, MISQ appears on the top of any journal list. How can a list missing the "top three" journals of the AIS Senior Scholars' "Basket of Eight" be taken seriously? The reviewing process also supports the notion that MISQ is the highest quality journal. A citation from MISQ must be taken seriously. Any acceptable literature review must take into consideration what has been said in an MISQ article. Senior scholars play a significant role in writing the articles that provide guidelines for review.

This model suggests that MISQ is considered to be the top journal because it is implanted in the minds of those entering the field. This opinion is reinforced by the evaluation system. The reviewing process which provides the articles that are reviewed also reinforces this notion. This model explains other phenomena. It also explains why in the face of numerous criticisms, the existing evaluation system remains intact. Given the fact that the three processes are interconnected, to change one requires changing all of them. For example, were we to attempt to change the evaluation process, it would require the agreement of the senior scholars to change the teaching of doctoral students. Additionally, we would have to change the reviewers' opinions that an MISQ article is more important than articles from other journals. The sheer inertia of the existing groups would seriously impact such an effort.

References

Lewis, B. R., Templeton, G. F., & Luo, X. (2007). A Scientometric Investigation into the Validity of IS Journal Quality Measures. *Journal of the Association of Information Systems*, 8(12), 619-633.

