“BETTER PAPERS THAN WE DESERVE?”

IS journal rankings: which are more reliable?

The state of ERP research and research ideas

An IS research agenda based on Herb Simon’s work

How to measure IS service quality for research and practice

KEN PEFFERS, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

MIS Department, 4505 Maryland Pkwy, Las Vegas, NV 89154-6034
Email: k@peffers.com, Fax: +1 702 446 8370, URL: http://peffers.com

This issue (7:2) has been a little longer coming than we would have liked, but the result is well worth the wait. Here JITTA presents four new papers that I personally enjoyed reading. I must confess that I generally couldn’t say that about four randomly selected IS papers, even from the most prestigious journals. Here is another confession: at one point in putting together the issue, I thought, “how did we manage to get these four papers for JITTA?” I’ll say more about that at the end of this preface.

First let me preview the papers for you.

Katerattanakul, Razi, Han, and Kam (2005) investigate the relationship between survey-based IS journal rankings and rankings based on citation analysis. They compile a list of 37 journals that have each been ranked in at least two recent survey-based journal ranking studies and for which citation data are available. They collect 27,000 citations made to 8,000 articles in these journals during 1997-2000. Then they analyze associations among journal rankings in the survey-based studies and between the survey-based studies and the authors’ own citation analysis using four citation-based indices. Using this data, they are able to draw inferences about the “reliability” of various studies and citation indices.

The question that this paper addresses is very interesting and practically meaningful for all of us who base our living on research performance and consequently want to measure it. How should we use journal ranking studies, should we use survey or citation studies, and which ones, for merit review, P& T, and the like? This question plagues university committees across the land, sometimes with substantial acrimony. This paper provides some answers. The results of the paper are strong and the conclusions are emphatically stated. We’ll let the paper speak for itself about them.

The authors are also able to contribute to the resolution of another question: should we use journal ranking studies that intermingle IS journals with journals from other disciplines or rankings that include only IS journals? Their results lend support for the notion, advanced by Peffers and Tang (2003), that IS researchers should stick to our own knitting when assessing research journal quality, i.e., just rank the IS ones. Peffers and Tang (2003) had made the political arguments that including other disciplines’ journals just caused our own journals to be ranked lower. Besides, why does anyone in IS need to argue that Management Science and the Academy of Management...
Journals are good journals, when the other disciplines will do it for us? Katerattanakul, Razi, Han, and Kam (2005) make more of an engineering argument: pure IS journal rankings are more reliable than mixed discipline ones. This is one of those papers that IS researchers will read and reread and will cite in their conversations among themselves and their colleagues in the business acadaeme.

Many of us in IS research are aching to see more research that addresses fundamental questions about how to build better, more effective systems for business. The growing stream of research about enterprise resource planning (ERP) is one stream that potentially addresses such a need. Cumbie, Jourdan, Peachey, Dugo, and Craighead (2005) review 49 papers in this stream that were published in 15 leading IS and OM research journals between 2000 and 2004 in an attempt to bring the rest of us up to speed on where this stream is going, its potential, and to identify research opportunities. They chart publication trends in the stream, point us to the journals that publish this research, categorize the papers by research strategy, and provide us with a nice summary of the research findings. They conclude the paper with a more than token effort to paint an agenda for further research. I wouldn’t be surprised to find this paper on the syllabi of many doctoral programs. The reference list, alone, makes the paper worth a look.

When we read the title of Chen, Okoli, and Lihua’s (2005) paper, “Strategic Growth of Firms in the Digital Economy: A Simonian Research Agenda,” most of us will immediately recognize the reference to Herbert Simon, whose work ranged from business policy, in *Administrative Behaivior* (Simon 1947), to computer science, information systems, cognitive psychology, and the nature of knowledge. What researcher wouldn’t like to at least think about pursuing a simonian research agenda? Chen, Okoli, and Lihua (2005) review 19 of Simon’s papers and books, as well as related literature, to develop a framework and agenda for research on information systems and strategic decision making. The framework includes “future shape systems,” used by decision makers to ascertain the nature of the future, “near decomposability systems,” to generate alternatives for firm design, “docility systems,” to motive human actors to implement strategy, and “symbol and signal systems,” to disseminate plans. This is the kind of paper, not unlike much of Simon’s own work, that is best read when one is prepared to think deeply and creatively about what we could be doing in our research.

How should we measure and evaluate information systems service quality? Here Kim Eom and Ahn (2005) investigate the relationship between service quality; as measured by SERVQUAL, perceptions, and gap measures; and user satisfaction. The results of the study should be of interest, not only to IS researchers, but also to practicing professionals. The authors find that there are substantial differences in the efficacy of the service quality measures as predictors of user satisfaction.

Now let me return to the question posed earlier: how does JITTA attract such interesting papers? There are a couple of interesting answers to this question, I believe.

First, as you read through this preface, you’ll note that the content of these papers ranges as widely, probably much more widely, around the IS research domain as those in any other IS research journal. One well known editorial policy at JITTA is that we very broadly define the scope of our content domain. We think that IS researchers are an intellectually curious audience and we’ll entertain any paper that we think would interest them, without quibbling about whether the paper is too far from the center of a particular focus. Researchers can submit a paper to us without concern that we’ll reject it because “we really don’t do that kind of paper.” If it’s an interesting paper (to an IS research audience), we’ll entertain it.

Consequently, this issue contains a “practical” paper about IS journal rankings, a short review on the state of research within a stream, a research agenda based on a very idiosyncratic review of the research of someone who, arguably, was not an IS researcher, and a traditional empirical study. Consequently, when authors have interesting papers that don’t quite fit the culture of most IS journals, they may feel inclined to send them to JITTA, where they’ll be welcome. See, for example Crowston’s (2003) paper about coordination mechanisms for collision avoidance. I wonder what other IS
research journals would have entertained it (it is very interesting).

Secondly, JITTA has a culture of flexibility with respect to methodology and style. We allow the authors to define the objectives of a paper and, as long as the methodology and the implementation serves the purpose of those objectives, we’ll evaluate the paper on its own terms. We demand high quality work and clear, accurate presentation, but we don’t demand or allow reviewers to demand unnecessary conformance to our own ideas of what is normal.

Thirdly, we never ask the author to go back and write a different paper. Every serious researcher has been nonplussed by the receipt of a packet of reviews with an editorial decision that says, in essence, “throw away this paper and write something different.” Of course, we’ll ask authors to fix problems or to make substantial revisions to improve the paper, but we never ask authors to change the paper’s objectives or to throw out the core of the paper to do something else. The paper either makes a worthwhile contribution or it doesn’t (we do reject about 75% of submissions).

Authors appreciate our straightforward approach. That’s part of the reason, I think, why we are getting better papers every year and better papers, in a sense, than we deserve.

**REFERENCES**


