EDITOR'S COMMENTS

When Is Enough, Enough?[1]

As academic researchers we have to walk a delicate line when it comes to publishing papers on similar topics, possibly using the same data sets. On one hand, we want to get as many articles published as possible, preferably in high quality journals. We want to leverage the data sets that we have spent considerable effort collecting. On the other hand, we need to be careful not to overuse these data sets. The purpose of this editorial is to provide guidelines to help you maintain your balance on the publication tightrope. In it, I provide indicators of overuse of dataset or ideas. I follow this with guidelines for making a distinct contribution and avoiding self-plagiarism. Finally, I explain why *MIS Quarterly* requires that a provenance declaration be provided with each submission of a manuscript for review.

Eight Sure-Fire Ways to Know That You Are Squeezing the Lemon Too Many Times

Below are some indicators that you have squeezed the lemon too much when it comes to your research.

1. You have published papers that support findings for both sides of a conflicting argument using the same data.

2. You have published so many versions of the study using the same model with various combinations of data sets from different countries that you have run out of colleagues who can distribute the questionnaire and you can't afford the plane ticket to administer the study in Antarctica, the only place left about which you haven't published results.

3. You have a data set with three constructs and have published separate studies on every possible combination of these constructs in the roles of mediator, moderator, independent and dependent variables.

4. You have added one variable to the model so many times that you now have 50 independent variables and can't fit your model onto a single page. (Or, inversely you have published so many studies subtracting one construct at a time for the sake of parsimony that you only have one construct remaining.)

5. You run the paper that you have submitted through turnitin.com (a plagiarism software tool) and suddenly discover that it has 80 percent common text with a paper that you have already published (and no reference is made to that paper).

6. You have e-commerce data gathered in 1995 that you used in a 1997 publication. Reviewers are now balking at publishing from the same data set because it can't take into account the dot.com bust.

7. You use exactly the same variables and measures that you did in a previously published paper, but expertly camouflage them with different variable names and/or as different concepts.

8. You have received reviews from the same reviewer at two different journals focusing on the same target audience who happened to get two versions of your paper that are so similar that the review starts out, "Following the author's example of submitting one article to two journals, I am writing one review for the paper and using it for both journals."

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[1] I appreciate the contributions from the current and incoming senior editors who provided me with insights on this topic.

Although these are facetious examples (with the exception of the very last point that actually occurred), I have seen enough similar, but less extreme, examples in my 2 years as editor-in-chief that I want to devote this editorial to providing some cautionary thoughts about overusing your data (i.e., over-squeezing the lemon). I encourage using the same data set when you are trying to reach different audiences. For example, you may write one article using a format that is appropriate for an academic audience and a second, simplified article with no methodology section and summarized data for a practitioner audience. The paper must be rewritten to focus on each target audience. It is also appropriate to use the same data set when you study disparate models or answer radically different research questions. However, if you find that multiple versions of your paper resemble the above indicators too closely, then I entreat you to consider writing only one version of the paper.

Guidelines

Contribution

I am frequently asked if ICIS papers can be submitted to *MIS Quarterly*. We encourage submission of papers previously presented at ICIS and other conferences. Conferences are an excellent way of vetting your ideas, and the feedback that you receive from conference participants can be very useful in refining your paper. Since we anticipate that such feedback will occur, we at *MIS Quarterly* would like to see added contribution over the conference paper. How much added contribution? I could say 20 or 30 percent, but what does that mean? The assessment of contribution is subjective. The point is that the contribution of a paper published in *MIS Quarterly* has to be a much improved version of the earlier paper.

Please note that I am talking about added value through contribution and not a 20 or 30 percent change in the wording of the paper. If the conference paper has been referenced and has not been copyrighted, using large sections of common text is not problematic. Large sections of common text become a problem if that common text is already copyrighted, either by the conference or by some other publisher.

The main point is that the *spirit* of the paper should be substantially different—even though the phenomenon being examined is the same. Spirit is a tough concept to define. It could be in terms of lens (alternative but complementary theory), audience (alternative but complementary audience), variable set (alternative but complementary variable set), or models (alternative but complementary models). While methodology sections can be paraphrased, the key is to avoid acute incrementalism and provide a fresh view of the phenomenon that complements but does not contradict the prior view. Collectively the complementary papers should shed more light on the phenomenon being assessed than any individual paper (i.e., when putting the two papers together, they can be framed in terms of a larger model with overlapping circles representing each paper). Herein lies the added value, the *contribution*.

In reflecting on contribution, it is worthwhile to always keep in mind that research articles in *MIS Quarterly* must "offer a contribution that is sufficiently original and significant so as to warrant a full-length article for the authors to develop and present their argument." Assessing whether this criterion is met is key to the review and editorial process and it includes considerations such as how significant is this contribution in relation to the existing body of knowledge? How clearly does the contribution distinguish itself from what we already know? How important are the implications of this contribution for both theory and practice? How well is the contribution supported by the theoretical and empirical evidence provided?[2]

Methods to Avoid Self-Plagiarism

When you overuse a dataset or idea, you are opening yourself up for charges of self-plagiarism. There is little agreement about what self-plagiarism is, but most researchers would agree is that it is unacceptable republication.[3] However it is defined, you don't want to be accused of doing it. Following are a few tips for avoiding self-plagiarism:

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[2]Thanks to Varun Grover and Lars Mathiassen for their respective insights (and words) in these last two paragraphs.

[3]For more insights on self-plagiarism, including its multiple definitions, please see Christian Collberg and Stephen Kobourov, "Self-Plagiarism in Computer Science," *Communications of the ACM* (48:4), April 2005, pp. 88-94.

- Avoid writing new articles by cutting and pasting extensively from old articles.

- If there are multiple authors involved, have each coauthor write a different section in the event that you use a data set for multiple papers. For example, the coauthor who wrote the "Introduction" in a conference paper might write the methodology section in the paper and vice versa.

- Don't knowingly dilute the contribution of a paper by saving a hypothesis or construct for a later paper when it could easily be included in your current paper.

- Reference past work. In order to maintain anonymity during the review process, this may mean that you have to replace the exact reference with a statement to the effect that "the author's name withheld to maintain review blindness." To maintain anonymity, also avoid telltale signs of authorship. For example, instead of referring to one of your papers as "In our paper (Lee and Saunders 2005)…," use "Lee and Saunders (2005) state…."

- At the time of submission, inform the editor of papers in which you have used the same data set and indicate the changes that you have made when using that data.

- At the time of submission, inform the editor of your closely related research that has been published, accepted for publication, under consideration at another journal, or published in conference proceedings. If you are in doubt about it being too related, go ahead and mention it to the editor. Be sure to indicate the contribution of the paper that you are submitting.

- Put sections of text that are the same in quotes. However, you can't put 80 percent of the paper in quotes. Copyright restrictions typically will allow only a small percentage of a published article and some small amount of a book to be replicated.

- Don't let short-term gains derived from multiple similar publications hurt the chances of your long-term career advancement. Consider how reviewers of your application packets for tenure and promotion will react to your publication record. Will they think that you have squeezed your research lemon too many times?

- Consult the "AIS Code of Research Conduct" if you would like to more fully understand what is meant by self-plagiarism.[4]

- Consult a senior colleague if you have any doubts. The colleague may have had greater experience with the complex issues involved in self-plagiarism.

Provenance Declaration

MIS Quarterly, like a number of other journals, requires authors to make a provenance declaration when they submit a manuscript. In the event that you are not sure as to whether or not you are overusing your dataset or conceptual model, the provenance declaration is designed to allow the senior editor of your paper to make a judgment call. However, senior editors can only make this judgment if they are aware of other related working using your data set or conceptual model.

MIS Quarterly's provenance declaration can be found at http://www.misq.org/roadmap/standards.html#Link55 and reads:

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[4]http://www.aisnet.org/conduct/AIS_Code.htm. You may also wish to consult the ISWorldPage on "Professional Ethics" maintained by Robert Davison and Ned Kock at http://www.is.cityu.edu.hk/research/resources/isworld/ethics/index.htm (September 23, 2004).

Authors must disclose the following information when they submit a paper to the *MIS Quarterly*.

- Other papers on closely related research that they have written and that have been published or accepted for publication, that are under consideration at another journal or the *MIS Quarterly*, or that have been presented at conferences.
- Other papers that use the same data or a subset of the data as used in the *MIS Quarterly* submission.
- Other papers on closely related research that have been rejected for publication on a previous submission to the *MIS Quarterly*.

In the event any of the above information needs to be disclosed, authors should explain why their submission to *MIS Quarterly* makes a sufficient contribution to knowledge over and above the other paper(s) to merit consideration by *MIS Quarterly*. In this regard, authors are encouraged to seek the advice of colleagues who will provide forthright, independent advice on the extent of the unique contribution of their *MIS Quarterly* submission relative to their other paper(s). Further, authors are strongly encouraged to address concerns raised by a review team that may have rejected an earlier version of the paper at another journal.

If authors submit a paper on a closely related topic to another journal subsequent to their submission to *MIS Quarterly*, they must immediately notify the senior editor responsible for their *MIS Quarterly* submission.

Articles published in or under consideration for other journals or as book chapters must not be submitted. Papers submitted to or awaiting presentation at a conference must not be submitted. Papers already presented at conferences must be revised (ideally, taking advantage of feedback received at the conference) in order to receive consideration.

Changing of the Guard

Three senior editors are stepping down from the editorial board in December 2006. They are Lars Mathiassen, Bernard Tan, and Dov Te'eni. Their contributions are considerable, not only in terms of their guidance on papers as senior editors, but also for their many years of involvement in the reviewing process as reviewers and associate editors. They have made important contributions to the journal's policy. I have found their opinions to be invaluable.

Last year we changed the term for an associate editor from 3 years to 2 years, with the possibility of renewal. I asked five outstanding associate editors to serve one additional year to ease the transition. These five associate editors willingly agreed to stay on, even though it entailed considerable work for them. The other senior editors and I appreciate their many years of service to *MIS Quarterly*. Our heartfelt thanks go to Susan Brown, Wendy Currie, Prabhudev Konana, Guy Paré, and Jeff Smith.

I am pleased to announce that the new senior editors whose terms will be starting on January 1, 2007, are M. Lynne Markus (Bentley College), Detmar Straub (Georgia State University), and Geoff Walsham (University of Cambridge). Lynne will take over the reins of the *MIS Quarterly* Review department from Dov Te'eni.

I am also glad to announce the appointment of eight new associate editors who will be joining the *MIS Quarterly* board on January 1, 2007. They are France Belanger (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University), Brian Butler (University of Pittsburgh), Hock Chuan Chan (National University of Singapore), Guy Gable (Queensland University of Technology), Juhani Iivari (University of Oulu), William Kettinger (University of South Carolina), Paul Pavlou (California State University, Riverside), and Gabe Piccoli (Cornell University). We are happy to have them onboard.

Outstanding Reviewers

One final set of accolades is for outstanding reviewers. Reviewers are the lifeblood of *MIS Quarterly* because they ensure the quality of its publications. Each year we ask the Associate Editors to nominate reviewers whom they consider worthy of recognition as outstanding reviewer of the year. The senior editors then deliberate upon the nominations and select the reviewer of the

year. This year we had an especially difficult time selecting the Best Reviewer of 2005. The names of many excellent reviewers surfaced. It was with much deliberation that we selected two individuals to share the Best Reviewer of 2005 award: Peter Gray (University of Virginia) and Ronald Thompson (Wake Forest University).

This year we have decided to recognize reviewers who performed above and beyond the call of duty. These outstanding reviewers received Honorable Mention: Pamela Carter (Florida State University), Atreyi Kankanhalli (National University of Singapore), Craig Van Slyke (University of Central Florida), and Michael Wade (York University). We appreciate the efforts of these outstanding reviewers, and of all reviewers who work so hard to maintain the quality of *MIS Quarterly*.

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