The International Visibility of South African IS Research: An Author-Affiliation Analysis in the Top-Ranked IS-Centric Journals

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ABSTRACT

Information systems (IS) has a well-known tradition of being multi-disciplinary. IS research has been published in a diversity of outlets. As the discipline has evolved, there have been several scientometric studies aimed at identifying and ranking a core set of high quality IS-centric journals. This effort has spawned additional investigations aimed at profiling IS research in different regions and countries across the globe. The purpose of this study is to add to the body of knowledge in this domain by investigating the international visibility of South African IS research. The scope of the study was limited to investigating journal publications. The approach used was to identify from the literature a basket of IS-centric journals ranked as the top set in the field. The affiliations of authors in these journals for the period 2003 to 2007 were examined, and South African-authored publications identified. The analysis revealed that South African-affiliated authors have published in only a small portion of these IS-centric journals. The total number of articles published has also been small. These findings may explain why South African IS research has been perceived as largely unknown by the international IS academic community. This is despite numerous publications in outlets outside of the commonly ranked IS-centric journal set. If South African IS researchers are to increase international visibility, one strategy is to explicitly target the commonly accepted top-ranked IS-centric journals. Other strategies for achieving this are proffered in this paper, and ideas for future research are put forward.

CATEGORIES AND SUBJECT DESCRIPTORS

K.3.2 [Computers and Information Science Education]

GENERAL TERMS

Management, Human Factors, Theory

KEYWORDS

International visibility; Journal quality; Journal Ranking; South Africa. Information Systems Discipline

1. INTRODUCTION

The Information Systems (IS) discipline has been aptly described as a fragmented adhocracy [1]. Debates on the identity crisis within Information Systems have been ongoing for several decades now [2]. Given its multidisciplinary nature, research in the field is conducted using a diverse set of research methodologies ranging from positivist to interpretivist to critical [10]. This has lead to publication of IS research within a diversity of journal outlets. Apart from essentially IS-centric journals, these also include journals from related disciplines such as computer science, information and library science, organization science and operations research.

As the discipline has matured, research has begun to focus on publication patterns and quality of outlets for IS research [7]. Lowry et al. [8] state that "where and how we publish are fundamental aspects of the identity of the IS field—reflecting our value systems, paradigms, cultural practices, reward systems, political hierarchy, and aspirations" (p. 1). The ISWorld website provides a comprehensive list of scientometric studies that have attempted to establish journal rankings [12]. Additional scientometric studies have been conducted to assess researcher productivity [5]. For instance, Galliers & Whitley [4] investigated the profile of European IS research, while Sellito [13] examined journal publication diversity in Australia. Not much is known about the international profile of South African IS research.

The purpose of this paper is to add to the body of knowledge in this domain by investigating the international visibility of South African IS research. International visibility is defined in

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the paper as the extent to which authors affiliated with South African institutions publish in highly-ranked IS journals.

In the next section, alternative journal rankings are investigated before a list is chosen that is to be used in this study. A short background is provided on the context of South African IS research, and the research methodology is explained. The data analysis and results are laid out before these are discussed and implications drawn. Limitation and future research are outlined and the paper is then concluded.

2. JOURNAL RANKINGS

With well over 600+ journals publishing IS-related research [6], choosing an outlet in which to publish has become quite daunting for researchers. Many research institutions rightfully expect that faculty should produce quality research and publish it in prestigious, high quality journal outlets. Determining journal prestige, then, has become an area of concern in most disciplines, including IS. Several IS journal ranking studies have been reported over the past decade [12]. These have varied from all-inclusive studies which have included in rankings such non-peer-reviewed outlets as PC Magazine, to ones that have examined only peer-reviewed academic journals [8]. Various approaches to ranking have also been employed including surveys of researchers [8], IS school ranking lists [7], and author affiliation indices [3].

Determining the basket of journals to use has not been easily resolved [7]. For example, decisions have to be made as to whether to include journals from related disciplines such as Management Science and Decision Sciences. Although not pure IS journals, these outlets publish IS research on a regular basis. As the discipline matures, there have been calls for identifying and ranking a list of high-quality IS-centric journals. Peffers & Tang [11] in attempting to resolve this dilemma, identified over 300 journals deemed to be IS-centric, and through a survey of IS researchers established a basket of top 50 journals. There have not been many other studies attempting to do this, and as such, the basket provided by Peffers & Tang [11] has since been used in other studies wanting to assess IS-centric journals [7].

3. SOUTH AFRICAN IS RESEARCH CONTEXT

The South African IS research community is small when compared to many developed countries. Furthermore, unlike in many developed countries there are no purely IS-centric South African journals. ICT-related journals that do exist typically serve the wider ICT/Computing community (e.g., South African Computer Journal). Other local outlets for IS research include multidisciplinary social science journals (e.g., Alternation) and business management journals (e.g., South African Journal of Business Management) among others. This may imply that a strong IS research community is yet to be established in South Africa.

In order to assess the status of researchers and allocate resources, the South African National Research Foundation (NRF) encourages researchers to apply for rating. Three major rating categories are A-rating (Leading international researcher), B-rating (Internationally acclaimed researcher), and C-rating (Established researcher) [9]. It is instructive to review the statistics around these ratings. Given the multidisciplinary nature of IS, it is difficult to establish the exact number of rated researchers who espouse allegiance to the IS discipline. The broader ICT/Computing community encompasses Computer Science, Educational Technology, Information Systems and Information Science researchers. Table 1 below shows the approximate numbers of NRF-rated researchers who have as their primary research interest some aspect of ICT/Computing (e.g., Computer Science, Information Systems, Information Science, Information Technology, Education and Educational Technology, etc.). Data was drawn from the NRF website, which shows that there were 1698 rated researchers in South Africa in 2007 [9].

Table 1: NRF-rated researchers in the South African ICT community

Rating Category	Approximate No.
A (Leading International)	0
B (Internationally Acclaimed)	6
C (Established)	35
L (Late Entrant into Research)	3
P/Y (Promising Young Researcher)	8

The approximately 52 rated ICT researchers represent about 3% of the total number. It is noticeable that there are no leading international researchers in the ICT field. Suffice to say, there may be leading international researchers in other disciplines who at times conduct research which could be described as within the field of ICT. Six internationally acclaimed ICT researchers were found. The small number of internationally acclaimed researchers may be an indicator of the level of international visibility of the South African ICT research community. Indeed the small number of rated researchers as a whole attests to the small size of the community. IS researchers form an even smaller part of this group. This small group, together with other researchers whom for whatever reason are not rated, manage to publish in international journals. The international visibility of their research will be investigated in this paper.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the international visibility of South African IS researchers. Therefore, an exploratory approach has been adopted, using journal publication data. IS-centric journals were chosen for examination, since visibility of South African IS research amongst global IS scholars was being investigated. Examining all possible outlets for IS research was beyond the scope of the paper, as this would have entailed an analysis of over 600 journals. It is argued in this paper that international visibility is best assessed by investigating the generally accepted top research outlets in the field. The top 50 IS-centric journals identified by Lewis et al. [7] were selected as the basket of journals to examine (see Appendix 1). Rankings were determined by aggregating IS school lists [7]. Lewis et al. [7] based their IS-centric journals list on the one provided by Peffers & Tang [11] with some minor modifications.

The approach used for gathering data was to peruse articles in the top 50 IS-centric journals published over the past 5 years (2003 to 2007) in order to ascertain the more recent status of international visibility. Articles that were written by authors affiliated to South African institutions were identified in these journals, and the data collated.

Upon encountering a South African affiliated author, the journal article was downloaded and the authors' names, specific affiliations, and year of publication were recorded. The number of articles published for each year between 2003 and 2007 were cumulated as well as the total number of articles published per research institution. References for each relevant article were

recorded and were later used to categorize the articles into their respective research themes.

Table 2: South African author-affiliated articles

Journal	Rnk	03	04	05	06	07	Total
Int. Jnl. of Info. Mgt.	31	3	1	1	3	1	**9**
Jnl. of IT Education	44	0	1	0	1	2	**4**
Informing Science	50	1	1	2	0	0	**4**
MIS Quarterly	1	0	0	0	0	2	**2**
Decn. Support Systems	6	0	1	0	0	1	**2**
Info. Resource Mgt. Jnl.	23	0	1	0	0	1	**2**
Behavior & IT	27	1	0	0	1	0	**2**
Info. Systems Mgt.	29	0	0	0	0	2	**2**
Info. Research	50	0	0	1	1	0	**2**
Info. & Mgt.	5	0	0	0	1	0	**1**
The Info. Society	16	0	0	0	1	0	**1**
Int. Jnl. Of HC Studies	18	0	0	1	0	0	**1**
Comm. Of the AIS	21	0	0	0	0	1	**1**
Jnl. of Computer IS	26	0	1	0	0	0	**1**
Jnl. of Glob. Info. Mgt.	30	0	1	0	0	0	**1**
Jnl. of Glob. IT Mgt.	34	1	0	0	0	0	**1**
Info. Processing & Mgt.	35	0	0	1	0	0	**1**
Jnl. of IS Education	39	0	0	0	0	1	**1**
TOTAL		**6**	**7**	**6**	**9**	**11**	**39**

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 2 shows that 19 of the top 50 IS-centric journals contained publications by authors affiliated to South African institutions (see Appendix 2 for article details). The journals with the most South African-authored articles were the International Journal of Information Management (9 articles), followed by the Journal of IT Education and Informing Science (4 articles each). The Rank column in Table 2 denotes the journal ranking based on IS school lists [7]. South African-affiliated articles were found in journals at various levels, including the top-ranked journal (MIS Quarterly). Sellito [13] noted that Australian- authored research articles were not well-represented in top-tier journals. Where Australian authors had published in top-tier journals, it was typically in co-authorship with other international scholars [13]. The same trend is apparent in South Africa. The two articles published in MIS Quarterly were co-authored with international authors (see Table 5).

In comparing the rank of the 19 journals containing South African-authored research with the 31 that did not, there were no major differences. One discernible trend was the tendency for South African authors to target international or global journals (e.g., International Journal of Information Management, Journal of Global Information Management). The research agenda for such journals is generally receptive to perspectives from countries across the globe, which makes it possible to publish research concerning the local South African context in these outlets.

Further searches for IS research published by authors affiliated with South African institutions revealed that ***just as many, if not more articles were published outside of the top 50 ranked IS-centric journals***. Outlets targeted included the Electronic Journal of IS Evaluation, Computers & Security, Computers & Education, Telecommunications Policy and the Electronic Library among others. This may be indicative of the South African research publication environment whereby the Department of Education (DoE) recognizes international journals listed on the Thomson ISI and the IBSS (International Bibliography of the Social Sciences) indices. These journals may then be the targets for publication rather than ranked journal lists such as in Appendix 1. Very often there is an overlap. Journals both highly ranked and indexed in ISI and/or IBSS should be the prime targets for South African IS researchers. Another reason for South African researchers not specifically targeting the top 50 may be that in developing countries such as South Africa, research focused on IS and national development is pertinent. As such, South African researchers may direct their research of this nature to journals with the same focus. To ascertain whether this holds a selection of 3 journals having a development focus were analysed as shown in Table 3. Table 3 shows that in these journals, 11 articles were published by researchers affiliated with South African institutions in the period 2003 to 2007.

Table 3: Development-oriented IS journals

Other IS-Centric Journals	03	04	05	06	07
Jnl. of Comm. Informatics	0	1	1	2	1
IT for Development	1	0	1	1	1
Elec. Jnl. of IS in Dev. Count.	0	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	**1**	**1**	**3**	**3**	**3**

Articles were also analyzed by university to assess any trends towards targeting IS-centric journals. Figure 1 shows that amongst South African universities, authors affiliated with the University of Cape Town [UCT] appear most often in the top-ranked IS-centric journals (14), followed by authors affiliated with Witwatersrand University [Wits] (7), University of Pretoria [UP] (5), and University of Johannesburg [UJ] and University of South Africa [UNISA] (3 each). Cape Peninsula University of Technology [CPUT], and University of the North West [UNW] followed (2 each), and then Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University [NMMU], University of Zululand [UZ] and University of the Western Cape [UWC] (1 each). Given the small number of publications, the accidental exclusion of even 1 publication becomes very apparent. This highlights how little research emanating from South African-affiliated authors has been published in these journals.

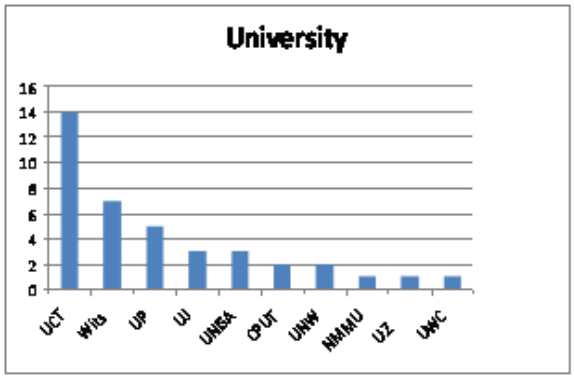

Figure 1: Publications per University

Table 4 shows that articles in the highest ranked journal were from UNW and UWC (each had one article in MIS Quarterly). Authors affiliated with UCT and UJ respectively had an article in the 6th highest-ranked journal (Decision Support Systems). Authors affiliated with Wits had an article in the 16th-ranked journal (The Information Society).

Table 4: Publications per University and Journal Rank for 2003-2007

Journal	Rank	Uni.
		UCT
Journal of IT Education	44	3
Int. Jnl. of Information Mgt.	31	2
Information Resource Mgt. Journal	23	2
Communications of the AIS	21	1
Decision Support Systems	6	1
Informing Science	50	1
Int. Jnl. of Human Computer Studies	18	1
Jnl. of Computer Information Systems	26	1
Jnl. of Global Information Mgt.	30	1
Jnl. of Global IT Mgt.	34	1
		Wits
Behavior & IT	27	2
Informing Science	50	2
Int. Jnl. of Information Mgt.	31	2
The Information Society	16	1
		UP
Int. Jnl. of Information Mgt.	31	2
e-Service Journal	46	1
Information Systems Mgt.	29	1
Journal of IS Education	39	1
		NMMU
Information Systems Mgt.	29	1
		CPUT
Information Research	50	1
Int. Jnl. of Information Mgt.	31	1
		UNISA
Information Research	50	1
Journal of IT Education	44	1
Informing Science	50	1
		UZ
Information Processing and Mgt.	35	1
		UNW
MIS Quarterly	1	1
Information & Mgt.	5	1
		UJ
Decision Support Systems	6	1
Int. Jnl. of Information Mgt.	31	2
		UWC
MIS Quarterly	1	1

The articles found were analyzed to identify common themes. 7 major themes were defined these being IS Management and Knowledge Management (10 articles), IS and National Development (8), Education and Research (6), IS Projects and Systems Development (4), Web and e-Commerce (4), Decision Making (3), Mobile Applications (3) (see Table 5 below). It is acknowledged that alternative classifications could have been used, but the above were deemed as adequate for the analysis in this paper. The institutional affiliation of South African-based authors is indicated in square brackets at the end of each reference in Table 5 (See Appendix 2 for full details).

Table 5: Publications by Themes

Theme	Reference
IS Management & Knowledge Management	Brown (2004) [UCT]. Brown & Russell (2007) [UCT]. Cohen & Toleman (2006) [Wits]. Da Veiga & Eloff (2007) [UP]. du Plessis (2005) [UP]. du Plessis & Boon (2004) [UP]. du Plessis & du Toit (2006) [UJ]. du Toit (2003) [UJ]. Hart & Porter (2004) [UCT]. Pretorius & Barnard (2004) [UNISA].
IS & National Development	Braa et al. (2007) [UWC]. Brown & Licker (2003) [UCT]. Brown et al. (2007) [UCT]. Introna & Whittaker (2006) [Wits]. Meyer (2005) [UNISA]. Onyancha & Ocholla (2005) [UZ]. Rhodes (2003) [UCT]. Thatcher et al. (2007) [Wits].
Education & Research	De Villiers (2007) [UNISA]. Hart (2006) [UCT]. Lynch et al. (2007) [UCT]. Mende (2005) [Wits]. Napier & Johnson (2007) [UP]. Scott et al. (2004) [UCT].
IS Projects & Systems Development	Cuellar et al. (2006) [UP]. Huisman & Iivari (2006) [UNW]. Iivari & Huisman (2007) [UNW]. Sewchurran & Petkov (2007) [UCT].

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There were several limitations in the study. In the first instance, very little research has been conducted to identify a broadly

accepted list of top-ranked IS-centric research. The list provided by Lewis et al. [11], based on Peffers & Tang [7] is a start in this direction. The list, however, still contains journals that are not purely IS-centric. Several journals on the list can be better described as multidisciplinary (e.g., International Journal of Information Management, Decision Support Systems, etc.).

Given the large number of journals to be searched, and the very few South African-affiliated papers found, it may be that some South African-affiliated publications could have been omitted. To reduce the probability of this happening, both authors were involved in searching for articles.

It was found that a large number of articles by South African-affiliated researchers have been published in international journals outside of the top-ranked 50. Future research might examine a comprehensive set of these to obtain a holistic view of international visibility. In addition, the most prestigious IS conferences might be analysed to establish the level of international visibility of South African authors in this set. Another interesting area of study would be to investigate the extent to which South African IS researchers are publishing in journals focusing on issues pertaining to developing countries.

7. CONCLUSION

The IS research community in South Africa is small. This small size has a major influence on the international visibility of South African IS research. The analysis has revealed that between 2003 and 2007 authors affiliated with South African institutions published in just under 40% of the 50 top-ranked IS-centric journals. In addition, only 39 articles were published in this set. Much more research has been published outside of the top 50 IS-centric journals. This may be as a result of the South African Department of Education policy, which recognizes international journals listed on the ISI and IBSS indices. South African IS researchers may target these general journal lists, rather than IS-centric ranking lists such as those proffered by Lewis et al. [7], and on the ISWorld website [12].

In the most prestigious journals (e.g. MIS Quarterly), South African authors have typically published in collaboration with international scholars. This trend has been noted too in Australia [13]. It is perhaps a strategy that can be employed by South African IS researchers as they strive to make an impact at the highest level of published research. Another strategy is to publish with South African researchers from other related disciplines who are known as international leaders in their field.

The journal which most often publishes research from authors affiliated with South African institutions is the International Journal of Information Management. Explicitly international and global journals have an appreciation of perspectives from diverse regions and cultures, and may be the specific target of South African researchers. Journals concerned with IS and national development were also found to be the targets of South African research, given that their research agenda aligns very well with that of developing countries. Many of these development-oriented journals, however, do not feature amongst the top-ranked IS-centric journals. This may be another reason for the relatively low international visibility of South African IS research. Many of the journals that rank highly in IS may not be suited for much of the development-oriented South African IS research. As a result, only a small subset of top-ranked journals is regularly targeted. A large number of other journals deemed to be more appropriate outlets are also targeted. This affects the international visibility of South African IS research. In order to improve visibility, South African IS researchers will have to devise strategies to increase publications in the top-ranked IS-centric journals, while continuing at the same time to publish in journals more suited for development-oriented research. The findings of this study will be of direct benefit to South African IS researchers wishing to apply for NRF rating, or wishing to improve their ratings.

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APPENDIX 1: TOP 50 IS-CENTRIC JOURNALS [7]

Journal	Rank
MIS Quarterly	1

Journal	Rank
Information Systems Research	2
Journal of MIS	3
Communications of the ACM	4
Information & Management	5
Decision Support Systems	6
European Journal of Information Systems	7
Journal of Strategic Information Systems	8
DataBase for Advances in Information Systems	9
Journal of the Association for Information Systems	10
Information Systems Journal	11
Information and Organization	12
International Journal of Electronic Commerce	13
Journal of Information Technology	14
ACM Transactions on Information Systems	15
The Information Society	16
Information Systems	17
International Journal of Human Comp. Studies	18
Organizational Computing & Electronic Commerce	19
Information Technology and People	20
Communications of the AIS	21
Journal of Organizational and End User Computing	22
Information Resource Management Journal	23
Information Systems Frontiers	24
Journal of Database Management	25
Journal of Computer Information Systems	26
Behavior & IT	27
Journal of the ACM	28
Information Systems Management	29
Journal of Global Information Management	30
International Journal of Information Management	31
Information Technology and Management	32
Electronic Markets	33
Journal of Global IT Management	34
Information Processing and Management	35
ACM SIGecom Exchanges	37
Scandavian Journal of IS	37
Australasian Journal of Information Systems	39
Journal of IS Education	39
Journal of IT Cases & Applications Research	40
Electronic Commerce Research & Applications	41
Journal of Information Systems Management	44
Journal of IT Theory & Applications	44
Journal of IT Education	44
Computer Supported Cooperative Work	45
e-Service Journal	46
Information Research	50
Informing Science	50
Wirtschaftsinformatik	50

APPENDIX 2: PUBLICATIONS BY THEMES – REFERENCE LIST

IS management and knowledge management

Brown, I. 2004. Testing and Extending Theory in Strategic Information Systems Planning through Literature Analysis, Information Resource Management Journal, 17,4, 20-48.

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IS and national development

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Brown, I., and Licker, P. 2003. Exploring Differences in Internet Adoption and Usage between Historically Advantaged and Disadvantaged Groups in South Africa, Journal of Global Information Technology Management, 6, 4, 6 – 26.

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