

Tutorial on Publishing ICT4D Research

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Welcome!

- Thank you to all of you for attending!
 - I look forward to your active engagement in the workshop
 - Please feel free to raise questions at any time

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Sources

- My own experience as
 - An IS researcher
 - A reviewer of many papers
 - An editor of four journals
 - Electronic Journal of IS in Developing Countries
 - IT & People
 - Information Systems Journal
 - MIS Quarterly
- My strong desire to encourage you to conduct and create good, publishable research

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The International Journal Market

- There are relatively few journals that focus exclusively on ICT4D
 - EJISDC
 - ITD
 - ITID
- There are many more journals that occasionally publish ICT4D research
- Each journal has its own mission, its own readership, its own niche.
 - You must write appropriately for each journal!

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Will MISQ Publish My Paper?!

- Well, they might!
- But you will need to adhere to their standards, their expectations, their niche view of the world.
- The same is true of any journal
- As an editor, I screen out 50% of submissions

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Authors and Publishing

- Authors often seem to be more concerned with publishing their research...
- ...and less concerned with who is going to be interested to read it.
- But it is not so simple – if the journal editor is not interested, or if the paper is unsuitable for the audience, the paper won't be published at all.

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Editors and Publication Policy

- So, editors pay attention to the quality of the research and its likely interest
 - Rigour – undertaking research according to strict standards and controls appropriate to the methodology.
 - Relevance – ensuring that the research is useful, consumable, readable, meaningful, value-adding for the journal's audience.
- These two factors are critical to good research – and its publication

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Rigour and Relevance

- Research that has a high standard of rigour (it is done well), yet is so artificial that it bears no relation to reality, may be of little use to readers.
- Research that is highly relevant, addressing complex problems, yet is so poorly conducted that we cannot have any confidence in the findings, is also of little use to readers.

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Examples

- Here are some examples of the kinds of papers that I see being submitted – to EJISDC, as well as to other journals.

Technology-Supported Decision Making

- I am interested in how Nepali Agricultural Aid Facilitators (AAFs) use ICTs to support their decision making
- This is not reported in the literature
- It seems that this is a difficult topic to study
- RQ1: How do AAFs make decisions?
- RQ2: Which ICTs do they rely on?

Method 1

- I can't find any AAFs. They are too scattered. So I ask my students to pretend to be AAFs and give them some sample AA problems to solve.
- I make careful use of theory to frame the study and carefully control the way technology is used in decision support, finally using a survey to assess the students' (AAF) decision styles.
 - But, can I **generalise** my findings to AAFs?
 - Can anyone really use the outcomes of this research?
 - Did we learn anything about **AAF** decision styles?

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Method 2

I am lucky enough to get access to a community of AAFs. I quickly start to interview them and can identify many interesting aspects of their decision making behaviour that have never been reported in the literature previously. After completing the interviews, I write up the paper – but no journal will publish it.

- Where is the theory?
- How can you explain your results?
- How did you develop your interview protocols?
- Was this a case study, ethnography,...?
- What additional factors that you failed to study might explain decision styles?

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Solutions 1

- Compelling motivation to the study
- A careful review of the literature about:
 - Decision making – especially by people like AAFs.
 - Decision making in Nepal (including cultural factors)
 - Use of technology for decision making in similar contexts
- Deliberate method selection?
 - Survey? Case Study? Ethnography? Interviews? AR?
- Survey:
 - A carefully developed instrument, based on a research model that reflects one or more theories with an appropriate set of theoretical constructs, using questions that directly relate to the decision making experiences of AAFs.

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Solutions 2

- Case Study
 - A carefully developed set of interview protocols, informed by a theory, that will enable me to extract relevant data about decision making
- Ethnography (or Participant Observation)
 - A carefully designed set of research protocols that will govern how I interact with AAFs, how I collect data, what additional sources I will use.
- Interviews
 - A carefully designed set of protocols (questions) that help me to understand their experience..

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Solutions 3

- Population
 - Real AAFs, not students.
 - Yes, it is hard to find them. But it is possible.
- Theory
 - Either a test of existing theory in the field, or (better) extension of existing theory or development of new theory
- Analysis and interpretation of the findings by both researchers and AAFs, with reference to the literature

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eBanking

- I receive, as editor, a submission from two authors based in and indigenous to India or China or Peru.
 - A study of ebanking adoption.
 - Application of a standard TAM-type theory
 - Survey based data collection
 - Strong statistical support and detailed discussion/conclusions
- But,... what is Indian/Chinese/Peruvian about this?

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Local Relevance?

- The authors originally are both Western-PhD-trained.
- They clearly know how to conduct and write research
- But they didn't say anything about India/China/Peru.
 - Content and face validity?
 - Context and culture?
 - Local conditions?
 - Who is the audience?

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Rigour & Relevance in the Context of ICT4D Research

- Research should be relevant to organisations and/or citizens in DCs
 - i.e. study them directly and produce findings that are relevant to them, as well as internationally
- Research should be conducted carefully, following principles appropriate to the methodology used

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Theory

- We have heard differing opinions about theory
- A good theory:
 - will be “practical” (Lewin, 1945), “plausible ... and correspondent with presumed realities” (Weick, 1989).
 - will help us “organize our thoughts, generate coherent explanations, ... improve our predictions [and ultimately] achieve understanding” (Hambrick, 2007)
- But equally there is nothing so dangerous as a bad theory (Ghoshal, 2005) and there is a risk of having a fetish for theory, of being imprisoned by theory.

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More generally...

- Who would want to read an article?
 - Who cares?
 - What would they learn?
 - How could a study be improved?
- ~~~~~
- How can you **motivate** a study effectively?
 - How can you **lure** readers to read and appreciate your work, to cite your work and to apply it?

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Possible Topics 1

- Cross-cultural studies contrasting a number of DCs in particular areas, e.g.:
 - Telecentres, E-Commerce Adoption/Use, Microfinance, Mobile applications for agriculture
- Success or failure stories of IS development, implementation or adoption
- Power and politics in IS implementation
 - use, abuse, success, failure
- Case studies of specific organisations
- Investigations into ethical issues

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Possible Topics 2

- The unexpected consequences of the tremendous growth and diffusion of IT
- State of global IT services offshoring in DCs and the related challenges or implementation experiences
- Tensions between local operators/people and overseas investors – in the IT field
- The role of Web 2.0 technologies in society and organisations.
- How does IT transform society?

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Style

- The Construction of Articles
 - From Abstract through Design to Conclusions
- Stylistic Conventions in Writing
 - The Art of Being Concise, Precise and Persuasive
 - 8000 words is a good target
 - Spelling and Grammar
 - You want to create a good impression
 - Consistency
- Referencing
 - Completeness and Appropriateness
- Plagiarism – and how to avoid it.

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Construction

- Most articles closely follow a template
 - Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review, Theoretical Framework and Research Design, Methodology, Results and Analysis, Discussion, Conclusions, References
- There should be a logical flow of ideas and arguments throughout the article
- All material from other authors (or from yourself) should be cited appropriately.

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Precise & Concise (& Simple)

- Most journals have a word limit of around 8,000-10,000 words
- Most reviewers don't like authors who are vague, dense, or overly complicated in their style
- Try to write clearly and precisely
 - Don't use bullet points (except for lists)
 - Don't write 6-line sentences (or 6 page paragraphs)
 - Try to avoid unnecessary jargon
 - Always ask a friend/colleague to read your work and to offer constructive feedback! They will see things that you can never see – because you know your own work too well.

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Persuasion

- You need to persuade reviewers (and editors) that your article is worth publishing
 - Many journals **reject** up to **90%** of submissions
 - Articles should offer something new, something interesting, and something unintuitive
 - Articles should advance our knowledge
 - They should also position their contribution in the context of prior work
- Journals have limited space. Even e-journals don't want to publish excessively long papers.

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Consistency

- Use the same font, the same version of English, the same formatting style for headers and titles
- Make sure that references are consistently presented
 - And that all references are complete
- Make it easier for the reviewer (and reader) to read your work
- Linguistic perfection is not essential, but an article must be readable, spell checked and grammatically correct.

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Referencing

- Most journals want to increase their citation count
 - And so most journals like to see their own papers cited
- If you want to publish your article in, e.g., EJISDC, then make sure that you cite some relevant EJISDC articles in your literature review!
- Don't over or under reference.
 - 15 references suggests that you have missed quite a lot
 - 105 references suggests that you are not very selective in what you choose to include
 - Each reference should be relevant
 - Recent (post 2007) references indicate that you know the **contemporary** literature

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Referencing

- For the eBanking example that I mentioned earlier
 - Most of the references did not describe other research conducted in the focal context, but instead focused on research undertaken in very different contexts
- But references do need to be relevant!

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Referencing Styles

- Styles vary from journal to journal
 - Consistency is more important
 - Look at a recent copy of the journal and follow the style
- Ensure that you include all relevant details
 - Author names, date, title, publication name, volume, issue, pages
 - Author names, date, book title, book publisher
 - Author names, date, conference paper title, conference name, location of conference, pages.

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Plagiarism

- Taking someone else's work as your own
- Not providing appropriate citation information to indicate authorship correctly.
- Plagiarism is a serious offence
- An author who plagiarises is likely to find
 - that his/her article is automatically rejected
 - irrespective of the quality of the work done
 - that he/she is blacklisted from that journal (and other journals) in the future
- Plagiarism is **very easy** to detect

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The Reviewing Process

- Each article that you submit is reviewed by 1-3 others.
- So, what is your responsibility, as an author?
- Reviewers are human, with limited time and energy.
 - So try to make their life a little easier.
 - Submit your best work! Don't assume that the reviewers will fix all the problems for you.
 - Get someone else to read your work before submission!

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Blindness

- Most journals adopt a “double blind” review process
 - The authors do not know who the reviewers are
 - The reviewers do not know who the authors are
 - But the editor knows the identity of both
- This does not guarantee the quality of the final review, but the reciprocal anonymity protects the privacy of both parties.
- The editor must select reviewers carefully, and then check that they have been fair in their assessment.
- Occasionally, poor quality reviews are discarded.

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Attributes of Good Reviews

- The paper should be summarised
 - To show that the reviewer understood the paper
- The strengths of the paper should be identified
- All advice for improving the paper should be actionable
 - If there are weaknesses, precisely what should the author do about them?
 - Which references should the author read?
 - The reviewer should avoid polemic or his/her own agenda.
 - It is the author’s paper, not the reviewer’s paper.

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Evaluation Criteria for Papers

- Is the topic important and interesting? Will anyone benefit from reading this paper?
- Does the paper make an original contribution to knowledge?
- Is the topic suitable for the journal?
- Is the paper sufficiently detailed for reviewers to assess its quality?
 - If there are major omissions, then reviewers may request additional information, or may reject the paper altogether.

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Evaluation Criteria for Papers

- Ethics
 - Did the researcher act ethically?
 - Did the researcher act to protect the interests of data subjects (individuals or organisations)?
- Research methods
 - Are the research methods used appropriate given the nature of the research problem?
 - Are the data collection and analysis methods appropriate?

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Evaluation Criteria for Papers

- Are the references correct, and up to date?
- Is the presentation clear, concise and grammatically correct?
- Are the concepts and arguments well organised, structured and defensible?
- Are the findings/contributions appropriately positioned with respect to the existing literature in this area?

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Rejection Criteria

- The article is uninteresting and no one would want to read it
- The problem researched is trivial, irrelevant, or not a problem at all
- The article is so poorly constructed that a completely new start is required
 - Or the arguments are so weakly/subjectively developed as to be meaningless
- There are serious ethical concerns about the way the research was conducted
 - E.g. plagiarism, use of deception, illegal/unethical practices, failure to protect research subjects' privacy

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How to Respond to Reviewers?

- Make sure that you address everything that they ask for
 - Even if you choose to dispute their view
- Provide a detailed presentation of your changes in a two-column tabular format
 - Left column – Reviewer Comments
 - Right column – Author revisions
 - Revision notes may be 10-15 pages long!
 - Even longer than the paper itself.

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Partnerships

- Gaining access to interesting data is one of the most difficult challenges.
- The people who do have access rarely publish it.
- Can a mutually beneficial synthesis be achieved?
- IFIP WG 9.4 encourages this kind of researcher-practitioner collaboration...
- But in the end it is up to you.

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