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The Trends in IS/IT Research for AMCIS Conferences: 1995 to 2004 (The Early Years): Research in Progress

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ABSTRACT

The Americas Conference for Information Systems (AMCIS) celebrates its 10th anniversary in New York City. Already AMCIS is viewed as one of the leading conferences for presenting the broadest variety of research done by and for IS/IT academicians in the Western Hemisphere. This research-in-progress article presents the beginning stage of an initiative to provide a systematic examination of the composition of each of the first ten AMCIS programs. Furthermore, it intends to provide a “living history” of the decisions and events that shaped each program, based on both the written and oral commentaries of the members of past and present conference committees. If there is any truth to the adage that research in proceedings proceeds research in IS journals, then there should be a sharp increase in Ecommerce publications at the expense of IS management research.

Keywords

Conference proceedings, IS/IT research trends, knowledge management, research themes, IS/IT literature

BACKGROUND: IN THE BEGINNING

Since 1995 over 3,000 articles, panels, tutorials, workshops, and technical demonstrations have appeared at the conferences and in the AMCIS Proceedings. In 2003 the AMCIS Executive Committee established the Organizational Memory Task Force to help ensure that procedures are in place to maintain appropriate records from each conference in an easy to access and meaningful form. The AMCIS Program History project is one of the initiatives spawned by that task force.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are threefold. One objective is to analyze the composition of the first ten AMCIS programs. This includes presenting information about the number of submissions, number of acceptances, and classification of accepted papers, panels, workshops, and tutorials. This can be used by future conferences as the foundation on which to build an assessment mechanism for conference quality. Another objective is to trace the historical evolution of the Conference mega-tracks that started with the 1995 conference, and continue through the development of mini-tracks, and finally the emergence of AIS Special Interest Group (SIGs) tracks. Understanding the impact of this evolution on the quantity and quality of AMCIS papers can also be used by future conferences as they plan their own programs.

Another objective of this research is to provide the basis for analyzing trends in research themes, approaches and methodologies in AMCIS over this time period. This can be used to compare research trends in AMCIS proceedings to trends cited and observed in other “mainstream” IS/IT academic journals. Such a study would provide insight into the speculation that research trends observed at conferences and published in proceedings actually precede, merely parallel, or simply follow research trends observed in mainstream IS/IT academic journals. We shall employ meta-analyses of current journal research trends when possible to assess this hypothesis.

AMCIS Conference History

In August 1995 the First Association for Information Systems (AIS) Americas Conference on Information Systems was held on the banks of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and the Ohio Rivers in downtown Pittsburgh, PA. At first this conference was to claim the acronym--ACIS. However, there was another conference held in Australia that already claimed that name for their Australian Conference on Information Systems. Therefore, the new conference organizers chose "AMCIS" for their new acronym. AMCIS stands for Americas Conference on Information Systems. AMCIS conferences have now migrated to nearly every geographical extreme of the United States (See Table 1). Conference themes, which are typically selected two to three years in advance, have tried to capture a sense of the future research (e.g., "The Wireless Worldwide Web (WWW) in Dallas 2002) with varying degrees of success. Innovations such as the Temple Review online system, which was introduced at the Boston 2001 conference, attempt to keep our conferences on the leading edges of the IS/IT technologies that form the core of our discipline. Furthermore, since its inception AMCIS has attracted a worldwide audience of academicians. Through the efforts of AIS Council, regional chapters of AIS are now located in North, Central and South America. As we enter the new millennium, Acapulco 2006, the first AMCIS conference outside the U.S., is rapidly approaching.

Table 1. AMCIS Conference Committees

Years/ Location	Conference Chairs	Program Chairs	Proceedings Editor(s)	Electronic Proceedings Editor	Program Review Chair
1995 Pittsburgh	Dennis Galletta	Hugh Watson	Manju Ahuja, Galletta & Watson	Reagan Ramsower	None
1996 Phoenix	Andy Philippakis	Michael Goul Heidi Owens	Jane Carey	Reagan Ramsower	None
1997 Indianapolis	Bill Perkins Iris Vessey	Leonard Jessup Joey George	Jatinder Gupta	Reagan Ramsower	None
1998 Baltimore	Milt Jenkins	Ellen Hoadley Izak Benbasat		Reagan Ramsower	None
1999 Milwaukee	Dave Haseman	Derek Nazareth Dale Goodhue	Robert Leitheiser	Reagan Ramsower	None
2000 Long Beach	Michael Goul	Michael Chung	Jan DeGross	Reagan Ramsower	None
2001 Boston	John Gorgone Jane Fedorowicz	Detmar Straub Diane Strong	Jan DeGross	Reagan Ramsower	Munir Mandviwalla (<i>ex officio</i>)
2002 Dallas	Jack Becker G.W. Willis	Reagan Ramsower John Windsor	Jan DeGross	Reagan Ramsower	Nicholas Romano
2003 Tampa	Alan Hevner Paul Cheney	Dennis Galletta Jeanne Ross	Jan DeGross	Reagan Ramsower	Nicholas Romano
2004 New York City	Jerry Luftman	E. Ted Stohr Chris Bullen	Nicholas Romano	Peter Wivagg	Nicholas Romano

As the audience for AMCIS expands, the conference program may need to change to reflect our changing needs. AMCIS has evolved into a "grass roots" type of conference. Conference themes have largely emerged as the mini-tracks were proposed. This process gave rise to several AIS SIGs at the 2003 AMCIS in Tampa, however, new mini-tracks are actively sought each year.

AMCIS Program History Project: Data Sources

The AMCIS program history project is one of the initiatives spawned by the AMCIS Executive Committee Organizational Memory task force. This article, which is the first stage of this initiative, examines the composition of each of the first ten AMCIS programs. Furthermore, it will provide a "living history" of the decisions and events that shaped each program, based on both the written and oral commentaries of the members of past and present conference committees. Fortunately all major chairs of past committee members are still very much alive (Table 1). In addition, a written summary of each conference program appears at the beginning of either the printed conference proceedings (last used in Boston 2001) or the printed conference programs, which have been distributed to each conference attendee. These summaries include details about conference submissions, acceptances, research themes, and research tracks, as well as discussions of new innovations at each conference. Finally, the entire proceedings for every AMCIS conference is maintained in the AIS eLibrary AMCIS Volumes archives along with links to copies of the original conference websites.

Prior Studies

IS/IT research is one of the most introspective academic disciplines. As one of the newest business disciplines, IS has frequently been referred to as a fragmented adhocracy (Kuhn, cited in Farhoomand, 1999). Our ongoing identity crises have sparked multiple studies on the nature of our discipline (Ives and Hamilton, 1980; Culnan and Swanson, 1986; Vessey, et. al., 2002), our reference disciplines (Benbasat and Zmud, 2003; Barki, Rivard and Talbot, 1988 and 1993), our research themes (Farhoomand, et. al., 1999), and the very nature of IS/IT research (Keen, 1980). Most recently, Vessey et al (2002) proposed a five-dimensional model for evaluating IS/IT research. The five dimensions are 1) reference discipline; 2) level of analysis; 3) topic; 4) research approach; and 5) research methodology. Farhoomand (1999) also specifically analyzed trends in IS/IT research across nine of the disciplines most respected outlets (I&M, JMIS, MISQ, CACM, ISR, EJIS, JSIS, MS and ICIS proceedings) for the twelve-year period 1985-1996. That study only focused on trends in research strategies and methodologies. Others have also focused on research themes and research topics (Hamilton & Ives, 1982; Vessey et al., 2002; Barki et. al., 1993 and 1988). We concur with Farhoomand that the two dimensions, research themes or topics and research strategies or methodologies, are the most appropriate for the current research project.

While our review of much of this literature points to a somewhat inconsistent use of any standardized terminology for analyzing and categorizing research in our field, we believe that the wealth of published studies can be used to assess a number of meta-analytical trends. One noteworthy trend observed in both the Vessey (2002) and Farhoomand (1999) studies was that while the quantity of non-empirical IS/IT research in our mainstream journals is still quite high (40% - 50% range), this type of research is declining, whereas the quantities of both case study and survey research are increasing..

Research Methodology

The contents of the first ten years of AMCIS proceedings will be analyzed according to their classification into research themes as specified by Farhoomand (1999), which is based upon Barki's (1993) Information Systems Research Literature (ISRL) keyword classification scheme. A three-point scoring method, outlined by Farhoomand appears to be an acceptable approach to give weighting to multiple research themes in each paper. The first stage of analysis will evaluate the trends in research themes as evidenced by the names of mini-tracks. Subsequently individual articles within each track will be classified according to theme and research strategy (Farhoomand, 1999; Vessey, 2002).

Next, the contents of each conference and program chairs letters to conference participants will be reviewed and used to present a coherent history of the first ten years of AMCIS.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

A summary of the numbers of papers, panels, tutorials, workshops and technical demonstrations delivered at each AMCIS is shown in Table 2. The number of these activities will reach nearly 4,000 by the close of AMCIS 2004 in New York City. A cursory analysis of this data reveals that while there has been overall growth in the conference, it has not been steady. Some of the declines noted in Boston 2001 and Dallas 2002 may be directly attributable to, first, the economic downturn in early 2001, followed by a devastating punch from the "9-11" disaster only one month after Boston 2001. A very subtle coincidence was that 911 papers were submitted to the New York City program committee.

A somewhat cursory analysis of the conference mini-tracks themselves is shown in Table 3. To get a sense of the changes over the ten-year time period, the number of articles in each paper track for the first five years (1995-1999) was compared to the number of articles in the same track (or a track with a very similar name) during the last five years (2000-2004). A percentage change was then computed based upon the net increase or decrease from the first period to the second period divided by the total number of articles in that track. Although the Pittsburgh 1995 conference did not officially recognize mini-tracks, we used the Phoenix 1996 mini-track names as proxies for the 1995 mini-tracks because of the strong correspondence between session names and mini-track names during those two years. Next the nearly 100 unique mini-track names between 1995 and 2004 were grouped based upon the authors' consensus into the 29 categories shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Summary of AMCIS Accepted Papers and Panels, Workshops, Tutorials and Doctoral Consortium Papers

Year	Location	Papers	Panels	Tutorials	Workshops	Technical Demonstrations	Doctoral Consortium Papers	Papers Submitted	Acceptance Rate
1995	Pittsburgh	200	12	7	10	14	None	*	
1996	Phoenix	225	0	6	26	7	20	*	
1997	Indianapolis	293	0	3	0	5	23	*	
1998	Baltimore	302	5	10	0	4	28	*	
1999	Milwaukee	283	1	9	18	2	22	*	
2000	Long Beach	407	5	6	3	2	18	*	
2001	Boston	388	0	10	6	0	39	600	65%
2002	Dallas	317	5	10	7	0	22	550	58%
2003	Tampa	414	0	10	0	4	40	627	66%
2004	New York City	562**	7	10	5	2	34	911	62%
	Totals	3391	35	81	71	40	256		

* Submission data pending; **Does not include 10 additional papers in a Special Roundtable Track

Table 3. Trends in AMCIS Mini-tracks

Mini-track Categories	Total Papers	Totals Papers Next 5 Years	Total Papers All 10 Years	Net Change	Minitrack Percent	Percent Change
	First 5 Years 1995-1999	2000-2004	1995-2004	1st 5 yrs vs. next 5	of all Papers	1st 5 yrs vs. next 5
Human Computer Interface	0	103	103	103	3%	100%
Artificial Intelligence	0	70	70	70	2%	100%
IS Staffing	0	66	66	66	2%	100%
Legal, Security & Environmental	0	49	49	49	1%	100%
Ecommerce Wireless	0	46	46	46	1%	100%
IT in Health Care	0	36	36	36	1%	100%
Interdisciplinary Research	0	32	32	32	1%	100%
Supply Chain Management	0	31	31	31	1%	100%
Outsourcing	0	25	25	25	1%	100%
IT Networks	0	9	9	9	0%	100%
ERP	23	95	118	72	3%	61%
Ecommerce	99	347	446	248	13%	56%
Information Technology	23	62	85	39	3%	46%
IS Theory	103	192	295	89	9%	30%
Database	43	80	123	37	4%	30%
IS Research	20	32	52	12	2%	23%
Decision Support Systems	47	70	117	23	3%	20%
Knowledge Management	52	74	126	22	4%	17%
Mobile Computing	9	12	21	3	1%	14%
Global IT	65	84	149	19	4%	13%
IS Pedagogy	131	168	299	37	9%	12%
Case Studies	10	12	22	2	1%	9%
System Analysis & Design	196	225	421	29	12%	7%
Project Management	64	68	132	4	4%	3%
Geographic IS	16	10	26	-6	1%	-23%
IS Management Issues	38	20	58	-18	2%	-31%
Technology Research	51	14	65	-37	2%	-57%
Collaborative Technologies (GDSS)	71	18	89	-53	3%	-60%
Organizational Research	242	38	280	-204	8%	-73%
Totals	1303	2088	3391	785		23%

While there may be a number of conclusions that can be drawn, it appears that the ECommerce mini-track has seen the greatest growth in the number of papers in the last five years, along with Human Computer Interface and ERP mini-tracks. On the other hand, the tracks on organizational research, IS management issues, technology research, geographic IS, and collaborative technologies have a shown real decline in the last five years. Other changes that have occurred between the first five years and the next five include the addition of mini-tracks that reflect the changing nature of the IS profession. Included among these new minitracks are health care information systems, supply chain management, legal, security and environmental, wireless, outsourcing and artificial intelligence. Large decreases in accepted papers occurred in organizational research and IS management issues minitracks, as well as in collaborative technology issues. This is surprising given the increase in this research area in many leading IS journals. One possible explanation is the lag between when research is presented at a conference and when it actually appears in a journal. If indeed conference submissions lead journal publications, then we might expect to see fewer journal articles on these topics in the next few years. Another possible explanation is that the conference has refocused its emphasis away from broad topics (e.g., IS management issues) to more specific areas. Regardless, these changes suggest that the research provided through the AMCIS conference is attempting to address important issues within both the practitioner and academic IS community.

IMPACT OF THIS RESEARCH

The findings of this research will provide several useful insights that can be used to guide AMCIS conference and program chairs as they plan future AMCIS conferences and to guide researchers as they plan their submissions to future conferences. These insights include an understanding of topics and streams which seem popular within the conference itself as well as a comparison of these topics with what is published in IS/IT journals. If the topics here are not comparable to IS/IT journal articles, then we might ask ourselves why and whether they should be. If the topics here are comparable to IS/IT journal articles, then we might ask ourselves whether our conference is leading or lagging published research, and whether or which it should be.

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