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Editorial: Welcoming Contributions on Topical Themes in Information Systems Research

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EDITORIAL

The plethora of topical research themes in the information systems (IS) field is often considered a challenge, as they make it difficult to establish an intellectual core for the discipline. Topical themes, however, also have the potential to develop the field in important ways. IS research investigates the design, use, and impact of information technology (IT), and topical themes focus on novel matters, such as those related to a domain, technology, or methodology in IS research. As such, research on topical themes is often both innovative and highly relevant. While investigating novel IT-related phenomena brings diversity to IS research, it also accelerates it and fosters the contributions our fields makes to society. Leaving the beaten track helps to align our research agendas with dynamically changing societal requirements and socio-technological opportunities.

Even so, investigating topical themes has limitations and brings challenges, the most important of which is these themes' integration with extant knowledge. Researchers can use four principles—conceptualization, contribution, IT orientation, and contextualization—to position topical themes in IS research.

1. **Conceptualization**: Research must clearly identify and conceptualize the phenomena at the core of a topical theme. For example, IT-related phenomena may be investigated in domains such as commerce, government, health, or banking, or in functions such as accounting, marketing, or logistics, and they may come with challenges such as sustainability, agility, or innovativeness. Methodology can also constitute a topical theme; for example, as when research leverages neurophysiological data or naturally occurring data as strategies of inquiry. Accordingly, conceptualizing emerging phenomena, including their scopes and boundaries, allows a new research theme to be justified against related research.

2. **Contribution**: Topical-themed research must present clear arguments regarding a theme's value proposition—that is, what we can learn from the new research focus. Researchers must also demonstrate that their research will add a critical mass of expected value to the body of knowledge. They need to demonstrate to what extent a new research theme may advance IS research and practice or, in wider terms, increase the societal value of IS research. For example, the study of new research themes has the potential to clarify IS phenomena, and such studies may also have a high normative value, especially if they focus on specific requirements in a domain or on recent innovations in IT.

3. **IT orientation**: Research must account for IT's role because topical themes must have the design, use, or impact of IT at their core to qualify as IS research. For instance, studying innovative IT applications in functional areas can improve IS design practices, and new research methodologies can bring fresh insights into the use of IT applications. However, IT's role must be addressed clearly, research must be grounded in extant research, and results must be compared with previous findings.

4. **Contextualization**: In an IT-oriented field such as IS, topical themes are typically linked to other fields. This relationship must be made clear when researchers provide background for their studies and when they interpret their results. Even highly innovative research must be grounded in the academic literature: topical themes may encompass notions and concepts that have been studied in other areas under other labels, so a thorough literature review should cover works from related, more-established fields.

While a timely consideration of contemporary challenges can increase the societal value brought about by our field, it is difficult to publish research on topical themes if these four criteria are not met. The criteria can thus support researchers in their effort to present innovative studies to the IS community.

Against this background, *JITTA* fosters research and discourse on topical themes in IS research. Apart from research papers on topical themes, which we welcome as regular submissions, we have introduced a special section that features standing calls for papers on selected themes in IS research, beginning with three themes: big data analytics (led by Sudha Ram of the University of Arizona in the US), (2) business process management (led by Jan Recker of Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia), and human-centered IS and NeuroIS (led by Rene Riedl of Johannes Kepler University in Linz, Austria). The senior editor leading each section will introduce each theme with an opinion paper. *JITTA*'s rapid editorial cycles support a timely discourse on these themes.

The first paper in *JITTA*'s current issue, *Suggestions for the next wave of BPM research: Strengthening the theoretical core and exploring the protective belt* by Jan Recker, introduces the special section on BPM. The paper presents a reflective, generative analysis of BPM research and contributing research programs from the viewpoint of a theoretical paradigm that embraces analytical, empirical, explanatory, and design elements. Recker outlines a BPM research program that seeks to develop BPM into a richer, more-inclusive, and overall more-significant field. The paper shows how to strengthen BPM's core and how to derive new theory from BPM. It also argues for the role of shared assumptions in BPM and the need to evaluate these assumptions to develop the field.

The second paper in the current issue, *Content validity for knowledge management systems success models in healthcare* by Nor'ashikin Ali, Alexei Tretiakov, and Dick Whiddett, takes a quantitative approach to content validity and investigates the success factors of knowledge management systems in healthcare contexts. The study adds to the literature of content validity assessment by demonstrating the practicality of Lawshe's technique for assessing content validity when developing survey instruments.

I am grateful to all of the authors, reviewers, and editors who contributed to this issue and the research on topical themes. I hope *JITTA*'s emphasis on topical research themes will lead to positive and dynamic developments in the IS field.

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