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## Editors' Comments: The Quest for an Initial Policy about Generative AI for MIS Quarterly Executive

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## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

### The Quest for an Initial Policy about Generative AI for MIS Quarterly Executive

There is an indeterminate line between using AI as a research assistant and attributing AI's work as your own. The challenge for a journal such as ours, and for teachers and professors assessing student work, is deciding where that line should be drawn.

We have encountered variations of this challenge in the past. While Wikipedia references are often frowned upon by editors, teachers and professors, the use of similarity detection tools has become standard for many submission systems, including Manuscript Central and Editorial Manager. But where does copy editing fit? We do not ask authors to disclose their use of spelling or grammar tools; we encourage such checks. How about more in-depth editing? For years, *MIS Quarterly Executive* has benefited from the meticulous copy editing of David Seabrook, ensuring the content appeals to, and is easily understood by, executive readers. Before final publication, another editor reviews citations and formatting to ensure they align with our standards. So the question arises: Are these tasks suitable for replacement or intervention? (as ChatGPT 4.0 has assisted me in doing with this paragraph based on the prompt: "edit the following for clarity, word choice, and grammar").

Prior to copy editing, our authors typically receive extensive input from reviewers and our senior editors. Indeed, from time to time I have heard authors complain that the finished paper looks very little like what they intended and "was essentially written by the review panel." While authors often express their appreciation for these, usually anonymous, inputs, the details of those contributions are neither published nor are our editors or reviewers paid for their efforts in any currency other than my appreciation. Others too have contributed at even earlier stages, including usually unidentified participants at a workshop, or those executives who contributed to a case or an action research project. Should inputs received by generative AI be treated any differently?

At the other extreme are papers written by generative AI based on a single prompt. On the surface this seems unlikely to produce credible research, but, depending on the nature of the research and the quality of the prompt, the AI tool might have access to relevant data that addresses at least portions of the research question. As time passes, and as AI tools feature more data and more powerful capabilities, such possibilities will increase. Shouldn't our students, authors, reviewers and editors be armed and proficient with the most powerful and ever more remarkable tools available?

To help me address this issue I set off on two paths: looking first at how other outlets are addressing the issue and then soliciting input from our senior editors.

### What are Others Doing?

While journal editors from various disciplines undoubtedly are grappling with this issue, I narrowed my brief search to prominent publications in our field. For information systems, like many areas of study, this is an issue of academic integrity, one that will be addressed in editorial statements like this. However, given our field's foundation in information technology, this topic must also be explored in our research contributions. How is, or how will, this emerging technology reshape publishing, education, research, and a myriad of other sectors, industries, organizations, jobs, and career paths?

The 2023 *International Conference on Information Systems* (ICIS) took an early and strong stand against the use of AI tools for papers submitted ("By checking this box, I acknowledge that no content or aspect of the manuscript was generated by ChatGPT or other AI content generators."). On the other hand, the Association for Information Systems (AIS), publisher of *MIS Quarterly Executive*, has yet to announce a policy – and so do have the editors of other AIS journals, including JAIS, AIS's premier research outlet. The *Management Information Systems Quarterly* (MISQ), our sister outlet, has also not yet issued a policy statement or addressed generative AI in an editorial statement. *Information Systems Research*

(ISR), on the other hand, published an editorial this month on “The Janus Effect of Generative AI: Charting the Path for Responsible Conduct of Scholarly Activities in Information Systems.” This editorial is interesting in that it provides examples where the use of these tools can be valuable and presumably be found acceptable.

While policies still seem rare, we are beginning to see the topic emerging as a research object in journal publications. The *Communications of the AIS* (CAIS), for example, published an article on “Generative Artificial Intelligence in Information Systems Education: Challenges, Consequences, and Responses” only recently, and the *Journal of Management Information Systems* (JMIS) has issued a call for papers on “Generative AI and its Transformative Value for Digital Platforms” that is due in January.

And then there are the publishers. Elsevier, the publisher of the *Journal of Strategic Information Systems* (JSIS), for example, has issued a policy on the “*use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in scientific writing.*” According to its statement, authors have to disclose the use of generative AI (and their variants) in their manuscript, and a statement will appear in their published work.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the policy applies to the writing process only; in contrast, using AI tools “*to analyze or draw insights from data as part of the research process*” is excluded. As arguments, Elsevier cites transparency and trust, which is not surprising given how quickly fake citations can erode said trust in the research process—but it is surprising to spare the actionable elements of the research process.

For those that want to learn more about how to differentiate “fake” writing from human writing, have a look at an article in *Wired*, titled “*Use of AI is seeping into academic journals—and it’s proving difficult to detect.*”<sup>2</sup> One criterion that differentiates the fake from the real is apparently the deviation in sentence length across consecutive sentences, along with a high standard deviation of sentence length overall. I cannot help but think of my editor at Accenture, David Light, who always said: Intersperse long and short sentences to increase readability. Who

would have guessed that algorithms do not follow his advice?

### What do MIS Quarterly Executive’s Senior Editors Think?

My second path led to our senior editors, a very experienced and knowledgeable resource. I invited each to contribute to a two-round, quasi-Delphi study. I first sought initial opinions and then used those to formulate questions for our second round.

In the first round, most respondents were positive about the need for a policy, noting that it would guide prospective authors, preempt problems, and even, as one senior editor suggested, set a progressive example. Two respondents cautioned that we might benefit from a year of experience prior to establishing a policy, and other respondents noted the likely rapid evolution of tools, uses, and accepted norms.

Concerns were raised about “hallucinated” references not being caught and then, perhaps, migrating into other publications. Another was “rearranging a deck chairs” problem whereby existing knowledge is repackaged by AI. A third concern was about using the tool to manufacture quantitative data—though given the nature of the work published in our journal, that seems unlikely.

There was also a wide range of opinions regarding the specifics of a policy. The need for “transparency” in the application of generative AI tools was a common theme, ranging from requiring a general acknowledgement to a detailed description of its usage. One respondent proposed not only an appendix, but a complete listing of AI prompts used. But in general, respondents in the first round were supportive of encouraging authors to use AI, with one author fearing that, unless carefully worded, a policy might discourage such use.

As part of the second round, I sought input about the degree of detail *MIS Quarterly Executive* should require for acknowledging the use of generative AI. There was little agreement, with responses ranging from “none” to providing its usage in both footnotes and an appendix with detailed prompts.

There was a similar disparity in the leadership role that *MIS Quarterly Executive* should play, and

<sup>1</sup> See <https://beta.elsevier.com/about/policies-and-standards/publishing-ethics#4-duties-of-authors>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.wired.com/story/use-of-ai-is-seeping-into-academic-journals-and-its-proving-difficult-to-detect/>

the extent to which we should be encouraging authors to employ such tools. One senior editor commented that the real opportunity would come not so much from our authors' use of the AI tools, but rather in the form of articles addressing such uses in practice. Another senior editor saw potential ethical concerns, whereby work developed with the help of AI risked not giving proper credit to original sources. The majority, again, felt we should encourage use while recognizing both the risks and limitations.

Another question sought advice regarding whether reviewers, and perhaps even senior editors, should be blinded regarding the use of AI as to not be biased against a manuscript. The near consensus was that shielding this information is counterproductive.

### Our Initial Policy

While there is a broad spectrum of opinions, the overall perception amongst senior editors is that the use of generative AI in research should be encouraged—not just accepted or forbidden. Thus, my starting point in formulating an *MIS Quarterly Executive* policy is to be encouraging, particularly for work applying the technology in organizations. But I also recognize that guidelines, and even guardrails, will be necessary. While I feel it is premature to delineate a detailed policy, I believe there are minimum requirements we can agree on. Those include:

1. Authors must be humans.
2. Authors are singularly responsible for the integrity and originality of their work.
3. As *MIS Quarterly Executive*, we reserve the right to reject a paper if we feel the use is “unacceptable.” This criterion is admittedly subjective, thus that call would be made only after a discussion with the authors, the senior editor, and the editor-in-chief. If the use has been well documented that decision can, and should, be made during the preliminary stages of the review process, or even in an inquiry letter prior to submission.
4. Reviewers and editors, as well as the intended audience, therefore, must be made aware that generative AI was used in the research and in the development of the manuscript. This may be little more than a short footnote in the manuscript

(e.g., Chat GPT 3.5 was used to search for additional references which the authors then confirmed). But I primarily hope that our readers and authors will benefit the most from seeing creative applications of generative AI in action. Thus, if the use of AI is novel, the details could be shared in an Appendix, perhaps even including generative prompts.

### Going Forward

Given that we may be standing on the cusp of an AI revolution in academia, I feel excited and worried at the same time—admittedly, leaning more towards the former than the latter. What intrigues me the most are the various uses of generative AI that I cannot even begin to fathom. With my research hat firmly in place, I decided to utilize the next year for an observational study. Specifically, I will survey authors shortly after the acceptance of their manuscript. The questionnaire will delve into usage patterns of generative AI, along with the authors' experienced trials and tribulations.

With regards to usage patterns, one senior editor alerted me to the Contributor Role Taxonomy.<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, this taxonomy is used to capture the various roles that human contributors play in the manuscript development process. A reduced set of those role descriptions will serve for half of the questionnaire; the other half will solicit written inputs, such as “What hurdles or unanticipated outcomes did you encounter?” or “What benefits did you experience from using generative AI as part of the research process?”<sup>4</sup> I hope this approach will help us to gain a better understanding of how, over time, generative AI impacts our scholarship; I am also hopeful to find some interesting use cases that can be shared and can serve as objects for future *MIS Quarterly Executive* articles.

### In this Issue

Four research articles are included. The first one, titled “How WashTec Explored Digital Business Models” and written by Christian Ritter, Anna Maria Oberländer, Bastian Stahl, Björn Häckel, Carsten Klees, Ralf Koeppel, looks

<sup>3</sup> See <https://credit.niso.org>

<sup>4</sup> A draft questionnaire is available here: [https://cofc.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_0jgCKFVvQ75QVNQ](https://cofc.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0jgCKFVvQ75QVNQ)

at WashTec, a market leader in the car wash industry, that embarked on the exploration of new digital business models. The paper highlights key stages of the journey, along with a four-phased method that can serve as a blueprint for other organizations to pursue.

The next research article, titled “How to Successfully Navigate Crisis-Driven Digital Transformations,” is written by Ralf Plattfaut and Vincent Borghoff. While the need for organizations to digitally transform is omnipresent, a distinct process perspective has often eluded small and medium-sized organizations. The paper reports on five Mittelstand companies, the set of challenges they faced with regards to existing business processes management practices, and the pathways how those challenges were overcome.

Next is the article written by Sara Schiffer, Martin Mocker, and Alexander Teubner on “Managing IT Challenges When Scaling Digital Innovations.” When moving a digital innovation from its exploration phase to a phase of scaling, lots of things can go awry. The paper reports on freeyou, a digital innovation unit of the German insurance company DEVK, and the challenges it faced when introducing a digital car insurance to the market. It reflects on the very different requirements for application development, IT organization, and data analytics.

The final research contribution, “Fueling Digital Transformation with Citizen Developers and Low-Code Development,” is written by Ainara Novales, Rubén Mancha. It presents the journeys of two early adopters, Hortilux Schröder b.v. and Continental AG, in their successful implementation of low-code development. Specifically, the paper looks at how early-adopters can use low-code development to innovate their product and services, how they can shape new internal business processes with low code, and what key actions need to take place when adopting low code successfully.

Enjoy reading and sharing those articles!

Iris Junglas  
Editor-in-Chief