EDITOR’S VIEW

An opportunity for editors of I.S. Journals to relate their experiences and offer advice.
The editorial view of Frantz Rowe, Editor in Chief: of *Systèmes d’Information et Management*.
Third in a series – On dissemination, national language and interacting with practitioners

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This opinion paper gives Frantz Rowe’s viewpoint, as the Editor in Chief of *Systèmes d’Information et Management*, on two of three main theme he had discussed at the 13th *European Conference on Information Systems* in Regensburg, which were: the type of papers which *Systèmes d’Information et Management* publishes, the importance of publishing in French and the experience of the Journal with practitioners. The Editorial Board of *Systèmes d’Information et Management* has adopted the same basic rules as those described by Ray Paul for the *European Journal of Information Systems* (Paul, 2005), so this paper mostly focuses on the last two of my three conference themes. After briefly describing the scope of the journal, therefore, we start by giving an account of our 10 years experience with practitioners. Then the second part discusses three reasons for publishing in French: the theoretical background; cost and recognition and dissemination of ideas.

Ray Paul’s paper (2005) provides a thorough account of ‘refereed journal dissemination in order to assist in the general desire to improve the content, appropriateness and readability of IS Journals’ (p. 217). As one of the Founders and the Editor in Chief of *Systèmes d’Information et Management (SIM)* that has published more than 200 papers over the last 10 years, I can only concur with him that:

- papers should be readable in the language in which they are published (A),
- an IS journal should publish papers dealing with IS-related issues (B),
- papers should be meaningful and provide some rationale (C),
- they should avoid mere presentation of statistical relationships (D), and
- should be more than a castle built on sand (E).

On each of these issues Ray offers very interesting and precise insights and concludes that when a paper does not fulfil one of these obligations he rejects them right away. He even states that ‘at the time of writing I reject somewhere between 25 and 40% of all papers submitted to EJIS without
going to review’ (ibid., p. 208). For SIM, I would say that I reject 20% of the papers we receive for similar reasons. Reason A (readability) occurs mostly with authors from foreign countries. In fact rejection on grounds of readability is quite rare, probably because I have tried to be positive towards submissions, including those from French authors! Poorly written papers, however, do not get published. Case B is probably the main reason why papers do not get sent for review. Nevertheless, I do send a significant proportion of such papers to reviewers, because, when they are well written, they can help us define the frontiers of the field (Benbasat & Zmud, 2003). In fact, as for all papers we publish the Editorial Board meets and discusses them beforehand, which often helps refining the Board’s understanding of SIM’s scope. In addition, SIM is recognised by other disciplines and I feel it would be dangerous to take the rejection decision alone, especially when we receive a paper with an important signature from another discipline. Case C is quite rare as a cause for direct rejection, probably because the Editorial policy makes this point clearly. Case D is also rare because such papers are often from young researchers who do not know how to develop a good line of arguments; and from experience I know that with the help of the Editorial Board they can often become acceptable, or even good, papers. The Board’s policy has always been to be supportive and the Editor must act accordingly. Direct rejection for reason E is, unfortunately, not so rare and very often occurs with practitioners who obviously have not read the Editorial Policy and have no original findings or experience to share.

It may seem therefore that the Editor in Chief’s review process has a significant effect on the kind of papers we publish and on the rate of acceptance of the Journal (actually 40%). In fact, we proceed as follows. After deciding that none of criteria A to E apply to a new submission, I send it to two reviewers who can be part of the Editorial Board, but more often part of the Review Board, and sometimes do not even belong to either but are asked to review because of their particular expertise. This is a double blind review process. When the paper has received positive feedback from reviewers and has reached a state where at least one of the reviewers likes it and the other is not totally against it (if he or she is strongly negative then I can ask a third reviewer), then I can send it to examination by the Editorial Board who always meet for each issue in Paris. There, we can have long debates about a paper, and may reject some that were apparently close to being accepted by reviewers, but we can also decide to publish one with demands of major revisions or even rejection by one of the reviewers. Our decision is always accompanied by very specific advice and requirements that condition the final acceptance of the paper. Generally the Editorial Board discusses six to eight papers for the four that are published in the corresponding issue.

The structure of Systèmes d’Information et Management: two basic mechanisms for interacting with practitioners

After briefly outlining the aim and scope of SIM, I will discuss the two basic mechanisms we adopt for interacting with practitioners through the journal: the ‘cas, experiences et pédagogie’ section and the ‘best article of the year’ prize.

Aims and scope of SIM

According to its official statement, ‘The journal aims to:

- highlight the best research and enhance scientific knowledge in the domain of information systems;
- share the interests and potential applications of academic research to practice.
- SIM strives for three scientific objectives: assess the performance and characteristics of information systems from the point of view of definition, design, development and use;
- describe and analyse the processes of information interpretation operated by actors in their activities of business intelligence, communication, creation and knowledge development;
- describe and analyse the way people accept or reject information technologies and the way the latter change the coordination between actors and sociocultural norms.’

(http://revuesim.free.fr).

Although SIM has published two papers analyzing the nature of the articles published in the journal (Peaucelle, 2001; Desq et al., 2002), neither used this typology. On a rough count, however, each category has been well represented over the last 10 years.

‘Cas, experience et pédagogie’: a section for practitioners and teaching

We wanted to promote the idea that a good scientific journal is not necessarily just a journal that promotes a systematic academic discourse with a lot of methodology and theoretical background. In the ‘Cases, experiences and pedagogy’ section we look for relevant (Benbasat & Zmud, 1999) articles where results or insights are more important than anything else (Aldag, 1997), with no special need for a bibliography, and as with any journal we seek to enlarge our readership by offering new insights. Indeed, the ‘Cases, experiences and pedagogy’ section includes teaching cases, feedback and accounts of the design and use of tools and management of the Information System function; consequently, emphasis is given to the relevance and originality of contributions rather than references to the literature (http://revuesim.free.fr).

This bias against methodology and theory in this section is certainly a bit artificial, but it remains the case that the gap between research and practice seems to be partly due to internal academic reasons, as much
academic research rests on a mainly (dis)confirmatory positivistic approach based on reference theories (Daft & Lewin, 1990; Jones, 2004) in which such methodological discussion and referencing is considered essential.

The distinction is however important because, in the ‘Research articles’ section we insist that papers be built on sound methodological foundations, with a thorough literature review, justification and description of the research methodology, etc. Of course, we recognise with Jones (2004: 128) that in SIM, as with the supposedly best papers in the best journals and Conferences, such as MISQ and ICIS, there is no strong consistency in the way papers report their research methods. The reason for this is not because of any particular emphasis on multi-methods, but rather that SIM seeks to be open to any methods as long as they are clearly described. We therefore endorse the argument of Jones (2004: 134) that ‘Paying careful attention to how we describe our research, in the light of our acknowledged philosophical position, and awareness of the artifice involved in this process are both necessary’. And this is precisely why we name this section ‘Research Articles’.

Overall, any original work enhancing knowledge in Information Systems is welcome as long as it deals with management issues.

Contributions of authors based on a theory from other disciplines are welcome. These could include philosophy, psychology, sociology, economics, anthropology, history, law, linguistic and cognitive sciences, computer science or mathematics.

Theoretical research whose field is clearly put in perspective can be acceptable along with empirical research that reviews concepts or theories.

SIM seeks to publish works that meets the highest international standards. It reflects diversity in methodological approaches: quantitative, qualitative, conceptual, action research, clinical and experimental, simulations based on hypotheses including concrete and relevant problems are all covered by SIM.

Consequently, the editorial board primarily selects articles: (1) making a significant contribution to knowledge in the chosen field; and (2) appropriate to teachers, researchers and well-informed professionals.

Despite the existence of the practitioner oriented section since its beginning, the journal has only published 18 papers written by professionals, sometimes with the help of a researcher, that is totalling a little <10% of all papers published.

The best article of the year: a recognition by practitioners increasing their incentives to read our research

The prize for the best article of the year in Systèmes d’Information et Management was launched in 2002. The €1000 prize is announced and awarded at the Association Information et Management conference by a Chief Information Officer of one of the members of the large French firms club (CIGREF: Club d’Informatique des Grandes Entreprises Françaises). The journal’s Editorial Board first selects five articles. The criteria are mainly overall excellent scientific quality and readability. They are then presented by the Editor in Chief and the President of the Association or his or her representative to the staff of CIGREF including its Deputy Executive Director and Management expert. After only 4 years it is difficult to interpret the effectiveness of this mechanism. Nevertheless, let us notice two main points. CIGREF has never selected an article in the ‘Cas, expériences et pédagogie’ section, although the Editorial Board proposed at least one from this section (out of the five selected each year). The number of articles in this section makes up only a third of the total number of articles in the research section. Two times out of four the authors whose article got the prize had had some relationship for their research with CIGREF which might indicate that the search for new interesting insights that does not involve some kind of direct institutional and oral communication complementing the research has limited impact. It may also be significant that two members of the Editorial Board are involved in the R&D arm of the IS function of large organisations (CIGREF and France Telecom).

The language issue

First and foremost, Systèmes d’Information et Management has established itself as the leading journal in the French speaking world (including Canada, Africa and the various places overseas where French is regularly spoken and used as the main teaching language of institutions). In these countries English or American IS journals are also read and subscribed to, at least by libraries, but French remains the main vehicle for authors. This section explains the reasons for this choice and SIM’s policy regarding the publication of articles in English. Why should we first publish in our native language?

We see three main reasons for publishing in French: theoretical sources, cost, and recognition and dissemination of ideas.

It is clear that ideas are better conveyed in one’s own language. Although prominent French scholars are translated, the original ideas and writing style of major thinkers such as Bourdieu or Foucault make it very difficult for them to be conveyed effectively in translation. And when significant new work gets published in French, IS scholars using French as their preferred vehicle for writing are best-placed to put over these new ideas for an IS audience. All those who read French can convey their appreciation in any language as well. However, they might better do it if the French-speaking IS community has first expressed their reaction in SIM. The fact that major French or German thinkers are translated is excellent news and it is surprising that some are probably better known to the English-speaking IS community (see for instance Willcocks (2005)) than to the French IS community itself. This might be because researchers place a high value on originality, so exotic theories, in other languages, are particularly attractive. This also
operates in the opposite direction in the French IS community where American concepts such as alignment and reengineering appear to have a particular appeal. This does not mean that one cannot be a prophet in one's own land, rather the prophet's voice may be heard and not used. Thus, we also read French scholars but do not use them in an explicit way. This has been the case with Crozier and Friedberg (1977) whose work is potentially very important for IS researchers as it offers a conceptualisation of the social actor which is, for us, embedded in the very concept of information systems (Rowe et al., 2004). Their work is not cited, however, when it could be (see for instance (Besson & Rowe, 2001)). Crozier and Friedberg may be considered less a primary reference than Weick whose message is very similar and more popular in the American Literature. Only very recently, for example, has explicit reference begun to be made to their treatment of behaviour using the concept of strategy (which, interestingly, emphasises its intentional and relational character) (Rowe, 2005). It may also be the case that the way ideas are expressed in French is very different to that in American writing. French authors are typically less direct and their adherence to a particular stream of thought is recognisable more by the concepts and style they use, rather than by specific claims and system of reference. This is not an insurmountable problem, but habits of expressing ideas, familiar concepts and communication style are very different and make it easier for French IS scholars to express their views in their own language. Moreover, this problem may mean that a paper considered to be excellent in its original language loses its rhetorical effect and may only be deemed acceptable when translated.

A second, and increasingly important, reason for publishing in French is that of cost and speed. For publishing an article this comprises the cost of time for writing in the original language, the cost of translation (and/or checking errors by a native) and the opportunity cost of not publishing more quickly to disseminate the ideas in one’s own country (For a more in-depth exposure see for instance (Reinsch & Beswick, 1990)). The cost of translation itself can be significant. Over recent years I have spent at least €1000 per year on translations (by native English or American speakers), only to receive the comment after many first round reviews: ‘please have the paper reviewed by a native English speaker’ (the translators are generally shocked!). Publishing in one’s own language also usually costs less in terms of time to publication. For example, there fewer delays are likely when one can interact with the Editorial Board and get to know when/if it is appropriate to send a proposal. Doing that requires some high-touch communication or a personal knowledge of the Editor and it is much easier to inquire effectively about opportunities in one’s home country or at least in one’s native language. Similarly, when Communication of the AIS recently announced that it would accept submissions in French a colleague and I submitted a paper right away. When we learnt, however, that the 37-page paper was to be translated, we withdrew it because of the additional cost. We were also concerned about the risk of a poor translation with the journal’s quick review process and its dissemination over the Internet. This could be a good thing if a paper conveys its ideas very directly but could be a disadvantage if not. Although its topic was an international comparison, with my co-author, we finally preferred to publish it in a French Marketing Journal that would probably have more impact nationally.

Finally the dissemination of ideas to a French reading audience is very important. Indeed publications in journals with national recognition are essential for hiring and tenure (Dennis et al., 2006). In France, SIM is one of the journals recognised by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (the equivalent of the NSF in the United States), which means that it can play a decisive role in recruitment at the very beginning of an academic career. In the French public university system, once a student’s Ph.D. has been passed by their university, the candidate applies to a qualification process for university appointments in late December (a reason why many young French Ph.D. candidates are unable to attend ICIS), Each applicant’s candidacy is examined by the Conseil National des Universités (CNU), comprising 18 Professors and 18 Assistant Professors (of whom two thirds are elected by their peers and one-third nominated by the government). The CNU votes on each candidate following reviews by two members. One major criterion they consider is whether the candidate has at least one paper published in a refereed journal. For candidates in all managerial disciplines, SIM is one of the few French journals, and the most well-known and recognised in IS, that plays this role. Given, the above considerations about the ability to convey one’s ideas in a foreign language and the cost issue it is clear that SIM serves a vital role in the survival of the French IS community. This being said, French IS researchers are publishing more and more in English and in particular in Journals such as MIS Quarterly, Information Systems Research, Information Systems Journal, Journal of Management Information Systems, Information and Management, Information and Organization, European Journal of Information Systems, Database and Journal of Global Information Management, all recognised by the CNRS. This will be a long process but we hope that the forthcoming International Conference on Information Systems in Paris in 2008 will help.

A progressive opening to papers in English while maintaining its vocation in French

This does not mean the journal is closed in on itself. On the contrary, since 1999 we have changed our policy to accept papers in English. Our motivation was to increase the quality of the journal, by complementing issues with one or two papers in English when needed. Unlike the practice of other French journals, such as Recherches et Applications en Marketing, the articles we select are not translated from other English or American publications.
Papers are required to be original, and are especially welcome for special issues. On two occasions there were more papers published in English than French, because the quality of papers in English was higher, but these were exceptions, and we would not normally have more papers in English than in French.

Over the past 7 years, 18 articles in English have appeared in the journal. The trend is increasing, and is well accepted, provided that it does exceed two per issue. Publishing more papers in English is not a particular goal of SIM, however, rather we see it as an interesting window on the international community that puts into sharp focus original work that we believe will be stimulating for the French speaking world.

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References


