Call for Papers for a Special Issue of the

Information Systems Journal

TRANSCENDING THE QUALITATIVE-QUANTITATIVE DIVIDE IN IS RESEARCH USING QCA AS A CONFIGURATIONAL, COMPARATIVE APPROACH

Aim and Purpose

Despite calls for comparative, contextualist understanding of digital phenomena (Avgerou, 2019; Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2020), comparative research remains underdeveloped in the field of Information Systems (IS). Yet, recent methodological advances have afforded IS researchers with untapped opportunities in this regard. Specifically, the emergence of a new, configurational view of digital phenomena (El Sawy et al., 2010) can provide IS researchers with a theoretical basis for conducting comparative research irrespective of its qualitative or quantitative nature (Ragin, 2008). Conducting such comparisons, however, requires distinctive techniques for abstracting contextual knowledge to derive robust, if modest, generalisations that apply to cases (qualitative or quantitative) beyond the sample under investigation to the extent that these cases share a reasonable number of characteristics (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2009).

To achieve modest generalisations and develop theories of the middle-range, we call for Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) as a novel approach for IS research that transcends the qualitative-quantitative methodological divide (Ragin, 2008). Subscribing to asymmetric causality, which considers both presence and absence of causal conditions in shaping an outcome of interest, QCA extends beyond the replication logic that informs contemporary comparative approaches (Cavaye, 1996; Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin 2014). While replication attempts to either confirm or disconfirm findings across multiple cases, QCA refines this quasi-experimental logic by drawing on counterfactuals to simplify "complexity in a theoretically-guided manner" (Ragin, 1987: 83).

QCA can advance theory building in IS research by going beyond the atomistic, variance-oriented logic to embrace conjunctural causation and equifinality. In contrast to the variance-oriented logic of an additive or one-to-one relationship between cause and effect, conjunctural causation accounts for the existence of causal interdependencies such that multiple causes can act in tandem to give rise to a given effect. In other words, QCA does not assume additivity in that the same causal condition could manifest different outcomes depending on the presence or absence of other related causes. Likewise, departing from the variance-oriented logic of uniformity whereby a given effect can always be attributed to an identical set of causes, equifinality forsakes the notion of a universal solution in favor of multiple causal paths for achieving a targeted outcome of interest. In this sense, the logics of conjunctural causation and equifinality advocated in QCA, when taken together, can aid in the development and validation of configurational theories for explaining increasingly complex digital phenomena (Benbya et al., 2020) where "different [causal] conditions combine in different and sometimes contradictory ways to produce the same outcome" (Ragin, 2000: 40). By assessing the effects of causes working in conjunction with one another rather than separately (Ragin, 2000), QCA allows IS researchers to ask probing questions about relevant configurations of causal conditions in order to elucidate complex causal mechanisms where causes can complement one another in certain contexts while offsetting one another in other contexts

(Fiss, 2011; Jin et al., 2020; Park & Mithas, 2020).

Accordingly, QCA can be employed for developing typological theories: contingent generalisations about configurations of conditions constituting theoretical archetypes (George & Bennett, 2005). Far from offering "little insight into why certain variables go together" (Greckhamer et al., 2018: 484), QCA entails a back-and-forth cycling between theoretical and substantive knowledge to develop novel theoretical arguments that lie mid-way between the 'orchestrating themes' embedded within individual cases and broader theoretical patterns emerging across cases. Nevertheless, to develop theories from QCA, challenges remain with regard to how cases should be selected to attain necessary and/or sufficient conditions for an outcome of interest. Compared with conventional theory development where outliers are often disregarded, deviant cases matter in ascertaining necessity and sufficiency for theoretical exploration via QCA (Schneider & Rohlfing, 2013). In the same vein, there are numerous unanswered questions over how QCA can be employed for theory testing that incorporates configurational logic whereby multiple configurations of causal conditions can exist despite sharing an identical theoretical perspective (Park et al., 2020). This, in turn, has implications for how well-established variance-oriented IS theories such as the Information Systems Success Model, Technology Acceptance Model, and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology can be re-interpreted in light of configurational logic and QCA.

In this Call for Papers, we encourage IS researchers to submit their best work on QCA, whether they are underpinned by Critical Realist case studies (e.g., Henfridsson & Bygstad, 2013; Iannacci et al., 2021; Wynn & Williams, 2020), interpretivist approaches (e.g., Jopke & Gerrits, 2019) or more positivist traditions (e.g., Liu et al., 2017; Pappas & Woodside, 2021). We are particularly interested in how QCA techniques can be employed to advance theory development and validation that celebrate inclusivity of various research paradigms. We are also calling for methodological innovations combining, for example, QCA with process-tracing techniques (e.g., Iannacci & Cornford, 2018), Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with two-step QCA (e.g., Maier et al., 2021), or methodological innovations deploying QCA to harness unstructured data sets (e.g., Nishant & Ravishankar, 2020) or utilising sequential research designs (Mattke et al., 2021). Apart from methodological contributions, we also invite submissions of empirical studies where QCA constitutes the overarching methodology.

List of Potential Topics:

- QCA in theory development and/or validation
- QCA and process-tracing techniques
- QCA and mixed-methods research
- QCA and multi-methods research
- QCA and Critical Realist case studies
- QCA and Positivist case studies
- QCA and panel data
- QCA and qualitative coding
- QCA and quantitative studies
- QCA and temporality
- Small/Medium-N QCA
- Large-N QCA
- Empirical papers where QCA is the overarching methodological approach

Submission Guidelines:

Please follow the ISJ's Instructions for Authors when preparing and submitting manuscripts. The formal submission deadline will not be extended. All manuscripts will go through a screening by the Special Issue Editors to assess their fit with the Special Issue and their readiness to be sent out to review. Manuscripts that pass the initial screening will go through the review process. Reviews will be conducted on a rolling basis.

Indicative Deadlines:

Manuscript submission: March 31, 2022
First round review due: June 30, 2022
First round revision due: September 30, 2022

Special Issue Senior Editors:

Federico Iannacci (Special Issue Coordinator), University of Sussex, United Kingdom
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(ct.digi@cbs.dk)
Angsana Techatassanasoontorn, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand
(angsana @aut.ac.nz)
Zhongyun (Phil) Zhou, Tongji University, China
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Scientific Advisors to the Special Issue:

Adrian Dusa, University of Bucharest, Romania
Lasse Gerrits, Erasmus University, The Netherlands
Roel Rutten, Tilburg University, The Netherlands

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