

Comments from the editors

What Comes Next?

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The SaudiCIS conference served as a catalyst for innovation, collaboration, and disruptive ideas. It brought together researchers, practitioners, and thought leaders, sparking meaningful conversations and forming influential connections. Now that the event has concluded, one pressing question remains: What comes next?

It is quite evident that the primary message conveyed by the digital transformation panel in the information systems field is that one should begin/think locally and publish globally. Similar guidance has been provided by prominent academics from across the world: make steady progress, develop your skills, cater to and support the needs of the local community, and finally, build your reputation on a global scale. As IS and business researchers in the GCC region, we have a unique opportunity to present our challenges, solutions, and innovations to the rest of the world; we can share our side of the IS story.

Building on the successful organization of the SaudiCIS conference, we would like to seize this opportunity to discuss the challenges faced by IS and business researchers in the GCC region and explore potential solutions for advancing the IS and business research community in the region. Moreover, we believe the message from the SaudiCIS conference is also relevant to other business disciplines in the region.

Challenges for IS and Business Researchers in the GCC

To foster meaningful progress in the fields of IS and business, it is essential to identify the key challenges faced by IS and business researchers in the GCC region. By recognizing these challenges, we can collectively explore viable solutions to advance the discipline. Below are some of the main challenges identified through brainstorming and aligned with the findings of Alkhaleedi et al. (2020), PWC (2024), and Yigzaw et al. (2021) for IS researchers in our region:

- *Limited access to high-quality data:* Researchers often struggle to obtain

reliable, real-world datasets due to privacy concerns, legal restrictions, and the lack of open-access research infrastructure. Collaboration with industry is often limited, constraining access to proprietary or real-time data necessary for empirical research.

- *Limited availability of funded research grants:* Although research funding opportunities are gradually increasing, they remain relatively constrained when compared to international standards. Many available grants prioritize applied research with immediate economic benefits, leaving basic and exploratory IS research underfunded.
- *Industry-academia collaboration gap:* A persistent misalignment exists between academic research and industry needs, leading to research outcomes that may not fully address pressing regional business issues and problems. The private sector may be reluctant to engage in long-term research collaborations, favoring short-term solutions instead.
- *Publication outlets:* IS researchers in the region often encounter difficulties publishing in top-tier journals, due to rigorous editorial standards, limited mentorship, and reduced engagement with established international academic networks. Additionally, evolving research impact metrics in the region may contribute to a disconnect between academic goals and practical relevance.
- *Talent retention and development:* The region is subject to some level of talent outflow, as skilled researchers seek positions in more research-intensive environments abroad. Furthermore, the development of local expertise in niche IS fields is hindered by a scarcity of postgraduate programs and specialized training opportunities.
- *Cultural adaptation of research:* There is a need to “think locally and publish globally”, as cultural nuances and region-specific challenges must be integrated into global IS frameworks to ensure relevance and applicability.

Identifying these challenges is the first step toward establishing a thriving IS research environment in the GCC. By enhancing collaboration between academia and industry, increasing funding possibilities, and dedicating efforts to address region-specific issues, we can collaboratively develop innovative solutions that position the GCC as an emerging leader in IS and business research.

Potential Solutions for IS and Business Researchers in the GCC

Addressing the challenges faced by IS and business researchers in the GCC requires a comprehensive strategy that promotes collaboration, improves resource accessibility, and ensures that research remains meaningful and relevant. Based on insights from Johansson and El-Masry (2021), Molodtsov and Nikiforova (2024), PWC (2024), and Telecom Review (2023), the followings are some proposed solutions to overcome these challenges and advance IS and business research forward in the region:

- Establish open data platforms: This can be accomplished by creating national and regional open-data repositories for the secure sharing of anonymized datasets from government agencies, corporations, and research institutions.
- Develop industrial research grant programs: Collaborate with the private sector to establish corporate-sponsored research funds, allowing firms to co-invest in initiatives that address industry-specific challenges.
- Establish innovation hubs and behavioral labs: Innovation hubs within universities can facilitate collaboration between industry experts and scholars. Additionally, behavioral labs can support researchers in testing and implementing IS solutions in real-world industry environments.
- Develop regional IS journals and research networks: Academic institutions should initiate regional journals that focus on GCC-specific research topics while adhering to international academic standards. Regional research networks can connect researchers, provide mentorship, and support collaborative publishing in high-impact journals. The developmental goals pursued at AJAS represent one such effort, which we hope will yield results in the coming years. However, there is also potential for launching additional journals with more practical or specialized scopes.
- Enhance IS graduate programs and promote talent retention: Establish more postgraduate research programs in IS fields at GCC universities, particularly in emerging areas such as AI, cybersecurity, and digital transformation. To retain top researchers, institutions can offer competitive research incentives, including tax benefits, research funding, and innovation awards.
- Establish mentorship programs to encourage the development of research skills and collaborative practices through formal or informal mentorship

initiatives, possibly integrated into regional conferences. These programs can support early-career researchers and those seeking to re-engage with research or develop new competencies. The goal is to nurture ideas and guide them toward submission to top-tier journals and conferences.

- Bridge the research-relevance gap by engaging with relevant research problems, promoting the value of research, and aligning institutional incentives with these objectives (Alabduljader & AlMarzouq, 2024)

By implementing these solutions, the GCC can position itself as a leading hub for innovative IS and business research. The key lies in cultivating collaborative ecosystems and aligning academic efforts with industry needs.

IS and business researchers in our region should begin by developing their research competencies through deep engagement with their discipline and by taking advantage of seminars, conferences, and interactions with local academics. These platforms can enhance skillsets and contribute meaningfully to the vibrant local IS community we all aspire to build. Second, engage locally as an IS scholar by participating in regional events, submitting your work to local journals, and supporting your peers-whether by serving as reviewers or mentors and by collaborating to produce high-quality, impactful research. The path to excellence may be challenging, but it becomes manageable when shared with colleagues who support one another along the way. The Arab Journal of Administrative Sciences (AJAS), for instance, offers one avenue through which you can make a difference-by publishing your work and contributing as a reviewer. If publishing in AJAS or other regional journals contributes to your promotion, take full advantage of that opportunity and let us grow together as a community. Third, foster local discourse by reading what your peers are publishing, and by engaging in meaningful conversations around the issues and solutions most relevant to our region.

The current issue of the Arab Journal of Administrative Sciences features five contributions that reflect both the intellectual momentum generated by the SaudiCIS conference and the broader challenges and opportunities shaping research in the region. Three of the published papers-those by Raja et al., Albashrawi et al., and Alfifi-originate from submissions to SaudiCIS and illustrate the growing sophistication of regionally grounded research on emerging topics. Raja and colleagues present a timely synthesis on cybersecurity vulnerabilities in Industry 5.0, offering a structured review that highlights the distinct risks introduced by

human-machine integration. Albashrawi et al. examine the psychological effects of social media use, with particular attention to narcissism and its interaction with empathy and well-being in the Saudi context. Their study uncovers significant gender differences and offers a strong foundation for future research on digital behavior in Arab societies. Meanwhile, Alfifi's exploratory study addresses structural and cultural barriers to women's participation in the accounting and auditing profession in the Jazan region. His findings point to persistent challenges as well as policy-relevant avenues for enhancing women's professional empowerment.

Complementing these SaudiCIS contributions are two articles that speak directly to enduring research needs in the region. Alebrahim's article demonstrates how agent-based modeling can be leveraged to investigate housing market dynamics in contexts where access to high-quality data is limited—a recurring constraint for empirical research in the Arab world. By illustrating the methodological rigor and policy relevance of simulation-based approaches, the study makes a compelling case for greater adoption of such tools in future regional research. In contrast, Hamoudah offers an empirical model to assess the factors influencing the adoption of environmental activity costs in Saudi manufacturing firms. Her work underscores the importance of integrating environmental accounting into corporate decision-making and highlights the organizational conditions under which environmental sustainability can be advanced. Together, these articles reflect both the intellectual vitality and the pressing realities facing scholars in the region. They exemplify the value of regionally situated research that speaks to global audiences while addressing local imperatives—an ethos we continue to champion at AJAS.

Let us take the guidance from SaudiCIS to heart. Collectively, we can enhance our competencies, support our communities, and cultivate a dynamic IS research ecosystem in the region. From there, we can confidently share our unique stories with the global community. Let us ensure that SaudiCIS serves not only as a milestone, but as a catalyst for something far greater—should we choose to pursue that path. It's up to us to make our mark on the world of IS research and beyond.

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