

MIS Doctoral Dissertations: 1973-1980

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Editor's Note

A major objective of the MIS Quarterly is the communication of knowledge concerning the MIS field. Dissertations are a major source of MIS research, but a search process is necessary to obtain a list of MIS dissertations. Such a list can be valuable to both academic and business researchers in order to:

- 1. provide an awareness of current MIS doctoral research,*
- 2. allow a non-specific search procedure that may trigger further investigation of research, and*
- 3. allow a check on other search procedures.*

To meet this need, the MIS Quarterly will publish a yearly listing of MIS dissertation titles. A comprehensive bibliography of dissertations on MIS topics for 1973-1980 is presented in order to provide a starting point for this information resource. Henceforth, only dissertation references not appearing here will be added. Additions to the bibliography are invited.

Introduction

Doctoral dissertations in MIS represent an important source of information because of the unique research reported, and because of the comprehensive literature review on the research topic typically included in a dissertation. Currently, there are about fifty to seventy-five dissertations produced each year that can be classified as MIS research. However, dissemination of these MIS dissertations is limited. As a result, most MIS dissertation research is not readily available to the academic and practitioner communities. This article explains how to access this resource and identifies MIS-related dissertations published during the 1973-1980 time period.

Searching for MIS Doctoral Dissertations

The search process for locating dissertations on a topic of interest may employ a manual search procedure with library reference materials, a computer search, or a combination of both.

Locating MIS dissertations using library reference materials

There are two reference sources for a manual in-library search. The references are available in most large libraries.

- 1. Comprehensive Dissertation Index (CDI) is an annual index of almost all American and some European dissertations [1]. There are separate index groupings for major subject areas (e.g., engineering, mathematics and science, business and economics). The CDI includes an author index plus a keyword-in-title index in which all dissertations having a keyword in the title are listed under that keyword. For instance, a dissertation entitled "Management Information Systems" will appear in the keyword-in-title index under "management," "information," and "systems."*
- 2. Dissertation Abstracts International (DAI) is a monthly publication of*

abstracts of dissertations submitted to University Microfilms International [2]. There is also a keyword-in-title index for the month. Most abstracts are published within three to nine months after the dissertation is completed.

In a manual search, the *CDI* is searched using a set of keywords expected to appear in the titles. Dissertations having titles that appear relevant are selected for further investigation. This is done by looking up in *DAI* the abstract of each dissertation selected for investigation. The abstracts are usually about 500 to 1,000 words, and provide a short description of the research topic, research methodology, and research findings. A dissertation that appears to be of interest may be obtained most easily by ordering either a microform (microfilm or microfiche) or a hard copy from University Microfilms.

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Locating MIS dissertations using computer search services

The listings of dissertation titles in the *Comprehensive Dissertation Index* may be searched using DATRIX II, a computer-based search device. DATRIX II is available through University Microfilms International and some commercial retrieval services. Keywords

expected to appear in titles are specified along with AND and OR combinations of the words. The DATRIX II service provides a list of dissertations having the keyword(s) in the title. One caveat is not to search for simple generic words such as "system" or "systems." The search keys should generally include a more specific term along with a generic word. For example, "information" and "system" might be specified. The cost of a DATRIX II search in 1980 is \$15.00 for up to 150 titles and \$.10 per title thereafter.

Locating MIS dissertations using a mixed search strategy

Our experience suggests that a manual search of *CDI*, though slower, will discover more relevant titles than the DATRIX II computerized keyword-in-title search. This is because the investigator defines additional keywords as the manual search proceeds. Variations of keywords not specified in advance also emerge in a manual search. For example, dissertations concerned with "computers" may employ "computerized," "computer based," "computer-based," or "computer system" in the title. Since *CDI* lists keywords in alphabetical order, variations of keywords are easily examined in a manual search. By way of contrast, all keywords must be specified in advance for DATRIX II.

A useful strategy is to use the DATRIX II computer search as an initial search procedure. Then, if a more complete search is desired, the computer search is supplemented by a manual search using the keyword-in-title *CDI* index.

A Search to Obtain MIS Dissertations

A search was undertaken to locate and analyze MIS related doctoral dissertations written in the United States and Canada between 1973 and 1980. The 430 dissertations identified by the search procedure are listed in the Appendix.

Criteria for inclusion of a dissertation as MIS-related research

A dissertation was considered to be MIS-related research if it was a systematic investigation of the

development, operation, use, and/or impact of an information system in an organizational environment. This definition excludes dissertations that deal primarily with technology *per se* rather than in the organizational context of MIS. Examples of areas excluded are computational algorithms, physical data structures, and systems software.

The search procedure

Two researchers independently reviewed the *CDI* keyword-in-title index for the 1973 to December 1980 time period. The keywords employed in the search were "computer," "data," "decision," "information," "management" and their variations. The *CDI* keyword-in-title index was manually searched under major categories or topic areas considered relevant to MIS (*i.e.*, engineering, mathematics and science, library and information sciences, mass communications, psychology, and business and economics). Areas not considered particularly relevant to MIS were omitted (*e.g.*, chemistry, philosophy, and religion).

The reviewers examined the dissertation titles appearing under the keywords and rated the degree to which they constituted research in the MIS discipline. A four point rating scale was used: "3" meant the reviewer considered the dissertation as definitely within the MIS discipline, "2" meant probably, "1" meant possibly, and "0" meant the reviewer considered the dissertation not to be within the MIS discipline. Dissertation quality was not considered in these ratings.

The two rating scores were merged and the abstracts of dissertations receiving a single score of three, or a total score of four to six, were retrieved from *DAI* and examined further. Dissertations receiving a total score of two or three were re-examined based on information in the abstract and in some cases were included. Otherwise, dissertations with a total score of three or less were dropped from the pool of MIS dissertations.

Evaluating the Search Procedure

There are three issues in testing and measuring the extent to which the search procedure correctly and completely identified the subset of MIS dissertations from the set of all dissertations. These issues and the results of the test procedures are summarized below and in Figure 1.

Comparison with keywords suggested by MIS experts

A survey was sent to thirty-one MIS faculty members drawn from twenty-five universities in the United States and Canada. These "MIS experts" were asked to provide keywords that they would use in conducting a search of this type. Table 1 contains the roots of keywords most frequently mentioned by the twenty-two (71 percent) who responded. Five of the six keywords appearing most frequently in the experts' list were those employed in the search procedure. Only the word "system" was frequently mentioned by the experts but not included in the search procedure.

Issue	Test Procedure
1. Are keywords used in the search the most appropriate?	A comparison with keywords suggested by MIS faculty experts.
2. Do keywords used in the search fail to identify a significant number of MIS dissertations?	The extent to which a sample of MIS dissertations suggested by MIS faculty experts would have been identified by the keywords used in the search.
3. Do the criteria used in the study correspond to MIS faculty criteria for MIS dissertations?	The extent to which a sample of MIS dissertations suggested by MIS faculty experts were included in the set selected by the procedures of this research and classified as MIS using the criteria of this study.

Figure 1. Issues in Evaluating the Search Procedure

Table 1. Keywords Suggested by MIS Experts

Rank	Keywords	Number of Experts Suggesting Keyword
1	Information *	18
2	Decision *	17
3	System	17
4	Manage *	15
5	Data *	14
6	Computer *	13
7	Design	10
8	Analysis	8
9	Support	7
10	Application	5

*Five keywords employed in the search procedure

However, the experts typically suggested "system" as a second word, e.g., information system. This was subsequently verified in the dissertation titles suggested by the experts as MIS-related. For those titles, the word "system" always appeared with one or more of the keywords used in the search procedure.

Keywords in dissertations suggested by MIS experts

The experts were also asked to provide the authors and titles for several MIS-related dissertations. They were encouraged to identify works that had not received widespread attention in the MIS literature. Fifty-three dissertations were suggested by the experts, and the titles were examined to determine if the five keywords used in the search procedure would have identified the suggested dissertations. Table 2 summarizes the results. Of the fifty-three dissertations, forty-six (87 percent) would have been identified by the five keywords used in the search procedure. The seven dissertations that would not have been identified did not contain any of the ten keywords

most frequently suggested by the MIS experts. Furthermore, five of the seven dissertations not identified would not have been classified as MIS research by the authors of this study.

Inclusion of dissertations suggested by MIS experts

The final validation step also used the dissertations suggested by MIS experts. Twenty-nine were from the 1973 to 1979 time period.¹ The set of dissertations identified by the search procedure for 1973-1979 was compared to the set of MIS dissertations for 1973-1979 suggested by the experts. The results, summarized in Table 3, indicate 23 (79 percent) of the twenty-nine dissertations suggested by MIS experts were *identified* by the search procedure. Applying the search criteria for classification of MIS dissertations, twenty-one (72 percent) of the twenty-nine suggested by the MIS experts were *classified* as MIS dissertations.

¹Identification of the MIS-related dissertations from the 1980 period was made after the validation steps were taken. Hence, only the 1973 to 1979 time period is included.

Table 2. Analysis of Keyword Performance in Identifying Fifty-three MIS-Related Dissertations Suggested by Experts

Analysis	Number of Dissertations	Percent
Dissertations identified by the five key-words used in the search procedure	46	87
Dissertations not identified by the five keywords (nor by any of the ten keywords most frequently suggested by the MIS experts)	7	13

Table 3. Analysis of Search Procedure Performance in Identifying and Classifying Twenty-nine MIS Dissertations Suggested by MIS experts

	Classified by the search procedure as:		Total
	MIS	Not MIS	
Identified by search procedure	18	5	23 (79%)
Not identified by search procedure	3	3	6 (21%)
Total	21 (72%)	8 (28%)	29*

*Only twenty-nine of the fifty-three dissertations suggested by MIS experts were in the 1973-1979 time period. Identification of the MIS-related dissertations from the 1980 period was made after the validation steps were taken.

The overall results of the tests are supportive of the research procedures and criteria used in developing the list of MIS dissertations. However, they demonstrate that there are MIS dissertations which will not be identified by the keyword search. In addition, the tests show that there are dissertations considered by some to be MIS which are not included in the classification of MIS dissertations used here.

Characteristics of MIS Dissertations Located by the Search Procedure

The frequency count of keywords appearing in the 430 MIS-related dissertation titles for 1973 to 1980 reflects those used in the original

keyword search. The eight most frequently appearing keywords, and the percentage of the 430 MIS dissertations with the keyword appearing in the title, are shown in Table 4. These counts include other words with the same root as the keyword shown. For example, the count given for the word "manage" also includes instances of the words "manager," "management," and so forth.

Based on the information in each dissertation abstract, the empirical research methodologies employed are characterized in Table 5. The classification utilizes Van Horn's taxonomy of MIS research methods [3]. Studies of a non-empirical nature, characterized by a conceptual or non-data research strategy, are included as a separate category. Overall, MIS doctoral research primarily consisted of field studies (30.9 percent) and non-empirical studies (33.0 percent).

Table 4. Frequency of Keywords Appearing in MIS-Related Dissertation Titles for the 1973-1980 Time Period

Rank	Keyword	Frequency Count	Percent of Titles*
1	System	275	64%
2	Information	231	54%
3	Computer	150	35%
4	Manage	136	32%
5	Data	79	18%
6	Design	78	18%
7	Decision	71	17%
8	Analysis	61	14%

*Multiple occurrences of the same keyword in a title are only counted once.

Table 5. Research Methodologies Employed in MIS-Related Dissertations

Research Methodology	1973-1979	
	Count	Percent
Empirical research	62	14.4%
Case study	9	2.1%
Field test	133	30.9%
Field study	54	12.6%
Laboratory study	142	33.0%
Non-empirical research	30	7.0%
Unknown methodology		
Total	430	100%

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