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129 Transparency in the Application of Theoretical Frameworks to the Advancement of Knowledge in Selected Library and Information Science Journals: A Systematic Review¹

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Transparency in the Application of Theoretical Frameworks to the Advancement of Knowledge in Selected Library and Information Science Journals: A Systematic Review1

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Abstract

The purpose of this systematic review was to determine the extent of theoretical transparency in library and information science (LIS) scholarship. Many studies have looked at theorizing and the use of theory in LIS. Unlike previous studies this research provides insights into transparency in the use of theoretical frameworks in the LIS field. Transparency is essential because different researchers employ the terms theory, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework in various ways. The transparent use of theory and the resultant theoretical framework enables other researchers to assess whether the theory is appropriate, consistent, and coherent with the empirical evidence. This systematic search followed Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines for reporting on systematic reviews supported by ADIMA®. A total number of 138 out of 2029 articles from 12 LIS-focused journals were analysed in March 2023. Most of the articles (88.6%) specified the framework they used. There was a high level of transparency in relation to the suitability of the theory to address the research problem. The degree of openness about the aim to utilise a theoretical or conceptual framework was moderate to high. The articles had a low or minimal level of transparency when it came to justifying why a certain theory was chosen for the study. Theory dropping was not apparent in the articles. The results from the articles demonstrate that LIS scholars appreciate that a theoretical framework or conceptual framework must be used in research. To ensure that readers understand the rationale behind the theories chosen for a study, it is necessary to be open about the reasons behind the selection of a particular theory. The explanation of how the theory contributed to explaining the phenomenon of interest is also essential. This article might help scholars get beyond theoretical obstacles related to the transparent use of a theoretical framework and produce theoretically sound research. It also

opens discourse on “best practice” in the use of analytical tools for research in the advancement of knowledge

Keywords:

Theoretical Frameworks; Conceptual Frameworks; Theoretical Lens; Analytical Framework; Transparency and Theory; Core LIS Journals