Academic Research in Kenya: Credible Sources of Research Literature

Details
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Aruya rushed home excited to tell his wife the good news. Last month he responded to a request for proposal from a leading health NGO in Kenya to conduct research on effective management techniques in healthcare institutions across East Africa. Following a month of waiting with no feedback, he received a phone call from the Country Director informing him that he won the bid process and should start on the research the following month.

Aruya and his wife elatedly celebrated with dinner at Kempinski. He then proceeded with planning out, reading literature, conducting surveys and observations, and writing up his research report to the NGO. Along with the final report, Aruya attached the ever important final consulting invoice. Thrilled at the prospect of the seemingly impending payment, he started dreaming and planning how he would spend the money on a new plot in Kigengela.

Upon two weeks after submitting the invoice, Aruya received an email from the health NGO informing him that it rejected his research report on the basis of “lack of research rigour” and “insufficient supporting literature”. He felt ill following the news and ashamed to face his wife and inform her of their new misfortune.

Aruya’s problem lay in his sources for his literature review. In his haste to commence the research report, he looked for sources of previous studies on generic search engines, like Google, and in masters’ theses at Nairobi-based universities.

What Aruya’s literature review on previous research studies conducted should have uncovered the role of an employee’s feelings of perceived organisation support for their work and the relation to the employee’s own performance. Simply put, if an employee feels that the organisation supports them, then they perform better. However, Aruya’s literature review did not discover this theme, so he did not notice it in hospitals and health clinics in East Africa.

So the big elephant of Aruya’s error: where should a researcher obtain his or her literature? Continuing Business Talk’s multi-week series on proper research techniques, let us pour over ways Aruya could improve for next time he conducts research.

First, notice his poor choice for haphazardly finding literature. By searching randomly on Google, he paid inadequate attention to where a study originates. The key to remember when considering the source of research literature: peer review. When an article undergoes peer review, other top minds in very specific fields investigate, pull apart, test, and compare the research against existing literature and prospective logic.

Any source of research literature that fails to go through a peer review lacks credibility and should not serve as a source and never quoted.

Some common misconceptions yield poor sources. So, do not utilize the following possible options as source literature. Never quote a textbook in a literature review. A researcher may only utilise a textbook as a source in the research methodology section. Text books are not meant as up-to-date sources. Text books delineate broad theories to learn big concepts, not the granular recent research as it evolves. Text books also do not undergo rigorous peer review. Textbooks instead receive readability editing from a publisher but little attention to rigour.

Also, only in rare circumstances quote an actual doctoral thesis, but basically never quote a masters thesis. Masters theses undergo very limited peer review and are not authored by trained researchers who are experts in their fields. Aruya’s mistake in quoting masters theses made his own research look laughable, lack depth, and devoid of credibility.

Additionally, never quote newspaper articles as sources of literature knowledge. Newspapers rightly summarise trending ideas and current events, but by nature do not show deep research with deep quantitative and qualitative backup. Generally, do not quote from books either. Books become outdated quickly. Only quote from a book if it represents a seminal work in that theory and underwent peer review.

Given all the incorrect sources, the main source of research literature must originate from academic journals. Credible journals undergo rigorous peer review and only publish the absolute best research in every subject. Unfortunately, the world holds thousands of non-credible journals that possess either no peer review or lackluster peer review from non-experts. In order to know the most credible sources, various associations and leading universities formulate rankings of journals. Such organisations include the Association of Business Schools, Financial Times Survey, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, University of Queensland (http://www. uq.edu.au/), among others. Thankfully, Professor Anne-Wil Harzing (http://www.harzing.com/resume.htm) maintains a regularly updated listing (http://www.harzing.com/jql.htm) of all the main journals and the accompanying ranking by multiple sources. Harzing’s list is a must read for researchers and may be found on this link (http://www.harzing.com/jql.htm). Excellent journals include the Academy of Management Journal (file:///C:/Users/dmuchai/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/Temporary%20Internet%20Files/Content.Outlook/MJKA3PH9/aom.org/AMJ)}
A side source may include conference proceedings from credible universities and associations. However, conference proceedings usually represent work-in-progress research, so only quote them if you see a gap in journal articles on a topic.

Once realizing the proper sources, a comprehensive literature review that shows the core theory, like Aruya’s missed perceived organization support, and how it was formulated from previous research studies. Then, delve into how others tested the theory in various environments and industries. Next, show how the core theory continues to evolve, modify, and extend with additional intermediate causes, like moderating or mediating effects. Finally, delineate the different effects from the causes, also called different dependent variables in the existing research in addition to the original independent and dependent variables in the core study.

Submit your research successes, challenges, and ideas as we continue Business Talk’s research series with other Business Daily readers through #KenyaResearch on Twitter.

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