Literature review in business and management research: Focusing on systematic review and database usage

Kida Sekai

1. Introduction

This paper examines what constitutes a good literature review in the field of business and management, and what methods and tools can be used to achieve it. In this paper, I pay particular attention to systematic review [SR]. I will also focus on the use of literature databases as an indispensable tool for conducting literature review in modern times. SR is recommended to be carried out before a major new research project or writing a dissertation (Kraus et al., 2020).

In this paper, section 2 describes what is considered a good literature review. In section 3, I will briefly discuss the meaning and method of SR, which has become popular in recent years. Then, in section 4, I will explain the current state of the use of literature databases in SR, and the advantages and problems brought about by the use of typical databases. Then, in section 5, I briefly mention examples of SR in domestic business and economics research, including economics, accounting, and entrepreneurship research.

This paper is translated to English from Kida (2024) with some modifications so that international students can read this paper to conduct review for their master or Ph.D. thesis.

2. What is a good literature review?

A literature review is "a study that analyses and synthesizes an existing

body of literature by identifying, challenging, and advancing the building blocks of a theory through an examination of a body (or several bodies) of prior work." (Post et al., 2020, p.352).

The functions of a literature review include (1) summary, (2) synthesis, (3) criticism, and (4) presentation of direction, and in some cases, it may also have the function of creating a new research area. When considering a good litera-ture review, there are two issues to consider: (ⅰ) The degree to which it broadly covers the research that has been accumulated in the field, and (ⅱ) The degree to which the review provides original value. A good review is considered to be one that covers an appropriate amount of breadth, provides original value through synthesis, criticism, and presentation of direction, and provides meaning.

If both (ⅰ) and (ⅱ) are small, obviously it will be a bad review. If only (ⅰ) is small, it will be a self-righteous review; if only (ⅱ) is small, it will be a research note-like review; and if the coverage area of (ⅰ) is too broad, it will be a review with too much information (Hattori, 2020; Tanaka and Ichikawa, 2011).

Regarding the scope of existing research to be covered in a review, there are four methods listed below, and the method chosen will depend on the ac-cumulation of prior research in the field and the existence of existing literature reviews. (Cooper, 1988; Hattori, 2022).

(1) Comprehensive review that covers the entire area
(2) While exploring literatures in the entire field, reviewer introduce a few selected from among them.
(3) Picking up typical or representative things from research related to each topic
(4) Limited to those that are relatively important and central in the field concerned.

In this way, there are a variety of options regarding the range of literature selection. Although the method of reviewing only important literature is con-

sidered useful for deeply examining individual literature and grasping the essence of the debate in the field, in recent years, comprehensive and systematic literature review is common in the management field (Hiebl, 2023). Then, I will briefly introduce the concept of systematic review in the next section.

3. Origin and procedure of systematic review

3.1. Origin of systematic review

Below, I will provide an overview of systematic review (SR), mainly based on Makishi (2017). SR can be said to be a methodology that has become popular in medical research in conjunction with the concept of Evidence Based Medicine (EBM). Sackett (1996, p.71) defines EBM as "Evidence based medicine is the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients. The practice of evidence based medicine means integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research." In determining the best solution/treatment, predictions based on probability theory regarding risk and effectiveness are required. It is necessary to know the denominator (total patients) and the numerator (the number of patients in which a certain event [e.g. disease onset, cure] occurred). Evidence provides information on such probabilities, and evidence includes case reports, cohort studies, randomized controlled trials, double-blind randomized controlled trials, SR and meta-analysis, in ascending order of strength. SR is positioned as the strongest evidence. According to the Cochran Library's homepage, SR or Cochane review in medical research is defined as the following. "A Cochrane Review is a systematic review that attempts to identify, appraise and synthesize all the empirical evidence that meets pre-specified eligibility criteria to answer a specific research question. Researchers conducting systematic re-

views use explicit, systematic methods that are selected with a view aimed at minimizing bias, to produce more reliable findings to inform decision-making."

3.2. Systematic review procedures

Here, I will provide an overview of the SR procedure, mainly referring to Kraus et al. (2020), which discusses SR methods in entrepreneurship research. Kraus et al. (2020, p.1033) lists the following four steps as SR steps.

⑴ Review plan
　① Consideration of necessity
　② Creating a protocol
⑵ Discovery and evaluation of previous research
⑶ Data extraction and integration
　① Data extraction
　② Data integration
⑷ Publication and dissemination of findings from the review

⑴　Review plan

Kraus et al. (2020) state that the first thing to do is to consider whether SR is necessary. Unlike a normal short review in empirical research papers, an SR is generally published as an independent paper, and is sometimes written at the beginning of a large research project. It is also recommended to conduct SR before writing the dissertation. The necessity is thought to be related to the degree of accumulation of prior research and the existence of other existing or ongoing reviews (protocols registered in PROSPERO, etc.).

Once researchers have decided to conduct a review, create a protocol that guides the review process. The protocol includes the combination of specific keywords and the databases to be used, criteria for determining the inclusion/exclusion of documents, and qualitative criteria (Pittaway et al., 2014). Kraus

et al. (2020) note that this protocol is not immutable and may be modified as the review progresses, but the modifications must be described and reflected in the protocol.

⑵　Discovery and evaluation of previous research

At this stage, researchers must decide the range of documents to search and which of the hit documents should or should not be included in the review. Kraus et al. (2020) recommends collecting papers from academic journals without including gray literature in entrepreneurship research. Among academic journals, they recommend a VHB Rating of C or higher. However, these standards are just an example of entrepreneurship research, and the type and level of literature that should be included will vary depending on the field and purpose of research.

Kraus et al. (2020) recommend checking the literature titles and narrowing down the literature to include in the review based on pre-developed qualitative content criteria and research questions. If researchers have not narrowed down your search enough and there are too many to integrate, they recommend that researchers read the abstracts as a secondary narrowing down to further narrow down the search. (In addition, it is common to record the number of documents at each stage of narrowing down and indicate these numbers in the review paper.)

⑶　Data extraction and integration

When researchers think of data extraction, researchers may think of quantitative information such as numbers, but Kraus et al. (2020) does not necessarily limit data to quantitative information. Rather, data means both quantitative and qualitative information. Here, in order to avoid the influence of bias in SR authors (for example, ignoring written content that does not match their ideas),authors may use a format (tables) for describing information. Authors must decide

what kind of information they extract in advance. Newbert (2007) provides examples of tables. It also recommends that two or more people work together to avoid bias.

Regarding data synthesis, Kraus et al. (2020) state that review should not be mere summaries, but should compare and analyze previous studies. He also states that the method of organizing by focusing on authors tends to result in mere summaries, so analysis should focus on concepts. As for this process, Kraus et al. (2020) only cite examples such as Newbert (2007), as the specific methods vary depending on the purpose of the review, and do not discuss them in detail. Hattori (2020)'s explanation of integration and criticism in the functions of review articles may be helpful. Here, four methods of integration are listed: presenting a research agenda, presenting a classification, presenting an alternative model or conceptual framework, and presenting a meta-theory, which is a theory about theories. In addition, the following nine points are listed as methods of criticism (Hattori, 2020, p.213).

⑴ Conflicts and disagreements in the discussion

⑵ Collective ignorance

⑶ History of origins and development of concepts and theories

⑷ Basic assumptions of the research

⑸ Problems with the method used

⑹ Problems related to the research sample or objects

⑺ Discrepancy with the empirical world

⑻ Conceptual ambiguity and need for redefinition

⑼ Reexamination of boundary conditions to which theories and concepts apply

⑷ **Presentation and dissemination of findings from the review**

Kraus et al. (2020) state that SR is located at the top layer of the evidence

pyramid, integrates a large number of empirical studies, and has more generality than individual empirical studies. For this reason, they recommend writing and publishing in a format that can be understood not only by researchers in a specific field but also by the general public, such as managers and entrepreneurs.

The above is the SR procedure based on Kraus et al. (2020). I would like to add some additional information on the differences between SR in medical research and business and management research. In medical research, SR is often performed in conjunction with meta-analysis, but in business and management research, SR does not necessarily include meta-analysis. In management research, qualitative research such as case studies often plays an important role. In addition, for example, the effects of pharmaceuticals may be considered to be easy to establish as universal laws to some extent, but in business and management research, contexts such as the era, culture, and industry have a large influence, and universal theories that hold true over a wide range of fields are unrealistic. In management research, it seems that there is a tendency for a middle-range theory to be sought rather than an exploration of universal theory. This point should be taken into account when deciding how widely to collect and synthesize the literature when conducting an SR in management field.

4. Systematic review and database use in business and management research

4.1. Current status of systematic review in business and management research

Hiebl (2023) analyzed 232 SR papers published in the Academy of Management Annals and the International Journal of Management Reviews and discussed sample selection in SR in management research. Here, three characteristics are listed as required for SR: structured, comprehensive, and transparent.

Structured means that each step of the review is explained and not arbitrary, and that the research questions and keywords and search terms used are clear. Comprehensive refers to the extent to which all relevant literature is covered that is relevant to the reviewer's pre-posed research question and meets the criteria for inclusion in the review. Transparent means clarifying the steps the reviewer took to collect and select documents to arrive at the final review sample (literatures), and what the final review sample contains. It shows the degree to which other researchers can replicate the literature collection and selection process.

Hiebl (2023) lists SR methods as follows: 1. journal-driven, 2. database-driven, 3. seminal-work-approach, and 4. a combination approach. 1: SR is conducted focusing on papers published in one or more specific journals; 2: SR is conducted on papers searched in one or more specific databases. 3 is a method that focuses on one or more highly influential documents and conducts SR on documents that directly/indirectly cite them, and 4 is a combination of the above methods. Hiebl (2023) found that the majority of reviewed SRs used database-driven approaches, followed by journal-driven, then combined approaches. Seminal work approach is used in few studies. Thus, database-driven approaches are most commonly used in SR. Hiebl (2023) points out that the advantage of the database-driven approach is that it can cover a wider variety of documents (higher comprehensiveness) compared to other methods such as journal-driven approaches.

In database-driven SR, the most used database is EBSCO (57%), followed by Web of Science (47%), ABI Inform/ProQuest (44%), Google and Google Scholar (21%), PsycINFO/PsycLIT (16%), JSTOR (12%), and Scopus (11%). These databases are basically multipublisher databases [including journals from various publishers (including literatures by other than the database provider itself)]. Publisher-specific databases [databases that list only the journals of a specific publisher (in-house)] are rarely used. Examples of publisher-specific databases

are ScienceDirect (Elsevier), Emerald, Wiley, SAGE, Taylor & Francis. SRs using any publisher-specific databases accounted for only 25% of the total. The average value of the number of databases used in each SR is 3.03, and the median value is 3.00. It is standard to use about three databases in one SR.

Hiebl (2023) points out that it is not enough to use three databases of any kind. Even if researchers use multiple publisher-specific databases, they will be able to handle a narrower range of literature than if they use multipublisher databases. It is pointed out that the comprehensiveness is not sufficient. It has been pointed out that the advantage of using publisher-specific databases is that they include in-press and latest papers before they are published in the multipublisher database, and that publisher-specific databases are only a supplementary position in SR. It has also been pointed out that Google and Google Scholar have complementary positions, and by using Google and Google Scholar, gray literature (working papers, reports, etc.) that is not often published in the multipublisher database can be used. In this way, Hiebl (2023) recommends using Google, Google Scholar, and publisher-specific databases supplementarily if necessary, and conducting SR using as many multipublisher databases as possible.

In addition, Hiebl (2023) describes the use of Business Source Premier at EBSCO and the designation of categories such as "management" and "business" on Web of Science as effective and efficient SR methods in management research. Limiting search to literature in the field of business and management enable us to avoid too many hits in the search results, allowing SR to be carried out with a realistic amount of effort.

4.2. Characteristics of each database

In the previous section, I have confirmed that database-driven approaches are the most used when performing SR. Especially, multipublisher databases provided by academic publishers such as EBSCO are often used in SR. Google

Scholar is complementary. Here, I am going to check what characteristics these databases have.

Google Scholar is a academic literature (including gray literatures) search service released in 2004, and today it is used for many researchers. By applying the crawling technology used by Google (program searches the web and collects information), it is possible to access a variety of documents, including those published in academic institution repositories. Google Scholar basically determines the order of search results based on relevance and number of citations (Kataoka, 2006). The advantages of Google Scholar are easiness to access a wide variety of literature, and simple user interface.

The first disadvantage of Google Scholar is that users can only access the text of open access documents from google scholar. (However, if appropriate settings are made by the university library or the user, it is possible to access literature subscribed by the university directly from Google Scholar search results within the university network.) If we were to perform SR using only Google Scholar, we would have to purchase almost all articles individually, depending on the university's subscription status. In that case, SR, which may handle hundreds of documents, will incur a large amount of costs (if a researcher purchase 100 papers with a pay per view unit price of 5,000 yen, the researcher will incur a cost of 500,000 yen). In addition, even if the researcher borrow documents or attain copies through ILL (Inter-Library Lending), the cost of shipping and copying fees and the hassle of administrative processing for handling a huge amount of documents cannot be ignored. ILL is offered basically by paper media. The researcher cannot utilize the benefits of digitization in terms of using text searches and storing documents.

Second, because documents are collected mechanically, the quality of the included documents cannot be guaranteed. This can be said to be the flip side of the benefit of having access to a wide variety of literature. Since most of the

documents are published in repositories of academic institutions, it is designed to display more academic documents than Google search results. However, it is possible that predatory journals and documents with low reliability are included. In an experiment, a researcher uploaded a fake paper on the university's website that cited all of the author's past papers, and succeeded in getting it listed on Google Scholar. This result show that it is possible to manipulate citation indicators (Delgado et al. 2014). Since the addition (deletion) of documents is done mechanically, there is no official information on the total number of papers included. The search result may vary greatly depending on the time of the search. This can be problematic from a transparency perspective in conducting SR.

Thirdly, search and sorting functions are limited. Regarding searches, operators such as AND and OR can be used. However, it is not possible to limit search to abstracts. Only full-text and title searches can be performed. There are problems with full-text searches, such as a large number of papers unrelated to the research question being displayed. It is almost impossible to conduct a SR that comprehensively covers all the papers shown in the search result. On the other hand, the problem with title searches is that there are too few hits. Additionally, Google Scholar does not allow users to specify the sorting order; instead, it displays in an order determined by an algorithm based on relevance, number of citations, and search history. In a reproducibility test of search results by Gusenbauer & Haddaway (2020), which verified the usefulness of 26 types of databases in SR, Google Scholar search results showed that search results are not reproducible. This is a serious problem in SR, which emphasizes transparency. Google Scholar is a convenient tool which can be used for free. However, researchers should be aware of its shortcomings.

Next, I would like to explain the EBSCO database, which is thought to be the most frequently used multipublisher database in business and manage-

ment research. EBSCO Business Source is a business and economics literature database provided by EBSCO Information Service. There are four versions: Ultimate, Complete, Premier, and Elite, in descending order of the number of documents included. According to the company's website, as of December 2, 2023, EBSCO Business Source Ultimate provides full text information for 3,461 journals, Complete for 1,727 journals, Premier for 969 journals, and Elite for 495 journals. Each time the version is lowered, the number of recorded papers is reduced to about half. Every version also includes 1,722 open access journals selected by the company. A complete list of journals included in EBSCO Business Source is available on the company's website. It can be said that EBSCO Business Source increases the feasibility of SR by providing the full text of many academic journals. However, in the lowest version (Elite), number of full text available journals is limited to about 1/7th of Ultimate. On the other hand, Google Scholar allows users to search for Japanese documents, but EBSCO Business Source basically does not include Japanese documents.

Regarding the quality of the content, the company's website states, "Predatory open access journals exist. That's why before including any open access journal in our databases, EBSCO references top citation indexes, such as Web of Science and Scopus, and subject indexes, such as APA PsycInfo and SciFinder, to determine relevance and quality. Our subject matter experts regularly monitor predatory publisher lists and industry information to ensure omission." Considering the possibility that academic journals become predatory journals after the decision to include them is taken into account, it cannot be said with absolute certainty that EBSCO Business Source will not include predatory journals. However, It may be considered that the possibility of containing problematic literature is lower than Google Scholar which collect literatures automatically.

Researchers can use various search function in EBSCO Business Source such

as the title, abstract, keywords added by the author, type of publication, names of companies/organizations mentioned in the paper and names of products mentioned in the paper. It is possible to conduct a detailed search using 26 search fields such as countries, making it easy to conduct searches with less omissions and noise and adjust the number of hits according to the intentions of researchers. In addition, there is also a search function using a thesaurus (group of related words), which displays words and phrases related to the entered word in a list format, and helps users search without missing anything by searching for all selected words at the same time. Therefore, EBSCO Business Source provides various support for researchers trying to conduct SR.

5. Examples of SR in Japan

Here, in order to show trends in SR in Japan, I will introduce examples of SR in Japan in the field of business, management and economics fields.

In the field of economics, Nakamura and Suzuki (2019) conducted SR in the field of development economics. Here, they conducted SR on experimental papers in the four major journals (overseas journals) in the field of development economics. In the review, information such as experimental methods and topics are extracted, and an answer to the question of whether empirical developmental micro-economics resolves the issues raised in experimental papers is sought. In addition, the period for collecting literature covers the period from 2010, when the discussion of the "reliability revolution" that the authors were interested in began, to just before the publication of the paper in question.

In the field of accounting, Makino (2020) is conducting an SR on management accounting research for small and medium-sized enterprises in Japan. CiNii is used here to comprehensively search domestic research. In addition, the methodology clearly states the search procedure as follows.

… Use keywords related to "*small and medium-sized enterprises*" *and* "*management accounting*" *comprehensively. The first keyword, which means* "*small and medium-sized enterprises,*" *is a logical search operation that combines the terms* "*small business,*" "*small enterprise,*" "*small and medium-sized enterprise,*" "*medium-sized enterprise,*" *or* "*startup.*" *The second keyword, which means* "*management accounting,*" *is a combination of the following key words;* "*management accounting,*" "*management control,*" "*budget,*" "*performance measurement,*" "*performance management,*" "*performance evaluation,*" *and* "*cost accounting,*" "*cost management,*" "*activity-based cost management,*" *or* "*activity-based costing.*" *Then, a search was conducted using the logical operation of an AND search for terms related to* "*small and medium-sized enterprises*" *and terms related to* "*management accounting.*" *Through this procedure, I obtained all papers available through CiNii online search until May 31, 2018 (Makino, 2020 p.77).*

Detailed explanations of such search procedures are considered important to improve reproducibility in SR. Since CiNii allows for free word searches and title searches, it would be desirable to state which one was used.

In entrepreneurship research, Seki (2021) used Web of Science to conduct SR on overseas research related to the entrepreneurial activity process. Here, in addition to the documents found on Web of Science (academic papers, book chapters), he manually added some important documents based on the number of citations. Then, using HistCite, the trends in the number of research articles by year and the journals were analyzed. Then, nine theme clusters (research topics) were created based on the citation relationships (citation mapping) between documents.

In the field of commerce and management, recent research includes Karasawa (2023) on service ecosystems, Kim (2020) on sustainability management control systems, and Onishi (2017) on the concept of philanthropy. EBSCO Business Source Premier is used in both cases. However, Science Direct (ELSE-

VIER) is used in Kim (2020), and ABI/INFORM and JSTOR are used together in Onishi (2017). Additionally, Karasawa (2023) uses KH Coder for text analysis.

Based on the above, CiNii is considered to be a powerful database when looking at domestic literature regarding management and economics SR published in Japan. When analyzing foreign literature, EBSCO and Web of Science tend to be used as the main databases. EBSCO Business Source Premier in particular is often used, as is the case with SR conducted by overseas researchers.

6. Conclusion

This paper first demonstrated that the requirements for a good literature review are to cover a wide range of research that has been accumulated in the relevant area and to provide original value and perspectives. Furthermore, in medical research, SR was proposed as a method for determining what variations in results exist and which claims are dominant overall in the entire study while eliminating investigator bias. Afterwards, I discussed SR procedures in business and management research, the current state of database use in SR, and the characteristics of typical databases. It is common to use multi-publisher databases in SR, and Google Scholar has poor search functions and limited full-text access, as well as uncertain quality of included documents and low reproducibility of search results. Because of the problems, it is difficult to use Google Scholar as the main database for SR. Recent argument indicates that multipublisher databases such as EBSCO Business Source should be used. Additionally, it was shown that publisher-specific databases such as ScienceDirect (Elsevier), Emerald, and Wiley, which only contain in-house journals, are not suitable for use as the main database for SR. After that, I explained the trends in SR in Japan using examples from economics, account-ing, commerce, business administration, and entrepreneurship research, and

explained that EBSCO Business Source Premier is often used and that it seems to be similar to overseas trends.

   In this paper, I could not explain the PRISMA statement, which presents guidelines and checklists for SR, so please refer to Kamioka (2021) on this point. I also assume that why transparency and reproducibility are important in literature review should be considered with reference to the perspective of philosophy of science and research on SR methodology. In addition, a comparison between SR and similar concepts such as s integrative literature review (e.g. Torraco, 2016; Hattori, 2020) remained as an issue.

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