WAKE-UP IN HOW WE CONDUCT RESEARCH:

What Entrepreneurship Journal Editors and Scholars Can Do Right Now!

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The global research community is undergoing a seismic shift. Once seen as the gold standard of rigor and objectivity, scholarly publishing is now confronting a credibility crisis. I recently read the #FrancescaGino scandal at Harvard Business School, where allegations of data manipulation triggered widespread concern about research integrity.

However, this issue extends far beyond a single high-profile case. Across disciplines, particularly in the behavioral and management sciences, evidence is mounting that questionable research practices, such as data dredging, selective reporting, and HARKing (Hypothesizing After Results are Known), have compromised the foundations of published findings. And no field is immune, including Entrepreneurship and MSMEs.

Research Credibility: A Wake-Up Call
A recent article in Personnel Review titled "Transparency, Reproducibility, and Replicability in Human Resource Management Research" by Herman Aguinis, Amando Cope, Ursula Martin, and Ryosuke Yokoya[AH1] and colleagues provides an assessment of the state of research credibility in human resource management (HRM) and other fields.

The article documents multiple retractions stemming from misconduct and highlights deeply rooted issues:

- A researcher in HRM was found to have fabricated significance tests in studies published in the Journal of Management. These articles, which were cited in The Wall Street Journal and Inc., influenced how firms understood workforce productivity and survival.
- Another scholar was implicated in over 37 retractions across multiple journals after investigations uncovered career-long patterns of data fabrication and obstruction.
- Even more ironically, a study in Nature Human Behaviour, which boasted an impressive 86% replication rate, was later retracted due to its lack of transparency and methodological flaws.

What these cases underscore is this: without transparency, no amount of journal impact factor score or institutional prestige can guarantee research trustworthiness and impact. As the article's authors write, "credibility is not a binary variable, it is a matter of degree." And the more we allow lax standards, the more we risk eroding the foundation of knowledge that both scholars and practitioners rely on.

The TTRUST Model: A Framework for Reform
To respond to this crisis, the authors propose the TRRUST model—a conceptual and operational guide for restoring confidence in scholarly work:

- **Transparency** – clear, complete documentation of the research process
- **Replicability** – consistent results across different datasets and methods
- **Reproducibility** – the ability to obtain the same results using the same data
- **Unified Ontology** – shared definitions and conceptual clarity
- **Shared Culture of Science** – editorial & institutional norms that support integrity
- **Trust and Values** – a commitment to rigor, honesty, and scholarly impact

Figure 1. The TRRUST Model: A Framework for Understanding Research Credibility
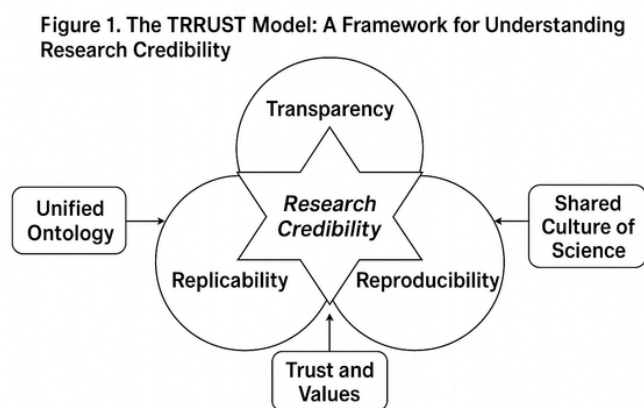
Source: Aguinis, H., Cope, A., Ursula, M., & Yokoya, R., 2025. Transparency, reproducibility, and replicability in human resource management research. Personnel Review. https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-10-2024-0946

Through this model, the authors offer 25 detailed, actionable recommendations, ranging from pre-registration and open data sharing to disclosing AI use and encouraging replication studies. These steps, while modest in effort and cost, can have a profound impact on restoring credibility in research as the authors proposed.

Why This Matters for Entrepreneurship & SME Research

These lessons hit close to home for the entrepreneurship and MSME research community. As Editor-in-Chief of JSBM and Co-Editor of JICSB, I see similar credibility pressures in our field.

Entrepreneurship research often grapples with:

- **Fragmented definitions:** What is a "SME", "startup"? What defines "innovation" or "growth"?
- **Limited replication:** Few studies test theories across regions, cultures, or firm sizes.
- **Opaque methods:** Especially in qualitative work, where transparency is critical but often neglected

At the same time, our research directly informs policy, funding, and development strategies for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) worldwide. This makes our commitment to transparency not just academic, but ethical and practical.

Steps We Are Taking at JSBM and JICSB
At *JSBM* and *JICSB*, we are actively aligning our editorial practices with the principles laid out in the TRRUST model:

Unified Ontologies – We're working to encourage consistent definitions for key terms, such as "MSME," "ecosystem," and "entrepreneurial orientation," particularly across global contexts.

Replication and Boundary Testing – We now encourage constructive replications and cross-cultural studies that test theoretical models in new settings and among underrepresented communities.

AI and Mixed Methods Reporting – We ask authors to disclose any use of AI tools, and we're working to improve guidelines for reporting and verifying qualitative and mixed-methods research.

Global Engagement – Through *JICSB*, we're building a platform where researchers from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East can showcase credible, context-rich entrepreneurship research.

Final Thoughts:
Our Moment to Lead

The credibility crisis is not just a problem for HRM and management; it is a broader issue affecting various fields. It's a systemic challenge that requires leadership across every field. As entrepreneurship scholars, we must hold ourselves to higher standards, not because we're being scrutinized, but because MSMEs around the world depend on us for insight, guidance, and evidence-based solutions.

Research rooted in transparency, reproducibility, and replicability is research that lasts, influences, and uplifts. Let's use this moment to embed a culture of integrity into the future of scholarship.