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Abstract

This research explored the criteria that reviewers use in reviewing empirical manuscripts submitted for publication consideration in tourism, travel and hospitality journals. Forty-three reviewers were asked to state the key areas that they look at when reviewing a manuscript. The Nud.ist programme was used in the analysis of their answers. Eight key areas were identified. Reviewers almost always stated the need for the paper to make a contribution. However, they also frequently mentioned being “innovative or unique”; thus, originality appears to be a significant criterion to many reviewers. Careless writing and presentation appeared to have significant impact on the reviewers’ reaction to a manuscript. It is also evident from the comments that the manuscript that leaves “so what?” question will not be recommended. Among the other critical elements for the acceptance/rejection decision are the use of literature, quality of arguments, appropriateness in relation to the mission and focus of the journal, research methodology and data analysis, and research implications. The authors aiming to publish may benefit from the study by being cognisant of the reviewers’ sensitivities to these aspects.

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Keywords: Review process; Referees; Review criteria; Manuscript rejection

1. Introduction

Publication in a scientific journal is one of the major goals of any scientific study (Day, 1998). No matter how spectacular the results are, the research is not completed until it is written and disseminated by publishing (Becker & Richards, 1986). Authors may have different publication motivations. Among the important reasons are: (a) *Personal sense of achievement*—the sense of achievement coming from seeing your ideas in print and the recognition that others in your professional circle have acknowledged that the work is worthy. (b) *Development of writing and communication skills*—it is invaluable to write in different styles for different audiences. Publication is an opportunity not only to share your research with readers but also to receive comments on your work from experts. New ideas and perspectives emerge during the writing process and also feedback from the review process. (c) Curriculum vitae—publications always complement a CV, and add an external validation for your ideas (Rowley & Slack, 2000). The publication of research in journals certifies new contributions to knowledge, as well as validates the

skills of authors (Miller & Perrucci, 2001). Publication determines promotion, tenure and salary and it will also have an influence on securing grants (McKercher, 2002).

Written dissemination of information is an essential part of science (Waser & Price, 1992). Writing up a publishable paper, however, is not as easy as it sounds. The manuscript has to meet certain criteria to qualify for publication and, therefore, dissemination to a wider audience. Review process is the main mechanism that research journals use to assess the quality of manuscripts (Becker & Richards, 1986; Febb & Durant, 1993; Woodwark, 1992). That the “review process has been used almost universally in relatively unchanged form ever since about 1750 no doubt proves its worth” (Day, 1998, p. 122). There is hardly a paper that has not been improved, often substantially, by the revisions suggested by referees (Brustad, 1999; Street & Bozeman, 1998). Due to journal standards observed to maintain quality, only about 5% to 10% of the papers are accepted as submitted, with reject rates approximating or exceeding 50% (Day, 1998; Woodwark, 1992). Hence, the feeling of frustration, confusion or even bitterness, arising from an unfavourable review outcome is familiar to many authors.

Authors should have some idea of the reasons for the review decisions in order to improve the acceptance rate

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of their manuscripts (Day, 1998). This study therefore aimed to isolate key areas that reviewers look at when reviewing an article. The paper can help authors not to be discouraged by critical reviewers—they are common, and should prompt improvements, not necessarily despair. The remainder of the paper is organised into three sections. Previous studies on the review process and criteria for manuscript acceptance and rejection are reviewed first. It should be noted that there are many aspects of the manuscript review process. Due to space limitations, only a selection of them is included in the present discussion. Data collection method used in this study, along with its limitations is explained next. Finally, the study's results are discussed in the light of previous research findings and recommendations for authors are provided.

2. Manuscript review process

The importance of quality research for the growth and advancement of knowledge in tourism, travel and hospitality is indisputable. Limited knowledge will certainly make it difficult to make informed management decisions. Thus, researchers have a certain responsibility to design and publish useful research that demonstrates what can be done, why it is worthwhile and how it can be applied (Lewis & Pizam, 1986). The method used for identifying high quality knowledge is peer review, an organised process that is essential to maintain the quality and credibility of journals (Miller & Perrucci, 2001). Peer review lies at the centre of science and academic life. Editors rely on their review systems to inform the choices they must make from among the many manuscripts competing for the few places available for published papers (Bordage & Caelleigh, 2001). Peer review aims at making a publication reflective of the peer community, not the editor's individual preferences and scope of knowledge (Peters, 1995). It is normally implemented as follows. The editor receives a paper and makes several preliminary decisions (i.e., the manuscript subject is relevant to the scope and mission of the journal) (Day, 1998). After such preconditions are satisfied, the editor selects two or more reviewers from a preselected reviewer board. The editor may also choose reviewers from non-board members (guest reviewers) (Day, 1998). Using guest reviewers may be a common practice by journals to avoid editorial board member fatigue. These individuals are experts both in the presentation of an academic argument and the subject discussed by the individual article (MCBC, 1994). Reviewers make recommendations about whether the editor should accept, reject or ask for revision. Revision is a common conclusion, provided that an editor makes an initial weeding out decision (Day, 1998; Peters, 1995).

The review process is an anonymous one in that the authors' name will be removed from the paper. Thus, reviewers are neither prejudiced for nor against a particular author. Reciprocally, the reviewers of a paper are not known to the author, although s/he may know the composition of the review board as a whole (Peters, 1995). While anonymity of the review process is one of its cherished bastions, sometimes the same anonymity of comment allows some reviewers to make rather destructive criticism (Peters, 1995). Considering that many manuscripts are submitted by younger and less frequently published authors, the destructive tone of the review may cause distress and it may stifle motivation and future creative efforts (Brustad, 1999). "When it invariably comes back asking for revisions, or worse, advising that the work is not suitable for the journal, without full explanation of where the deficiencies in the paper lie, the young author can be devastated" (McKercher, 2002, p. 858).

Reviewing practices do not appear to vary with regard to empirical and non-empirical reviewing (Beatty, Bandyopadhyay, Chae, & Tarasingh, 1982). However, they may vary on several such other dimensions as thoroughness, guidance and substance suggesting that different reviewers may view their roles and the importance of review criteria in the reviewing process differently (Beatty et al., 1982). Thoroughness reflects the reviewer's knowledge of the subject matter involved; guidance is the degree to which reviewers provide specific written comments about how to improve a manuscript, and substance relates to the specificity of comments and explanations about flaws in a manuscript (Jauch & Wall, 1989). Reviewers in different disciplines may attach different levels of importance to different criteria. In a study across reviewers in four different fields, it was found that sociological political scientists gave the highest ratings to logical rigour of the article (Beyer, 1978). On the other hand, physicists ranked originality first and clarity and conciseness of writing style in a tie for second, while chemists ranked replicability first, and logical rigour the second (Beyer, 1978).

A study on marketers' perceptions of ethical practices in publishing reported that there could be questionable behaviours and unethical practices involved in publishing (Sherrell, Hair, & Griffin, 1989). Three widely-agreed upon unethical practices are (1) by authors, such as reciprocal authorship and multiple submissions of the same or similar manuscripts; (2) by editors, such as displaying favouritism and selecting reviewers to produce a particular desired outcome; and (3) by reviewers, such as stealing the ideas of manuscripts they reject or having graduate students do the reviews (Sherrell et al., 1989). Seaton (1996) notes that the refereeing process is often a hideous mechanism and simple but good ideas rarely get past academic referees in unvarnished form.

“...too often, this [peer review] causes delays in the publication of topical material and—worse—encourages a style of presentation that is turgid, long-winded and in thrall to the literature review...” (Seaton, 1996, p. 397). Some reviewers are argued to be negativists (interested readers are referred to Brustad (1999), Babor and Griffith (1996) and Seaton (1996) for discussions of good and bad reviewing). But, most of them look positively to articles and believe in the principle of “innocent until proven guilty” (Beatty et al., 1982). They usually go out of their way to help an article and take time to read manuscripts carefully and make detailed comments. It should be noted that many reviewers expend substantive time and effort in these reviews, even when the article is ultimately rejected (Beatty et al., 1982). Some reviewers read a manuscript once, put it down and do something else for a while, returning later to the manuscript later for a second or even a third reading before writing their views (Beatty et al., 1982). It is thus important that authors and their manuscripts should benefit from these reviews.

3. Criteria for manuscript acceptance/rejection

Criteria referred to in the review process have been studied almost extensively in marketing, medical, and management journals. Despite its significance and the number of research published annually, there is only a few research papers designed to provide guidelines, particularly for novice authors in the tourism and travel literature. Three characteristics of manuscripts were found to increase their likelihood of acceptance: (1) a strong author reputation, (2) a successful test of the author’s own new theory, and (3) content different from that traditionally published by the journal (Kerr, Tolliver, & Petree, 1977). On the other hand, among the characteristics that impede publication are; (1) statistically insignificant results, (2) mere replication of previous studies, (3) lack of new data, (4) topics highly represented in recent issues of the journal, (5) topics too far outside the discipline’s mainstream, and (6) previous presentation at professional association meetings and publication in proceedings (Kerr et al., 1977).

Beyer (1978), ascertaining the reviewing practices in scientific journals, identified ten criteria: Originality, logical rigour, clarity and conciseness of writing style, theoretical significance, positive findings, relevance to current areas of research, replicability, coverage of literature and applicability to practical or applied problems. Marketing journals’ reviewers participated in the Beatty et al. (1982) study identified significant contribution (which should provide relevant, meaningful findings for both academics and practitioners) as the most important criterion for both empirical and non-empirical articles. Conceptual rigor was another

criterion viewed important by the reviewers. Interestingly however, relevance to the target audience was reported as being far less important than the technical aspects of the manuscript (Beatty et al., 1982). Considering marketers’ traditional focus on target marketing, the low ranking of this criterion is ironic. Another research identified eight common headings included in pro forma sent by editors to reviewers: Originality and innovativeness, relevance to previous work, building on and relevance to body of knowledge, evidence and objectivity, clarity of writing, quality of argument, theoretical and practical implications, and meets the editorial objectives (MCBC, 1994). Many reviewers may however add or extend such other attributes as research design, depth, practical examples, presentation, conclusions, focus versus generalisation, clarity of thought, interest and so on (MCBC, 1994). Manuscripts may also be rejected because the reviewers had an ideological disagreement with the central thesis of the paper, were not familiar with the literature or were unfamiliar with the methodology (McKercher, 2002). The manuscript may simply be rejected because the reviewers did not invest the time required to read and understand the paper thoroughly (McKercher, 2002).

A total of ten criteria were identified as common faults of research projects submitted for publication consideration in hospitality journals (Lewis & Pizam, 1986). These include (1) lack of construct validity, (2) failure to control for intervening variables, (3) unwarranted conceptual leaps, unsupported conclusions, and presumptive judgements, (4) failure to apply tests of statistical significance, (5) errors in sample selection, (6) failure to identify the issue, problem or purpose of the research, (7) failure to capture the richness of data (whether because poor research instruments or poor statistical analysis), (8) failure to define or limit variables, (9) poor writing, and (10) failure to notice spurious relationships. In the same study, Cornell Quarterly explains their rejection and acceptance reasons as follows (Lewis & Pizam, 1986). Rambling, disorganised article, jumbling all over the place instead of proceeding in a logical manner generally guarantees rejection. Articles with substantive flaws either in methodology or in theory are likely to be rejected. Other rejection reasons include the use of the wrong tone (either too academic or too informal) and commercial bias that the article contains (Lewis & Pizam, 1986). The Quarterly seeks articles that are useful to managers, original, comprehensive, accurate, seminal, broad in their application, and clearly organised. It is suggested that authors should try to cover only one idea in an article and develop it fully (Lewis & Pizam, 1986).

Convoluting writing style is a recurring theme in previous studies on reviewers’ decision-making. Some

novice authors seek an academic style which contains a high “fog factor” to cloud weaknesses or flaws. But, if the article is difficult to follow and understand, then simply it is not doing its job. In writing for scientific journals, there is little need for ornamentation, as they are likely to cause confusion (Day, 1998). The best English is that which gives the sense in the fewest words. However, difficult English is often used in articles. Much attention is devoted in graduate programmes to developing statistically competent researchers. In contrast, development of writing skills appears to have received much less attention (Brustad, 1999). This contradicts the fact that a researcher must not only do but also write research. Most of the today’s researchers did not have a chance to attend formal writing courses. As graduate students, many of us learnt and developed our writing by imitating the prose of the authors before us (Day, 1998). Along with the prose, a weak conclusion section may contribute to rejection. The conclusion in an article is the place where one can expect to find the answers to the question posed, implicitly or explicitly by the article. If the conclusions are superficial then the quality of whole article will be called into question (MCBC, 1994). A thin argument and conclusions that are not backed up with documentation would fail to convince a reader.

4. Methodology

4.1. *Research instrument and data collection*

This present study aims to identify criteria that reviewers refer to in making their manuscript acceptance or rejection decisions. The intent of the present paper is neither to rank the importance of individual criterion nor to compare the views of reviewers from different journals. Rather, the aim is to isolate key areas that reviewers look at when reviewing and give suggestions to authors to increase acceptance of their empirical manuscripts. A short research instrument, containing three open-ended questions was developed for the study. The questions were structured to isolate and understand the three most important criteria that lead to accepting a paper and three most important flaws that cause rejection. Respondents were requested to add comments and recommendations as to how paper quality can be improved. The use of a simple research instrument, containing a limited number of questions was essential in order to reduce the completing pressure (Robson, 1993; Ryan, 1995). Open-ended questions enabled respondents to reply as they wish and provide extensive answers (Oppenheim, 1992).

A total of ninety reviewers, from seven international tourism, travel and hospitality journals were invited to take part in the research. Reviewers were from *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Journal of Travel Research*,

Tourism Management, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, *Journal of Vacation Marketing and Anatolia: An International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*. A number of the reviewers were in the editorial board of more than one journal and there were a few editors in the sample. It should be noted that this research was exploratory in nature and a convenience sampling method was adopted. No demographic question was included. The form containing the questions was attached to the invitation message and forwarded to participants via e-mail in February 2002. The reviewers were required to return the forms at their earliest convenience. Twelve reviewers were not reached due to address mistakes and automatic replies indicated that eight of the reviewers were out of their office for research or other reasons (e.g., holiday leave). Invitation letters were resent to those who were away. Forty-three reviewers completed and returned the forms. Most respondents produced answers of half of a page or more.

Before proceeding with details in data analysis, limitations of conducting research that contains open-ended questions through the Internet should be acknowledged. Although the Internet provides an easy, convenient and cost effective access to the selected individuals, its effectiveness may be reduced by different elements. Problems related to delivery failures may impact on the size and composition of the sample. This in turn may affect the generalisability of findings. Due to its newness, researching via Internet may be perceived as a low credible way of data collection. One of the reviewers in this study noted that questionnaires sent through the Internet could not create the same effect or feeling, as much as postal questionnaires could do on the potential respondent. Unless replied on the same day, the research enquiries sent through the Internet may lose their importance. Research enquiries arriving during office times may prompt the respondent to give only short answers due to daily tasks. Additionally, research enquiries sent through the Internet may not offer the same advantages to the researcher, as face-to-face interviews do. To follow up interesting expressions that the respondent has made is often limited. Finally, some people simply may not have enough computer skills. The generalisability of findings in this study is limited subject to relatively small size of the sample. It should be noted that the set or order of the criteria that reviewers refer to in the manuscript review process may differ between journals, and also between new and experienced reviewers.

4.2. *Data analysis*

The answers were content analysed. Due to variety of its use in the literature, there is no one universal definition of content analysis (Finn, Elliot-White, &

Walton, 2000). It can however be defined as a technique that is applied to non-statistical material and that allows the researcher to analyse such material in a systematic way (Kassarjian, 1977). Content analysis involves categorisation of the data. Researchers may either adapt previously created categories if they fit the framework of the study or develop new categories (Shea & Roberts, 1998). This technique has been used frequently by tourism, travel and hospitality researchers in understanding many different subjects (e.g., customer satisfaction, hospitality ethical codes, etc.) (Shea & Roberts, 1998; Stevens, 1997). There are different approaches to content analysis, ranging from purely quantitative where frequencies are counted to an approach that focuses on meaning in which inferences are drawn from the data (Finn et al., 1978). While quantification is mostly equated with strict frequency counting, quantification can take the form of quantitative words like more, always, or often (Berelson, 1952 in Kassarjian, 1977). In this study, as the focus was on the “meaning”, the author did not make frequency count of the mentioned attributes affecting reviewers’ decisions.

The Nud.ist software programme was used in this study to analyse and display data in an organised fashion, and draw conclusions from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Nud.ist is among the most advanced of the packages available, as it includes a malleable “node-tree” structure that assists with qualitative data management. Three major inter-connected steps were followed in the analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). (1) Two researchers read reviewers’ comments and gained an overview of the body of material that has been collected. (2) The researchers prepared a thematic framework of issues and concepts arising from the recurrence or patterning of the responses. Experienced with the software, they then developed categories inductively by using Nud.ist’s “free node” capabilities. Two meetings were held to establish a consensus of interpretation. This has resulted in eight major categories shown in Table 1. (3) The final step related to the interpretation of the findings. A narrative approach, using direct quotes from the respondents is adopted in the presentation of the study findings.

4.3. Results

Before explaining in detail the study findings, it should be noted that respondents provided more extensive answers on criteria for manuscript rejection than for acceptance. One of the reviewers stated specifically that writing about the criteria for rejection was easier, as this reviewer typically recommends 75% or more papers to be rejected. While statistical flaws appeared as a factor contributing to reviewers’ reject decision, excellent use of statistics did not appear sufficient on its own for accepting a manuscript. It is

also evident from the reviewers’ comments that different standards may be applied depending on the nature of publication (i.e., a much higher standard of excellence for papers to be published in well-recognised and highly prestigious journals). Eight key areas that reviewers look at when reviewing an empirical manuscript were identified. These include contribution to knowledge, innovativeness and originality, meeting journal objectives, clarity of writing, the use of literature, the quality of arguments, research methodology and data analysis, and research implications. These are almost consistent findings with those of other studies conducted with reviewers in marketing and management journals (MCBC, 1994; Beatty et al., 1982). It should be noted that the ordering of categories in Table 1 does not imply any priority.

4.4. Contribution to knowledge

Papers are often rejected because they lack a theoretical foundation or they fail to advance the industry’s knowledge of a topic (Lewis & Pizam, 1986). Authors are expected to be adding something to the area in which they are working (MCBC, 1994). Similar to these propositions, the reviewers in this study suggested that “the paper should clearly advance development in the field beyond what has been already done empirically”. One reviewer explained that “it should contribute to knowledge in terms of testing theories, methods or propositions in the literature or in the development of good case studies”. Research is conducted within a system of knowledge and that research should be probing or testing that system with the aim of increasing knowledge. “The increase in knowledge may something entirely new and original, or more commonly, it may consist of checking, testing, expanding and refining ideas which are themselves still provisional. In particular, research should continually question the nature of knowledge itself, what it is and how it is known” (Preece, 1994, p. 18). From the comments, it is evident that the research needs to provide findings which advance knowledge. However, as reviewers often stated, it also needs to provide a procedure for solving managerial problems and addressing business issues.

4.5. Innovativeness and originality

Reviewers frequently indicated that for their decision to be “acceptance”, the research must be novel. One of the reviewers specifically stated that “sample size or methodological approach taken are not important... What is important is the quality and the level of innovation in an argument”. Another reviewer expressed that the first quality he seeks in a paper was whether “the research is well conceived, presents good

Table 1
The criteria referred to in the manuscript review process—Verbatim details

<i>Contribution to knowledge</i>	<i>Innovativeness and originality</i>
Magnitude of contribution	Novel research
Adds to what is already known	Presents new ideas, approaches, ways of looking at things
Advancement and broad application	Different, unique, puzzling
Value and interest to business	Makes a difference
Conceptual rigour	
Advancement of current expertise	
Stimulates further research	
New insights	
<i>Meets journal objectives</i>	<i>Clarity of writing</i>
Appropriateness in relation to the mission and focus of the journal	Well written and argued
Criteria specific to the journal	Read by others before send out
Relevant to journal readers	Not convoluting style
Submission criteria	Clearly organised
Interest/ significance of topic	Easy to read, understood at first reading
	Uncomplicated writing
	Arguments flow logically
	Logically structured
	No jargon
<i>Use of literature</i>	<i>Quality of argument</i>
Adequacy of literature review	Sound logic
Comprehensive and relevant review	Credible and cogent
Show understanding of the context	Use of evidence
Reading covers the key literature	Interesting, compelling and convincing
Covering theories in the mainstream journals	Logical flow
Appropriate use of what has been written	Clarity of thought, logic and argument
Appropriate examples from the industry	Presentation
Strong conceptual basis	Innovative argument
Theoretical foundation	
<i>Research methodology and data analysis</i>	<i>Research Implications</i>
Clearly stated objectives	Practical implications
Appropriate method	Consideration of so what impact
Clearly described method	Findings of any relevance
Technical merit	Reasonable conclusions
Appropriate research design	Conclusions supported by findings, substantiated conclusion
Accurate interpretation of statistics and findings	Offering value to the reader
Adequacy of data analysis	
Well conceived	

or new ideas...”. He noted that “there were lots of things that researchers could do, but one is more inclined to spend time with stuff that demonstrates that whoever did it, is really a cutting edge”. Another reviewer stated that innovative arguments were likely to be received positively by reviewers. He specifically stated that “I think it crucial that journal articles present new ideas that are contributions to knowledge, either new approaches, new ways of looking at things, new findings, new techniques”. Another reviewer advised that simply presenting another quantitative analysis of data was of little use or interest to most readers: “there should be something different, unique, puzzling, contradictory about a paper to make it worthwhile”. One of the reviewers criticised that some manuscripts read like an introduction chapter for a dissertation rather than a concept piece that suggests new thoughts. Another

reviewer commented that he would suggest accepting an innovative paper even it is terribly written and has problems, provided that it could be revised and corrected.

4.6. Meeting journal objectives

Comments indicated that the paper should be appropriate to the journal’s mission and focus and it should meet the journal’s submission format. One reviewer expressed that “There is only one reason for accepting—that is if the paper meets the criteria stipulated by the journal that I am refereeing for. These criteria are slightly different for each journal but they are always published in the journals themselves”. Another reviewer indicated that journal had goals and objectives for what they publish, and thus the

manuscript should be appropriate for the journal objectives. But, "...some people never read these things [the journal's objectives]... if you want to get published, you have to send it to the right place". It is evident from the comments that the journal's submission requirements should be met. One reviewer specifically explained that "As an editor I have short patience for papers that are not in the format of my journal. It suggests that they have been prepared for anyone who will accept them, possibly offered to other journals and the authors not prepared to do the necessary work to fit our journal's requirements. This applies less so, but to an extent, to issues like length and general points such as relevance of topic".

4.7. *Clarity of writing*

Reviewers' often suggested that the paper should be well written and argued. One of the reviewers specifically stated that "you can have the best idea in the world however unless it is appropriately conveyed to the audience it is useless". According to the reviewers in this study, the paper must explain itself concisely and coherently. One reviewer commented that papers should be "well written or at least written in such a way that it can be editorially salvaged". He stated that "while one would think that presentation and writing would always be a # 1 priority, many articles are very poorly written and this often masks whether an idea has merit. It is not job of the reviewer to have waded through poorly written stuff...and it almost always guarantees rejection".

Poor presentation and muddled or confused writing appeared to be a major reason for rejection or asking for revision. One reviewer pointed that "...even good ideas, when poorly expressed, fail to impress. Poor presentation and writing suggest sloppiness. Spelling errors, incomplete or inaccurate references, incorrect style raise doubts about the actual research methodology and analysis". Another reviewer specifically stated that he had read "hundred of manuscripts that appear as if they were never proofread or that where there were multiple authors, each wrote a section and no one ever come back to see what the others have done". This reviewer advised that "if a manuscript is poorly written, it is hard to get past the first few pages. Many people I know will simply stop and send it back".

Another reviewer noted that papers should be read by colleagues or others before they are sent out: "Good manuscripts and good researchers get their colleagues to read the stuff before it goes out, and are often rewriting 5+ times to improve the readability... And if you are a researcher who works with English as a second language, find a good editor or reviewer (take a colleague to lunch, dinner; buy them drink, etc.) and get them to salvage your writing. It will make you better as long as you don't take it too personally". Reviewers

almost always suggested that care should be given to the clarity of logic: "...if the paper can be easily understood by the average academic in the field, then I am likely to be supportive, providing of course there is something to say. This is not to say it should be simplistic, rather, that it should be well presented and well written and not couched in obtuse or unclear writing to hide poor quality by complicated writing".

4.8. *The use of literature*

Reviewers often stated that the paper should be appropriately conceptualised within the existing literature. One of the reviewers complained that too often people tended not to read the key literature in their area and ended up doing what has been done 20 years ago. Another reviewer was critical of hospitality researchers: "... [they] demonstrate amazing ignorance of theory in mainstream management disciplines, basing their literature reviews solely on what has been published in hospitality journals. This tends to perpetuate theories and concepts that have long since been questioned or refuted in mainstream research". This problem mirrors itself in other disciplines. It is really difficult to make an impact in a well-trodden area. However, the authors are frequently attracted to well researched subjects, and their research is often designed with microscopic refinements to previous research (MCBC, 1994). According to reviewers in this study, when the literature review is poor, inappropriate or irrelevant to the subject area, the paper then becomes fundamentally flawed at its most basic level. Appropriate use of literature is usually seen as an indication that "the author has done the background research and placed the work in a proper conceptual and theoretical context and understands the relevance and contribution of the paper". The author has the responsibility to collect sufficient background information, critically analyse it and show the areas in which his/her research differs from the rest of research on the topic. Reviewers in this study frequently mentioned uncritical listing of previous research as a factor contributing to their hesitation to recommend a paper. Haywood and Wragg (1982: 2 cited in Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill 1997, p. 40) describe this common mistake with literature reviews adeptly as, "the furniture sale catalogue, in which everything merits a one paragraph entry no matter how skilfully it has been conducted: Bloggs (1975) found this, Smith (1976) found that, Jones (1977) found the other, Bloggs, Smith and Jones (1978) found happiness in heaven".

4.9. *Quality of arguments*

High credibility and cogency of the arguments and use of evidence in the paper are among the criteria that affect reviewers' acceptance decisions. Reviewers often

suggested that the authors need to present tight and compelling arguments. One reviewer commented that “papers are much like lawyers arguments. Building the evidence piece by piece, the authors must present a compelling argument. The process starts with the research question, and then adds a contextual or conceptual background, the identification of an appropriate message to answer the research question, the gathering of suitable data, analysis of those data, interpretation of that data and discussion of the results ...again, I am constantly surprised at how few authors know how to build an argument”. Another reviewer complained that authors sometimes naively express conflicting views about the same issue, and this makes the reviewer hesitant to recommend the manuscript.

4.9.1. *Research methodology and data analysis*

Poor methodology is one of the greatest single reasons why papers are rejected. One reviewer specifically stated that “if the method does not allow the offer to conduct their research then no publishable paper will emerge”. Another reviewer stated that “it was not uncommon to come across papers employing method or research design that does not allow the researcher to answer the research question posed”. One of the reviewers illustrated that “if someone wishes to do a comparative study, but does not gather data that allow comparisons to be made, the project cannot succeed”. The same reviewer complained that far too many authors were trying to hide a weak methodology. However, this cannot be done: “...A weak method will show throughout the entire paper. It is better to acknowledge the limitations of the methodology than to try to hide them”.

Because it makes the findings invalid, the research design that does not meet the research purpose is among the most important rejection reasons. One reviewer expressed that “there are many studies that are perfectly executed in terms of data analysis, which contribute nothing to our understanding, since the data does not relate to the nature of the problem”. Another reviewer criticised that “some folks try and do fancy stuff because they believe it is what will get their stuff published. Usually apparently they don’t know what they are doing and it makes this whole section weak. Often problems with initial design of the research makes it difficult to salvage, e.g., response rates from surveys of 15% and then no attention to this as a problem or to non-respondents”. Another reviewer stated that he would reject “an innovative paper if it were clearly done using inappropriate techniques that cast doubt on everything in the paper”.

4.9.2. *Research implication*

The frequently stated question of “so what?” (What does this all mean? What does the paper contribute to

our broader understanding of this phenomenon called tourism?) is a recurrent theme across similar studies (MCBC, 1994). According to the reviewers in this study, the paper should start by convincing the reader why the research is important. The paper should say something to someone but this criterion is too often forgotten. Reviewers in this study suggested that the authors should consider and explain the usefulness and applicability of their research to practice. One reviewer commented that “far too many papers were very good at presenting statistics but were weak at discussing the bigger picture impacts of their research”. It is evident from their comments that manuscripts failing to consider and explain the implications arising from their work which will of relevance to researchers and practitioners reading their work will be rejected or asked for revision. This may be interpreted as a lack of sensitivity to the needs of a journal and its readers, in presenting something, which will be of use (MCBC, 1994). The majority of authors would agree that good tourism research is much more than data collection and crunching the numbers. However, a major gap still exists between the users and producers of research (Taylor, Rogers, & Stanton, 1994). “That is a nice piece of work... but how can I begin to put this to use at my level?” appears to be a common question posed by many practitioners. There is little evidence for the impact of research on practice or for the extent to which research findings are used by practitioners (Levy-Leboyer, 1986 in Robson, 1993, p. 432). A better dialogue between the industry and researchers is needed in order to bring the industry’s particular needs to the fore and to reduce the likelihood of research collecting dust on a shelf somewhere (Taylor et al., 1994).

5. Suggestions and conclusion

This paper examined the criteria referred to in the review process for empirical manuscripts submitted to tourism, travel and hospitality journals. Conveniently selected reviewers were asked what would make a manuscript to be accepted or rejected. Although they almost always stated the need for the paper to make a contribution, they also frequently mentioned being “innovative or unique”; thus, originality appears to be a significant criterion to many reviewers. Among the critical elements likely to determine acceptance or rejection are (1) how well written the paper is, (2) whether it contains methodological and/or statistical errors, and (3) how well it establishes the bridge with the journal’s audience.

Careless writing and disorganised presentation appear to have a significant impact on the reviewers’ reaction to a manuscript. A number of reviewers emphasised the need to have the manuscript proofread before its

submission. The reviewers' emphasis on clarity of writing signifies the importance of communication art in publication. This finding has important implications for educators. Unfortunately, the education of scientists is often so overwhelmingly committed to the technical aspects of science. Due to absence of formal course in scientific writing in education, many new authors develop a prose through imitating that of other authors—with all their antecedent defects—thus leading to a system of error in perpetuity (Day, 1998). Thus, courses may be organised to help new authors become effective manuscript writers. Additionally, authors whose first language is not English may greatly benefit from the provision of proofreading services by education institutions or publishers.

It is evident from the comments that reviewers are looking largely for interesting, concise, and applied primary research with a sound theory. One reviewer suggested that an article be considered if it presented new and interesting research findings, its methodology is sound and well explained and its English composition is easy to understand. Another stated that if the paper had four elements—a good methodology, strong conceptual basis, good data analysis and interpretation and written in a tight manner, it would be accepted. Based on the comments, it can be stated that two distinctive features—replicability and objectivity that distinguish scientific research from other types of research should not be understated (Armstrong, 1982). The authors should explain their research reasons and the methods clearly, convince the reader that the research is important and show the areas in which their research is different. The authors should also show how their articles relate to the existing body of knowledge, what value it offers to the reader and what new avenues it recommends for other researchers.

The technical aspects of a manuscript are important but they are not sufficient on their own for manuscript acceptance. Negligence of the rules and objectives specific to the journal may cause some editors and reviewers to react negatively to the manuscript. Additionally, the structure of the manuscript and its logical flow appear to have an impact on reviewers' reaction to a manuscript. For example, the authors should not introduce new material in their conclusion and they should not hold back a key finding until almost the last word (Veal, 1997). It is also evident from comments that reviewers may change their reviewing approach when reviewing for different journals. Based on reviewers' comments, it might be stated that one particular strength of the manuscript may compensate for minor weaknesses in other areas. The reverse however could also be true. Finally, it is apparent that the manuscript that leaves "so what?" question will be rejected.

This study should provide some useful insights for journal editors. Reviewers' frequent mention of writing

style and clarity as an important criterion implies that a thorough reading by the editor (or in-house-editor) should precede submission of papers to reviewers. Reviewing is a time-consuming, high commitment process, with little tangible reward (Beatty et al., 1982). Exercising some judgement and simply returning papers that editor felt to be unacceptable will shorten the time. Responses to research questions in this study indicated that different reviewers might view importance of the review criteria in the reviewing process differently. This implies that there may be no uniform agreement among reviewers on the nature or the importance of the criteria, and that "maintaining integrity" across reviewers is a challenging task. The editors should be explicit with their reviewers, as well as prospective contributors, in relation to what they expect in order to get higher-class results. Additionally, the key areas that referees look at when reviewing tourism and hospitality manuscripts did not appear to differ extensively from those of other social science areas, which might be regarded as more "mature" disciplines. This consistency is interesting. As the reviewers of this paper rightly pointed out, this consistency may imply that "if the same findings apply to the tourism literature; that it is no longer acceptable to write a 'good' descriptive study, then the possibility as a discipline this means that tourism and hospitality literature is moving into a 'mature' phase".

Understanding the key aspects that reviewers look at when reviewing is important. It is hoped that the present discussion of aspects that the reviewers are sensitive to will benefit authors in the field. Further research is needed that looks into editors' decisions in relation to review papers and the second stage of reviewing in which the editor goes back to the reviewers when the authors revised the paper. "How to become a good reviewer" is another potential research subject which may have important implications for socialising new reviewers into the reviewer world.

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