

## Editorial

### How to develop a quality research article and avoid a journal desk rejection

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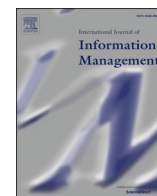
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## Editorial

## Editorial: How to develop a quality research article and avoid a journal desk rejection



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## ABSTRACT

The desk rejection of submitted articles can be a hugely frustrating and demotivating process from the perspective of the researcher, but equally, a time-consuming and vital step in the process for the Editor, tasked with selecting appropriate articles that meet the required criteria for further review and scrutiny. The feedback from journal Editors within this editorial, highlights the significant gaps in understanding from many academics of the journal assessment process and acceptance criteria for progression to the review stage. This editorial offers a valuable “lived-in” perspective on the desk rejection process through the lens of the Editor, via the differing views of nine leading journal Editors. Each Editor articulates their own perspectives on the many reasons for desk rejection, offering key insight to researchers on how to align their submissions to the specific journal requirements and required quality criteria, whilst demonstrating relevance and contribution to theory and practice. This editorial develops a succinct summary of the key findings from the differing Editor perspectives, offering a timely contribution of significant value and benefit to academics and industry researchers alike.

## 1. Introduction

The process of concluding that a submitted research article does not align with the specific journals' aims and scope or meets the required rigour and quality, is commonly termed - *desk rejection*. This element of the review process is normally performed by the journal Editor directly or by the team of specialist sub-Editors. Only submitted articles that are judged to meet the initial Editor screening would be sent out to reviewers for a detailed peer review assessment of their suitability and novelty for publication within the specific journal.

For researchers on the receiving end of a desk rejection, this can be a painful and frustrating experience where the authors may have had high expectations for the submitted article. Equally, the decision to reject can be a time-consuming and extremely disappointing process for the Editors, where a significant number of submissions are rejected at this initial stage, and authors have perhaps failed to align their submissions to the scope, quality and relevance of the journal (Craig, 2010; Flanagan, 2021; Stology, 2017), or have offered insufficient research contribution (Billsberry, 2014; Hierons, 2016; Hulland, 2019). An increase in the level of submissions for key journals, especially from countries such as India, Brazil and China, has exacerbated the situation, where a plethora of weaker papers have entered the pipeline only to be desk rejected at this early stage (Ansell & Samuels, 2021; Ashkanasy, 2010).

The journal review and acceptance process requires the help and expertise of a finite set of academic subject experts, who offer their services on a volunteer and goodwill basis to specific journals.

Generally, journals require three or more reviewers, each offering their own insight and perspectives on the submitted article. However, Editors typically need to approach between five and ten reviewers to secure the necessary commitment, thereby incurring substantial delays in the review process (Ansell & Samuels, 2021; p. 5). Consequently, Editors are mindful of their precious reviewer resources and are generally minded to desk reject a submission rather than sending out poor-quality papers that would not justify the reviewers' valuable time and end up being rejected further along in the process (Bannister & Janssen, 2019).

The literature has highlighted the scant levels of research that focus on rejection (Balyakina & Kriventsova, 2021), with existing studies positing theories on the underlying causes and institutional practices that result in desk rejection rates of between 20% and 50% (Ansell & Samuels, 2021; Balyakina & Kriventsova, 2021; Hassell, 2021). What is clear, is that there exists a significant gap between the aims and expectations of authors, and the requirements of journal Editors. The driving factor of this editorial is that this situation does not seem to be improving. This editorial aims to fill this gap by offering new insight and perspective from nine leading journal Editors who have distilled their “lived-in” experiences on their reasons for desk rejection and offered their guidance to authors to progress past this critical stage in the publishing process. The Editor perspectives are listed in the next section, where each one reflects on his/her own experiences from their specific journal. It should be noted that the comments and recommendations from the nine Editors compiled in the next section are in unedited form, presented directly as the Editors provided them. Although this approach

Christy M. K. Cheung, Kieran Conboy, Yanqing Duan, Rameshwar Dubey, Marijn Janssen, Paul Jones, Marianna Sigala and Giampaolo Viglia have made equal contributions and are placed in alphabetical order.

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creates an inherent unevenness in the logical flow (Dwivedi et al., 2015, 2020; Dwivedi, Hughes, et al., 2021; Dwivedi, Ismagilova, et al., 2021), it captures the distinctive orientations of the Editors and their recommendations related to various aspects relating to desk screening and rejection process. The overall discussion on the key threads from the Editor viewpoints and guidance is provided in section three. The final section provides a useful summary for authors on how to avoid desk-rejections.

## 2. Editors' perspectives

### 2.1. Professor Christy M K Cheung [CMKC], Editor-in-Chief of *Internet Research*

Receiving a desk-reject decision can cause extreme disappointment and frustration for most authors. Thanks Professor Dwivedi for giving me an opportunity to share observations from my editorship of *Internet Research*. Although the sharing is solely based on my experiences with *Internet Research*, the reasons that I identified are also commonly seen in other refereed journals. I hope my observations can offer authors some insights to better prepare their manuscripts and streamline their submission journey.

#### Reason 1. : *Mismatch with journal aims and scope.*

This is the top reason for a desk-reject decision in *Internet Research*. *Internet Research* publishes papers on a wide range of research topics related to information technologies (including the Internet). We specifically focus on research that develops theoretical insights and understanding on topics and issues addressing the potential social, ethical, economic, and political implications which arise from mass public access to information resources. However, we occasionally see submissions that primarily examine technical issues, such as system development or IT architecture. The desk-rejection decision is solely based on the suitability to the journal's readership.

##### Suggestions to authors: .

- Read carefully the aims and scope of the target journal
- Skim over the papers published in recent issues of the target journal
- Volunteer yourself as the potential reviewer for the target journal

#### Reason 2: *Lack of novelty and significance.*

*Internet Research* expects manuscripts with solid theoretical foundations. However, we are also looking for manuscripts that address important issues, advance theories, and offer new theoretical insights. Manuscripts that simply apply a well-established theory and test it in a new context (e.g., new technologies) or in certain countries without adding new theoretical insights or highlighting its unique contributions are unlikely to be sent out for peer review.

##### Suggestions to authors:

- Communicate the novelty and significance of your work in the cover letter
- Pay attention to the structured abstract and use it as an opportunity to highlight the novelty and significance of your research

#### Reason 3: *Poor preparation.*

The first impression is important. The preparation works for a manuscript submission affect whether your manuscript can successfully be sent out to reviewers. There are three commonly seen problems: (1) poor language, (2) manuscript presentation, and (3) ethical issues. The authors should ask themselves during the manuscript preparation:

- Poor language: how readable is the manuscript? have you proof-read the manuscript to remove typos and grammatical errors?
- Manuscript presentation: have you prepared the manuscript according to the Authors' Guidelines? are all the citations in the manuscript included in the reference list, and have you used the

correct referencing style? have you checked the format and length of your manuscript?

- Ethical issues: have you addressed the necessary ethical standards regarding the research? Are you aware of possible/un-intentional plagiarism (e.g., self-plagiarism)?

##### Suggestions to authors:

- Follow the authors' guidelines in preparing your submission
- Use text similarity checking tools to assist you in detecting potential plagiarism
- Use professional copy-editing services

### 2.2. Professor Kieran Conboy [KC], Co-Editor-in-Chief of *European Journal of Information Systems*

#### 1. Tell a story: a single story

From my experiences across journals as both an author and editor, it has become very clear that certain editors and associate editors have their own preferences (or dare I say fetishes) when it comes to what they want to see in a paper. Some get excited by theory or by method, others by the technology or context being studied, and others by the contribution you intend to make. You would hope that you get an editor who is balanced and not overly trigger happy when it comes to rejecting papers that don't meet the unusually high standard they set under their criteria of choice. However, I have found that it is not usually a particular section that is usually the downfall of a paper. Editors are usually an optimistic bunch and are often willing to overlook one weak section of the paper if the overall story is strong or can be made strong after revision. The problem occurs when that story is not strong, not clear, does not exist, and the paper as a whole is not cohesive. The objectives may be very clear and well motivated, the method robust and the findings very impressive. Unfortunately, when the method doesn't answer the objective and the stated contribution does not flow logically from either the stated objectives, theory or method, then the outcome is usually negative. This is really disappointing when each of the parts of the paper are strong enough on their own. Therefore the first imperative when preparing a manuscript is to tell a single story from start to finish.

#### 2. Target your story to the audience

Academics think and act in tribes, whether cognisant of this or not. Therefore, they tend to like what is familiar to their tribe. I have always been amazed by how influenced editors are by how the length of the sections, the weighting of theory versus empirical components, and even the style and formatting, influence their decision. Personally, I am really concerned by anything that creates homogenous content in a journal. It would be awful if all papers had the same formulaic pattern. I don't think one should let the look and feel of a journal's content affect fundamental decisions about the research design. The goal should be to produce the very best research, not (just) to get into the journal in question. However, I would suggest that you know the journal audience- the tribe you are submitting to. Explain how your research fits with their goal and style. If it doesn't then for me that is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact I think it could be great. However, if it is different then it is important to explain to them how and why it is different and how the publication of your research will enhance the value, contribution and diversity of the journal. Otherwise the risk or rejection is high.

#### 3. Making your story and contribution (a little) Promethean

*I wrote recently that IS research should encourage revolutionary thinking, evoking heretofore inconceivable "Promethean leaps" (Conboy, 2019).* IS research as a discipline should aim to propel society into a world outside of their usual comforts and routine of daily life, to enable creative thinking and vision analogous to those thinking about fire before its invention. Of course it is easy to challenge authors to go beyond simple 'gap spotting' and incremental research, and to conduct research that

makes such fundamental leaps. Actually, the reality is that it takes all types of studies to make a successful research community- from small and incremental to large, disruptive, Promethean studies. The reason most studies get rejected is not that they are too small, or indeed too large, but that they either over or undersell the contribution of their work. Sometimes the abstract and motivation leads us to believe this study will transform everything we currently hold true, but then the subsequent contribution is not as impressive as originally implied. In other cases, a study that initially appears to be mundane and lacking novelty, turns out to be very impressive but only when one has read to the final page; and many editors will have decided this a desk reject before that point.

### 2.3. Professor Yanqing Duan [YD], Associate Editor of International Journal of Information Management

To use the expert reviewers' time effectively and improve the efficiency of the reviewing process, journal submissions can be desk rejected by the editor or the associated editors without being sent out for review. There can be many reasons for desk rejection, but most of them are rejected due to a few key concerns. Based on my experience, I would like to highlight the following main reasons for "why do editors desk reject submissions?":

1. The topic falls outside of the scope of the journal - First and most importantly, you need to choose the right journal for your submission. Selecting the target journal should not be left until you have completed your manuscript. You should consider which journals to target when you develop your research ideas and start drafting your manuscript. To demonstrate the relevance of your manuscript to the targeted journal, you must cite relevant publications in your manuscript. It is also helpful to explain the relevance of your research to the journal's scope and its readers in your cover letter to the editor.
2. Insufficient novelty and new contributions – Your manuscript can be desk rejected if there is very limited justification and evidence on its novelty and new contributions, especially in relation to theory and research advancement. You can submit a well-written manuscript that has followed a rigorous research process, but if it does not demonstrate sufficient novelty and new contributions, it may not pass the initial assessment by the Editors. To avoid this problem, your manuscript should provide a critical review of the current research, identify very clearly the research gaps to be addressed, and substantiate your claim of new contributions with your own work.
3. Lack of theoretical consideration and support – Theory plays an important role in academic research and articles published in leading journals are expected to have a strong grounding in theory (Gregor, 2006); thus, your manuscript should demonstrate adequate consideration of relevant theories in the field and your contribution to theory and theoretical development. This can be achieved through reviewing relevant theories, applying theory to support your arguments and/or propositions if appropriate, explaining how you have made a contribution to the theoretical development, e.g. extending current theories or developing new theoretical understanding, concepts or models.
4. Lack of research rigour – Even if you have chosen an important research topic and presented a compelling case for making new contributions, your manuscript can still be desk rejected if the research is conducted inadequately and has discernible flaws. The research rigour can refer to "the extent to which the work demonstrates intellectual coherence and integrity, and adopts robust and appropriate concepts, analyses, sources, theories and/or methodologies" (REF, 2021, 2019)). Various factors can affect the rigour of your work. They can be related to conceptual confusion, flaws in key arguments, and most commonly inappropriate research methodology, e.g. misalignment between research objectives and chosen research methods, wrong sampling strategy, poor data quality,

potential bias of chosen respondents, inappropriate data analysis techniques, lack of rigour in data analysis, etc.

5. Poor quality of writing - It is critical that the manuscript demonstrates the best quality of academic writing and meets the required quality standards to be considered for publication. Poor quality of writing will seriously affect the clarity and readability of the manuscript, thus can be rejected at the initial assessment stage. If you are not an English native speaker, it is essential to get your manuscript proofread by a native speaker or using a professional proofreading service to correct language errors. However, the quality of writing is not just a language problem. The structure, clarity of argument, logic progression, coherence, etc. will all contribute to the quality standard of the manuscript. For example, you should follow the similar structure of the most papers published in the journal. You could invite colleagues to read your manuscripts and seek honest feedback for improvement before submission.

### 2.4. Dr Rameshwar Dubey [RD], Associate Editor of International Journal of Information Management

Desk rejection is one of the most difficult decisions that editors have to make. We are all academicians and understand the importance of any publication to shape an individual career. Desk rejection may impact the morale of authors. Despite so many moral obligations, we believe that desk-rejection is one of the best ways to prevent dilution of the literature. Before identifying quality reviewers for any submission, I first read the manuscript carefully. Most of the time, we have to make a choice whether I should desk reject the manuscript or to invite the reviewers for the review. I desk reject those manuscripts, which are scientifically flawed. For instance, I have observed that most of the articles were submitted in haste. In the IJIM we receive a lot of submissions and the majority of the submissions are non-empirical in nature. We believe in diversity and encourage non-empirical research. However, we expect that non-empirical research must be of three types. Firstly, we receive a lot of review-based research papers. We expect that the review-based article must be based on a critical review of existing literature include synthesis of existing theory, novel theory, conceptual studies, taxonomies and typologies which provide a strong foundation for the advancement of the theoretical boundaries of the information management field. Secondly, theory-building articles critique the existing theories and help develop strong research propositions in information management that may be tested in the future. Thirdly, the popular articles in information management address information management philosophies, historical debates, and definitions of the information management at the intersection of other disciplines like marketing management, financial management, operations management, and human resource management. Unfortunately, most of the non-empirical submissions do not fall into any one of these three broad categories, we desk reject to avoid the dilution of the scope of the IJIM. Moreover, most of the submissions are not grounded in the information management philosophy.

**Recommendation:** The submission must be grounded in the information management theory that help advance the theoretical boundaries and open the door for new and excited debates on information management field.

We also reject several empirical research articles which lack scientific rigour. For instance, we often reject the articles in which authors have failed to explain how the authors have conceptualised their theoretical model or generated their research hypotheses. In data collection, we try to understand how samples were chosen. Moreover, in the case of survey-based research, we assure whether the authors have performed a non-response bias test beyond the Armstrong and Overton (1977) guidelines. In most submissions, we have noticed that the common method bias results are not well reported. We strongly recommend that



the authors should look beyond single-factor Harman's test (Ketokivi & Schroeder, 2004). In addition to these tests, we recommend the authors check the causality before carrying out hypotheses testing. Unfortunately most of the submissions the authors report statistical results which carry no sense or do not add much value to the existing theoretical debates. Although we sometimes give the opportunity for authors to revise, when we believe that the damage caused during data collection due to poor research design cannot be repaired during the revision stage, we desk-reject to save the reviewer's effort.

**Recommendation:** *The submission must follow scientific rigour and avoid incorrect use of the statistical analyses.*

## 2.5. Professor Yogesh K. Dwivedi [YKD], Editor-in-Chief of International Journal of Information Management

IJIM has a very large submission rate, therefore, peer-reviewing all submissions can have a detrimental effect on our reviewers' workload and quality. Hence, IJIM conducts two levels of desk screening to eliminate all submissions that are unlikely to survive our full review process, either due to lack of fit with the journal's scope or lack of theoretical and methodological rigour. At the first level of screening, as the EiC, I read the submitted article and may desk reject where submissions fail to meet the IJIM criteria for the reasons specified below. Submissions that pass the first level of screening may go through a second level of screening by the Associate Editors (depending on subject area). This may lead to further desk rejections. Sections 2.3–2.4 presents some of the reasons for desk rejections outlined by two of the IJIM Associate Editors.

The common reasons for desk rejections during the first level of screening are as follows:

**Duplicate and previously rejected submissions:** submissions are desk rejected or rejected after review simply because they are deemed inadequate or inappropriate for publication in the IJIM. If there are any potential, rejection notification levels that submissions can be resubmitted after addressing specific concerns, such submissions are given due consideration when they are resubmitted. However, desk rejected submissions should not be resubmitted if the rejection notification does not invite resubmission. Whenever such submissions are received, they are simply desk rejected. Some submissions are fruitlessly resubmitted again and again but the outcome is the same - another rejection.

**Recommendation:** *Do not resubmit a previously rejected submission unless invited to do so after specific amendments.*

**Plagiarism and Self-Plagiarism:** submissions with a high similarity of content with other sources (including authors' own previously published work) are generally desk rejected due to lack of originality and copyright issues. As is the case with many other journals, the IJIM desk reject submissions with a similarity rate of greater than 15%. However, before rejecting such submissions, the similarity report is carefully reviewed to ensure that the similarity is not due to use of common words and terminologies related to theories, models and methodologies. It is important to note that any similarity related to citations and references are not used as a basis for desk rejections.

**Recommendation:** *Submissions should be carefully read and edited to remove excessive overlap or plagiarism from other sources.*

**Lack of adherence to journal/author guidelines:** A full formatting as per the journal guide for authors<sup>1</sup> is not necessary during the first submission. However, all submissions must meet the basic formatting requirements and should be accompanied with all required files. For

example, the abstract should be a standard abstract, but a number of researchers submit a structured abstract. Similarly, as per guide for authors, there should be a separate editable file along with the submission to provide 3–5 bullet (highlight) points (maximum 85 characters, including spaces, per bullet point). Yet, often the highlight file is either completely missing or the points included are too long. The IJIM follows author (year) format for citations and referencing, but often submissions have numbered style for citations and referencing. Additionally, the journal follows a double-blind review process, yet several submissions insert authors' details in the main manuscript. These are just a few examples that suggest that either the guide for authors was not carefully considered or submission was rejected from a journal and authors resubmitted it to the IJIM without making any changes to align with the journal guidelines.

**Recommendation:** *Submissions should be correctly formatted as per the guide for authors and should include all required files.*

**Lack of fit with the journal's scope:** The largest proportion of desk rejections are due to a "lack of fit" in alignment with the IJIM's scope. We often receive submissions that are either very technical in the nature or focussed purely on other areas, including psychology, operations research, operations management, knowledge management, project management, management, product & innovation management, research policy, marketing, retailing, human resource management, computer science, information processing, data science, machine learning, economics, finance, healthcare and medicine, library science etc. Such submissions are simply desk rejected based on their appropriateness to the journal and its readership. Many submissions have employed approaches such as mathematical modelling and econometric analysis, which is not suitable for the journal's readership. It is important that authors should carefully explore regular issue articles published in IJIM in the last few years to understand the current focus of the journal in terms of the type of research (both in terms of topics and approaches) being published.

**Recommendation:** *Submissions should have a clear focus and relevance to the issues related to information management to pass the desk screening stage.*

**Inadequate connection with existing work published in the journal:** This point is somewhat related to the previous point. Some submissions may have their focus on information management but they may not have utilised any relevant work from IJIM and/or closely related journals. This makes it difficult to assess their contribution to ongoing scholarly conversations in IJIM and existing knowledge within information management and closely related domains. Appropriate recent citations also help editors and associate editors to identify appropriate reviewers who may be willing to perform the review. Hence, lack of relevant and recent citations from IJIM and closely related journals can pose problems in identifying relevant reviewers, which consequently may result in long delays in the review process.

**Recommendation:** *Submissions should show an adequate connection with the recent work published in the target and closely related journals.*

**Poorly structured and developed manuscripts:** Poorly structured and developed submissions are generally desk rejected. Such submissions may lack important sections such as literature review, hypotheses development, discussion and conclusion. Submissions they may have these sections, but in partially developed form. For example, such submissions may have weak motivation and poorly defined research problem in the introduction section, the literature review section might be very descriptive in nature, each hypothesis may not be well supported by adequate discussions, the methodology section might have missing details related to the data collected (for example, time & place of data collection, sample size, measurements and their sources), the results section may have missing tests relating to reliability and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.elsevier.com/journals/international-journal-of-information-management/0268-4012/guide-for-authors>

validity and the research may not have provided demographic details of respondents, the discussion section may not have provided an adequate synthesis of results with the existing literature and there may be a missing or underdeveloped discussion on theoretical contributions and implications for practice. Finally, there may be a missing or underdeveloped conclusion section. Other issues related to this include a poorly written abstract and inadequate or inconsistently formatted references. All these issues can lead to a desk rejection. It is important that authors should carefully explore regular issue articles published in IJIM in the last few years, to understand the expectation regarding the structure and level of development of the manuscript.

**Recommendation:** *Submissions should be developed at the required level of quality of published articles in the journal, to avoid a desk rejection or being rejected by the reviewers.*

**Inadequate length and language-related issues:** Manuscripts that are too long or too short are unlikely to survive the desk screening process. Reviewers are often highly critical of very lengthy manuscripts, as such work may lack succinctness and clarity. In contrast, manuscripts with just 4000 or 5000 words are unlikely to demonstrate the level of development expected by the journal. Furthermore, several manuscripts suffer from grammatical issues with lengthy sentences and paragraphs that negatively impact readability, leading to desk rejection.

**Recommendation:** *Submissions should not be too long or too short, a length around 10 K can provide ample scope to develop a strong manuscript. Manuscripts should be copyedited to ensure adequate flow and readability.*

**Theoretical and/or methodological issues:** Lack of adequate theoretical underpinning, poorly thought through and supported hypotheses, student sample, very small sample size and inadequate reliability and validities in quantitative submissions can lead to desk rejection. Articles that focus on technology adoption where the paper examines intention using cross-sectional data and not on the behaviour/usage aspect, is also likely to be desk rejected. Similarly, a lack of strong theory-building/development at the backend of qualitative papers is also likely to be desk rejected. It is important to note that merely describing results from interviews is insufficient to make an adequate contribution. Unfortunately, many qualitative submissions suffer with this problem and are subsequently desk rejected.

**Recommendation:** *Submissions should have a very well-developed theory and methodology sections as both theoretical and methodological rigour are essential to demonstrate adequate contribution.*

**Inadequate research contribution:** Lack of sufficient topical and theoretical novelty, as well as limited significance and relevance of results, limits the research contribution offered by a submission. Some researchers attempt to examine issues that have been very well examined in the distant past but have less relevance and significance in the current context, so they are unlikely to make a sufficient and interesting contribution. Some submissions may attempt to examine emerging issues by employing well-examined and tested theoretical models (TRA, TPB, DoI & TAM), but however, lack theoretical novelty and are unlikely to progress through the desk screening stage.

**Recommendation:** *Submissions should demonstrate adequate novelty both in terms of the research problem examined and theory utilised. The topic being examined should have relevance and significance in the current context to demonstrate an adequate contribution.*

**Bibliometric analysis, descriptive review, meta-analysis and data driven (sentiment analysis) research:** In the last two years, there has been a significant increase in the number of submissions based on bibliometric analysis, descriptive review and sentiment analysis. All these types of submissions are unable to demonstrate clear theoretical contributions, which is necessary for publication in IJIM. Hence, they

are unlikely to pass through our desk screening stage. Bibliometric analysis types of submissions should be targeted to a more specialised journal that publishes such research. Descriptive reviews may provide a good account of the current state of research on a specific topic, but they fail to demonstrate any form of theoretical development that can guide future research. There are an increasing number of meta-analysis studies, but are largely descriptive in nature and are unlikely to pass desk screening. Meta-analysis type of submissions should be confirmatory in nature and meet the requirements as set in our recently published guidance article (see Jeyaraj & Dwivedi, 2020). There is a relatively recent trend where researchers are developing manuscripts based on analysis of social media-based user generated data by employing sentiment analysis. Generally, such submissions also lack theoretical underpinning, which limits their overall research contribution. In our recent guidance article (Kar & Dwivedi, 2020), we have discussed how to build and test theory within sentiment analysis type research.

**Recommendation:** *Bibliometric analysis and descriptive review type submissions should target a more specialised journal for consideration. Meta-analysis and sentiment analysis type submission should meet the requirements set out in the guidance articles recently published in IJIM.*

## 2.6. Professor Marijn Janssen [MJ], Co-Editor-in-Chief of Government Information Quarterly

After having checked the format and correctness of a submission, the editorial process starts. The next step is an initial screening of the paper to determine the feasibility of arriving at a publishable paper. An important responsibility of any editor is to avoid sending a poor-quality manuscript out for review (Bannister & Janssen, 2019). This feasibility check can be done by a single editor or by several editors who assess a manuscript independently of each other. Sometimes the editor-in-chief conducts the first screening. If the submission passes that step, then the manuscript is assigned to a handling editor, who conducts another screening. The handling editor can determine again the feasibility of arriving at a high-quality paper that will be publishable. If the likelihood is low, then a desk reject is given. Sometimes a reject and invitation to resubmit is given when the editor can see the potential of the paper, but the paper is not likely to pass the review process in its current form.

Desk rejects are a common method for editors to avoid non-appropriate papers enter the review process. Good reviewers are a scarce and precious resource that should not be wasted and valued and nurtured (Bannister & Janssen, 2019). Some journals desk reject even the majority of the submitted papers. This is undesirable, as editors favour receiving high-quality papers. However, even worse is sending a paper out for review that will likely not be publishable. Many premier journals receive an overload of papers, whereas there is a scarce reviewer capacity. Writing a good review requires time and dedication and should not be wasted on hopeless attempts.

There are several reasons for desk rejection. Some papers might not fit the journal's scope, whereas, for other papers, it is likely that the reviewers are negative and, therefore, it has no use to send such papers out for review. The bottom line is that papers should be worthwhile to be sent out for review. This saves time for the reviewers, a long waiting time for authors while waiting for the obvious outcomes, however, this pushes the burden on the editor who is in charge of desk rejecting. Indeed, editors would prefer not to desk reject any paper, as this saves them work. Often the submission of low-quality papers is discouraged, and therefore, this editorial is important to avoid arriving at such an undesired situation.

We provide the following recommendations to avoid a desk reject. Indeed following these recommendations will help, but is no guarantee that no desk rejection will be given.

*Avoid sloppiness and obvious mistakes.* Overall, writing requires attention and dedication. Writing should be tidied up and proper English

used, and references checked. Proofreading before submitting is needed. How can you expect that editors and reviewers read your manuscript with care and attention when the authors did not do the same. Ensure that the paper is developed well before submitting.

*Fit the journal's scope.* Misunderstanding of the scope of the journal. At the least, authors should familiarise themselves with the journal and, in doubt, they can contact the editor's in advance. Some journals require both rigour and relevance and this should be reflected by the papers (Janowski & Janssen, 2015). Sometimes journals are selected for their reputation and impact scores instead of for the journal's audience. Why bother to submit to a journal whose readership is not your target group? This will not likely result in the desired impact. Ensure that your paper is within the journal's scope.

*Aligning expectations.* Sometimes authors do not understand what is expected by the journal. This results in a mismatch between the expectations of the authors and editors. The authors think that they wrote an appropriate paper, whereas editors know the papers in the journal very well, have a clear view on the scope and have expectations about what makes up a good paper. Always read papers prior published in the journal to understand the expectations better.

*Make a clear contribution.* The editors and readership of a journal expect a clear scientific contribution. Yet another paper about adoption/diffusion, another case about a Bigtech company or another COVID-19 paper with descriptions that are well-known by persons who are reading the news and magazines make a limited contribution. Indeed replication studies are also useful and can be published, but the drivers for conducting a replication study should be made clear. Always ensure that the paper makes a clear and well-articulated contribution.

*Know the empirical domain.* Government Information Quarterly (GIQ) is focused on addressing an empirical domain. Sometimes papers are received in which the authors clearly have no or at best a limited understanding of the empirical domain. They might be a one-time player in a certain area, e.g. a fortune-seeker, and not have a deep understanding of the issues at stake and the state-of-the-art in a domain. For example, sometimes the nature of the government is not understood, and its idiosyncratic nature is not expressed by simply replication business literature that is not suitable for addressing the issues at hand. This can result in papers that are not valid or too abstract to contribute to the field. Ensure a good understanding of the empirical domain.

*Problematisation.* The problem should be clearly described and analyzed and should address a knowledge gap. The problem addressed should relate to the journal and, ideally, the research challenge should be founded in the literature. A simple analysis of past rejections shows that more than half of the desk rejected papers had no clear problematisation that fits within the journal's scope. Indeed this varies over time but gives a clue that a clear problematisation that fit with the journal is needed.

*Sound research question(s) and methods.* Lack of research question(s) or objective(s), bias in the research methods, skewed or too small samples and other issues in the research method can make the research unsuitable for publication. For journals operating in a fast-moving area, as information management, the actuality of the data might matter. Cases from the past or other data might not reflect the current situation. The results should be sound and the limitations acknowledged.

*Use key literature.* The literature foundation of a paper should be clear. A desk reject can be a consequence of missing contemporary literature, essential elements or concepts or developments. Hence, demonstrate your knowledge of recent literature, theoretical foundations and developments. Being up-to-date with the issues in the domain and having the right foundations is essential.

Indeed there are other reasons for desk rejection. Editors are not infallible or all-knowing but are able to judge the basics. By adhering to the previous recommendations, the obvious can be avoided. Overall, avoid submitting a paper too soon. Unlike being rejected after finishing a reviewing process, there is hardly any learning from a desk reject. The authors and editors are wasting each other time. Avoid the well-known

weaknesses in a submission. Using your colleagues for providing feedback before submitting, can avoid the pitfalls mentioned above.

## 2.7. Professor Paul Jones [PJ], Editor in Chief of International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research (IJEER)

The avoidance of a desk rejection decision when submitting to a peer-reviewed journal is a key benchmark of meeting a quality threshold standard for any academic. For your work to progress to full review is a sign that the manuscript is meeting a quality threshold and that the study offers a unique contribution to warrant a full review. For this to happen, it must pass what I call the 15-minute test, Namely, having read the Abstract, introduction, methodology and conclusion (in 15-minutes) that the manuscript offers a novel insight into a research phenomenon that I was not previously aware of. Put simply, I have learned something that I did not know previously about this research area.

Like most Editors in Chief, I have a busy (hectic) academic life. The IJEER journal attracts approximately 900 submissions per year so I must make rapid and appropriate judgements regarding the quality of individual manuscripts. With IJEER, both the Desk Review Editor and Editor in Chief must agree for a paper to progress into the full review process. So what are the key issues I would recommend be addressed when submitting to a journal such as IJEER?

Firstly, is your manuscript relevant for the focus of the journal? Take time to understand what the focus of the journal is by exploring its Aims and Scope which is available on the journal website. Thereafter, it would be good practice to read papers from the journal to understand how your study is further developing the conversation in the research area. If you are still concerned please email the editor send them an abstract of your work and ask them if the journal would be interested in your manuscript.

Secondly, you must be able to convince the journal editors that your work offers a novel contribution to knowledge which extends understanding of existing theory. A relevant theory must be embedded throughout the manuscript and the study must seek to evolve this theory. Thus, the Abstract should be able to succinctly summarise the contribution offered within the manuscript. The manuscript introduction should introduce the research area and effectively summarise (say four paragraphs) as to why your work is relevant and its aim and focus. The literature review should critically summarise the key literature in the field and identify appropriate research questions or hypothesis supported by a theoretical or conceptual framework. The methodology must clearly explain the research process undertaken to investigate the phenomenon and draw upon appropriate methods, literature and academic precedent. Moreover, the methodology must demonstrate academic rigour that the study has been well executed. So the authors must convince the Editors that their work offers a suitable contribution which is of international significance. Therefore, it is essential that the manuscript is suitable framed with appropriate language that clearly outlines the theoretical contribution achieved.

Thirdly, the manuscript must be appropriately formatted as per the formatting requirements of the journal website. This requires due diligence and effort including the formatting of the final reference list. Failure to do this accurately will lead to desk rejection.

In conclusion, your papers progression to the review process cannot be assumed it must be earned. To achieve this requires ensuring that your contribution is clearly stated and diligence in the preparation of your manuscript. If these issues are addressed then you stand a good chance of progressing to the full review process.



## 2.8. Professor Marianna Sigala [MS], Editor-In-Chief of Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Management

The Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management (JHTM)<sup>2</sup> is the official journal of CAUTHE<sup>3</sup> (Council for Australasian Tourism and Hospitality Education Inc.).

The JHTM is recognised as one of the top ranked journals in its field. Currently, JHTM has an SSCI impact factor of 5.959 and it is ranked 17/58 journals in hospitality, leisure, sports & tourism and 61/226 journals in management (SSCI Journal Impact Factor rankings).

The JHTM is a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary journal that publishes research making a clear and significant theoretical and practical contribution. The JHTM scope fits within a broad range of topics related to travel, tourism, hospitality, leisure, recreation and event management. The journal welcomes theoretical and methodological pluralism, as well as it equally values both conceptual and empirical research studies.

The quality of JHTM depends on attracting and publishing top quality research. As the Editor-In-Chief of the JHTM during the last 6 years, we have established a two stage review process for ensuring quality: 1) a desk-review (conducted by the Editor-In-Chief) determining whether the submission has value and potential to move forward to the review process; and 2) a double-blind peer review process (managed by the associate editors and overseen by the Editor-In-Chief). The aim of the review process is to uphold and strengthen the journal's reputation and standards, but also to provide developmental and constructive benefits to authors, reviewers and the editorial team alike.

Desk-reviewing is not always a straightforward and easy process. I have to consider many things, take critical decisions and sometimes even take 'risks', which all can ultimately affect the journal's reputation and effective management of its resources. When desk-reviewing, I need to achieve the following aims: apply the journals' scope and quality criteria to legitimate and encourage its standards; avoid progressing papers with no potential to the peer review stage (so, no scare and valuable reviewers' resources are wasted); and avoid rejecting papers with potential that may later be published elsewhere (so, eliminate journal's losses). To manage these aims and risks, I need to be very careful and treat everyone's resources, trust and selection choice of JHTM to submit or review work with respect and fairness.

To that end, I use the following major criteria and questions when desk-reviewing (Sigala, 2021):

- Is the paper credible and relevant to the scope of JHTM?
- Does the paper provide a significant new theoretical and practical contribution?
- Does the paper have a rigorous research design?

I further elaborate on these criteria by identifying: 1) some major indicators providing good answers to these questions (i.e. what to do); and 2) the most popular reasons/characteristics of desk-rejected papers (i.e. what to avoid doing).

Submissions are initially judged upon their fit with the JHTM scope and mission. At a minimum, research should relate to the wider tourism related sectors. I increasingly desk-reject papers that although they seem to provide a robust research study, their relevance to the JHTM is strictly eliminated to findings collected from a 'tourism' sample/context. Papers need to critically engage with and reflect (and not just cite) past tourism literature to establish credibility and relevance in the JHTM field, as well as provide evidence of understanding of the real tourism industry world.

Second, submissions are evaluated on their significant or potential new contribution to theory and practice. Studies simply replicating or

transferring existing knowledge, relations, and/or frameworks into a new sample, context and/or 'discipline' without adding anything new to the field are the most commonly desk-rejected submissions. It is difficult and controversial to judge research originality (Hollenbeck, 2008), but good indicators may be: novel ideas, new methodologies and/or new data reinterpreting or creating new knowledge, expansion of knowledge with unexplored, unimaginable dimensions. Business relevance is also important, usually judged based on arguments or potential for meaningful and actionable managerial implications deriving from the study.

Third, the rigorousness and robustness of the research methodology. There is no study with perfect methodology, but when a study is 'fault by design' (i.e., it cannot be fixed without re-doing it), then this is a clear desk-reject. Common indicators of conceptually and methodologically weak studies include: research questions/hypotheses/models with shallow or vague theoretical underpinning and/or insufficient, inappropriate theoretical argumentation; a problematic research sample; fault assumptions, lack of recognition and/or discussion about competing scholar discussions/arguments.

I also consider presentation, language, writing style and accordance to submission guidelines. Such factors can make a really bad first impression, showing that the authors have not done their 'homework' and may potentially not respect the journal and its editorial team. However, it is rare that a submission is desk-rejected only because of these. The purpose of the desk review is not to reject papers and/or find the perfect paper. There is no such paper and there will never be. When desk-reviewing, I aim to filter out submissions and decide which submissions to progress by judging the study's value and the authors' potential to reflect and act on the reviewers' feedback in order to improve the manuscript and drive it to an acceptance stage.

I hope the above insight is constructive in helping you design your research better and that it makes the desk-review process as a less opaque black-box. I do hope that you will consider the JHTM, should your studies match the JHTM aims and scope.

## 2.9. Professor Giampaolo Viglia [GV], Editor-in-Chief of Psychology & Marketing and Associate Editor of Annals of Tourism Research

I can list one formal and four substantive issues on why we desk-reject articles in the two journals where I have substantive editorial responsibilities.

The formal reason is when a paper presents very vague sentences and poor readability. An example of this is saying "Implications are discussed" at the end of the abstract. Be specific, avoid passive form, and offer examples. Poor structure, grammar and flow irritate reviewers and the outcome would likely be a reject in any case. Warren, Farmer, Gu, and Warren (2021) provide some guidance on this. Even worse, a sloppy manuscript (e.g., punctuation or spacing issues, basic grammar errors in title and abstract, etc.), has no chance to pass the initial screening. If authors do not put effort in their draft, why should reviewers? In general, well-illustrated tables, figures, and supportive material help to enhance readability.

Here are the four substantive issues:

- i) When the content has a poor fit with the journal. For this I suggest perspective authors to read the Aims and Scope of their target journal and get familiar with articles of the target journal using a similar theory and/or methodological approach. It is surprising to see among the number of papers we receive that many articles have a very poor fit with what *Psychology & Marketing* publishes (i.e., application of psychological theories and techniques to marketing). This does not mean that we do not encourage bold new ideas, but these ideas should be broadly aligned with the Aims and Scope of the journal. Another way to make sure that the paper fits with the target journal is to read Editorials which set the direction for the journal. For instance, see this editorial (Viglia, 2021) where I provide a "vision" for the journal.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-hospitality-and-tourism-management>

<sup>3</sup> <https://cauthe.org/>

**Table 1**  
Reasons for journal desk rejections.

Reasons/ Sources	Ed Category	Sources	Editors	Remarks
Lack of adherence to journal/author guidelines	Administration and Quality	Ashkanasy (2010); Billsberry (2014); Craig (2010); Flanagan (2021); Phillips (2019); Stology (2017); Tarafdar and Davison (2021)	CMKC; YKD; PJ; GV	Journals differ on their requirements at the desk review stage. However, a lack of adherence to author guidelines may suggest that “an author either lacks the training to prepare a quality manuscript, or is simply not interested in presenting high-quality work” (Ashkanasy, 2010, p. 2).
Submission length	Administration and Quality	Billsberry (2014); Phillips (2019); Stology (2017); Tarafdar and Davison (2021); Volmer and Stokes (2016)	YKD	There are specific word counts limits by various journals, some variations are tolerated, but submissions with much higher word counts are unlikely to pass desk screening. Many journals allow manuscript length up to 10 K words but check the guidelines.
Grammar and poor writing and formatting related issues	Administration and Quality	Billsberry (2014); Elliott (2018); Flanagan (2021); Hierons (2016); Lake (2020); Phillips (2019); Stology (2017); Tarafdar and Davison (2021); Volmer and Stokes (2016)	CMKC; YD; MJ; PJ; MS; GV	Grammatical issues; declarative vs. explanatory language
Lack of fit/Lack of relevance to journals' readership/Aims and Scope	Scope and Alignment	Billsberry (2014); Craig (2010); Davison (2017); Eden (2009); Elliott (2018); Flanagan (2021); Hierons (2016); Hulland (2019); Jones and Gatrell (2014); Lake (2020); Phillips (2019); Tarafdar and Davison (2021); Volmer and Stokes (2016)	CMKC; KC; YD; YKD; MJ; PJ; MS; GV; RD	Many submissions have no direct relevance to the journals' subject domain. Although such submissions can be interesting and well written, Editors are forced to reject such submissions due to lack of fit with the journal and lack of relevance to the journals' readership.
Resubmitting a rejected paper to a new journal without any improvements	Administration and Quality	Ashkanasy (2010)	YKD	Generally, unmodified resubmitted manuscripts are likely to be desk rejected by the Editor of the next journal. It is vital to make adequate improvements before submitting it to another journal.
Underdeveloped paper/ Premature submission/ Poorly organised and developed. Poor Preparation/Not cohesive	Administration and Quality	Ashkanasy (2010); Billsberry (2014); Craig (2010); Elliott (2018); Hierons (2016); Sun and Linton (2014); Tarafdar and Davison (2021)	CMKC; YKD; KC; YD; MS; RD	Underdeveloped submissions will not be sent to reviewers and rejected at the first stage. Some of the symptoms of these submissions include a submission that is too short, poorly structured or not cohesive, and suffers from grammatical and spelling mistakes. Suggest to improve submissions through feedback, or by inviting comments from experienced authors published in target journals, and/or editorial review board members from the target journals.
Lack of familiarity with existing work published in the target journal/ Not connected with existing research conversations in the journal	Scope and Alignment	Ashkanasy (2010); Billsberry (2014); Craig (2010); Davison (2017); Elliott (2018); Hierons (2016); Hulland (2019); Phillips (2019)	KC; YKD; MJ; MS	Lack of familiarity may mean that the submission may not have a good fit with the journal, it may be outside the expertise of AE and the editorial review board, mode of presentation may not be aligned with one followed by the target journal, and it may not be relevant to the journal readership.
Lack of robust theorisation/ Does not build or test theory/Just testing a well established theory	Theoretical & Methodological	Ashkanasy (2010); Craig (2010); Eden (2009); Hulland (2019); Gregor (2006)	YD; YKD; PJ; GV; RD	A list of hypotheses without suitable justification and a collection of constructs without coherence and logic do not constitute theory and this is easy to spot. Similarly, just describing results in qualitative submissions and presenting a descriptive account of existing studies in a review article does not constitute theory development or building that is a prerequisite for publication in any high-quality journal.
Lack of methodological underpinning and rigour/Single administration self-report survey instrument	Theoretical & Methodological	Ashkanasy (2010); Craig (2010); Conboy, Fitzgerald, and Mathiasen (2012); Eden (2009); Elliott (2018); Flanagan (2021); Hierons (2016); Hulland (2019); Lake (2020); Phillips (2019); Stology (2017); Tarafdar and Davison (2021)	YD; YKD; KC; MJ; PJ; MS; GV; RD	Inadequate description of various aspects and/or not meeting the standard suggested by the literature from the subject area. For example, multi-source/multi-administration data collection methods is a prerequisite to publish in many high-quality journals. Submissions that have utilised data from a single cross-sectional survey get desk rejections from such journals. Survey measures are poorly validated and/or survey measures are not included in the manuscript. Data might be too old or sample size too small.
Insufficient research contribution/Lack of novelty	Contribution and novelty	Ashkanasy (2010); Billsberry (2014); Conboy (2019); Craig (2010); Davison (2017); Eden (2009); Hierons (2016); Hulland (2019); Lake (2020); Phillips (2019); Stology (2017); Te'eni, Rowe, Ågerfalk, and Lee (2015); Tarafdar and Davison (2021)	CMKC; KC; YD; YKD; MJ; PJ; MS; GV; RD	It is important for a manuscript to show that the research presented is new, innovative, relevant and significant. “So what?” and “Uh-ha!” test. A topic may be saturated as several articles are already published on that theme.

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

Reasons/ Sources	Ed Category	Sources	Editors	Remarks
Plagiarism (Extent of similarity with other sources)/ Self-Plagiarism	Administration and Quality	Hierons (2016); Phillips (2019); Stolowy (2017); Tarafdar and Davison (2021); Volmer and Stokes (2016)	CMKC; YKD	Several submissions include a large proportion of their contents either from other sources or from their own previously published articles. Journals are now screening and desk rejecting the majority of such submissions due to inadequate originality.
Duplicate submission/Previously Rejected submission	Administration and Quality	Stolowy (2017)	YKD	Authors resubmitting their previously rejected submissions. Many journals and editors have the policy not to consider previously rejected submissions. Unless rejection notification clearly states a further opportunity for the resubmission, it is not appropriate to submit in the same journal again.

- ii) The content does not to make a clear, original, and compelling contribution to the extant literature: To bring out your contribution, I often suggest to include a literature review table so that you can show your contribution vis-a-vis with the other relevant articles.
- iii) Having a very context dependent question: The empirical context can be specific, but make the results of your work more generalisable. Generally, a single context-dependent cross sectional study measuring intentions is unable to provide substantive contributions. One important goal for journals is making sure that articles can make an actionable impact to diverse stakeholders and that this impact is relevant.
- iv) The paper presents fatal methodological flaws: This is an onerous initial screening for an Editor (or an Associate Editor). However, given the high number of manuscripts reviewers receive, we do this screening prior to sending a manuscript to reviewers. This hopefully saves some time also to authors who can re-design that part and send a methodologically rigorous paper somewhere else within a reasonable timespan.

### 3. Discussions and recommendations

This section discusses the key findings from existing editorials and the invited journal Editors, where the discussion elaborates on many of the collective perspectives on why submissions are desk rejected and the guidance offered to researchers. The perspectives within this section pull together the Editors' substantive guidance for researchers to mitigate the common reasons for desk rejection and offer a path to progress to the reviewer stage.

Many researchers perhaps omit to view the desk review process through the Editor lens. Professor Jones elaborates on this theme where he highlights the reality of limited time-constraints and having to process 900 submissions per year, and the necessary pragmatism needed to be able to make judgements on the suitability of each. Researchers should make it relatively easy for the Editor to make an assessment on contribution, novelty, theory and methodology without hunting for these aspects later in the paper. These perspectives are further illustrated by Professor Sigala, where she articulates the complexities of the desk reviewing process where she has to juggle a number of considerations, assess the risk of impact on the reputation of the journal and effective management of reviewer resources. She elaborates further on the attempt to achieve journal aims of alignment with scope, quality, early rejection to avoid wasted reviewer time whilst avoiding rejecting papers that have the potential to be published elsewhere. The points emphasised by Professor Janssen are particularly pertinent where he recommends not submitting a paper too soon, there is little to be learned from a desk rejection prior to any formal review, and the reality that editors, as well as researchers, are effectively wasting each other's time where papers are rejected at this early stage.

The reasons for desk rejection within the extant literature are detailed in Table 1 together with the alignment from the journal Editors'

views presented in this editorial.

In alignment with the general consensus of the Editor desk rejection reasons, the groupings in Table 1 can be categorised as follows:

#### 3.1. Rejection reasons: administration and quality

A number of reasons for desk rejection seem to be administrative in nature, where poor quality manuscripts are submitted, and authors have failed to adhere to journal guidelines or have omitted to address basic grammar and language-related issues. While rarely the sole reasons for rejection, these aspects are often viewed by Editors as an early stage indication of the overall potential of a manuscript, creating a perception of low quality and lack of rigour (Ashkanasy, 2010; Billsberry, 2014; Phillips, 2019). These aspects are discussed by the majority of the journal Editors where each describes the impact and forming a perspective on a submitted manuscript from these fundamental issues. Professors Cheung, Duan and Viglia highlight the importance of quality of writing and subsequent first impressions that can impact whether a manuscript should be sent out to reviewers. These points are further emphasised by Professors Dwivedi, Janssen and Jones, where they reference the issues relating to researchers not proofreading or formatting adequately prior to submission. Professor Dwivedi details the issues relating to manuscripts that: are a resubmission of a rejected paper, where journal guidelines are not met and where evidence of plagiarism exists. These issues can give the impression of poor quality and rigour as well as adding to the reasons for the paper not being worthy for further review.

Researchers are advised to allocate time and resources for proof-reading and peer review on content, structure, and scope for the target journal in advance of submission and ensure guidelines are complied with. Many of the Editors highlight the importance of first impressions and perceptions of quality, efforts by researchers to correct these issues are likely to instill greater confidence in the overall paper. The Editor advice and guidance for researchers for these types of rejections are detailed in Table 2.

#### 3.2. Rejection reasons: scope and lack of alignment

Editors are frequently faced with submissions that are poorly aligned with the aims and scope of the journal and its subject domain. Regardless of the quality and motivation of the topic, Editors tend to reject such submissions due to the poor fit with the journal subject area and lack of relevance to the journal readership (Lake, 2020; Phillips, 2019; Tarafdar & Davison, 2021). Editors need to quickly decide if the submitted manuscript is a good fit for their journal and researchers can potentially waste time and effort omitting to ascertain if their paper aligns with the scope and aims of a target journal. Each of the journal Editors reference desk rejection due to submitted manuscripts not being in scope or a lack of fit with the journal subject domain and suitability for the specific readership. This specific desk rejection factor is discussed at length where Editors articulate the lack of analysis and preparation from the

**Table 2**  
Administration and quality rejection reasons and Editor guidance.

Editor Rejection Category	Editor Guidance Summary
Grammar and language issues; poor quality of writing; lack of required rigour; underdeveloped papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake additional proof-reading, care, rigour and due diligence to mitigate sloppiness and key mistakes that may give the impression of a poor quality paper.</li> <li>• Seek constructive peer feedback and additional language and grammar review if applicable</li> </ul>
Lack of adherence to journal/author guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spend time checking for adherence to the journal guidelines for formatting</li> <li>• Researchers should ensure they adhere to the manuscript length requirements and not to submit an article that strays too far from this.</li> </ul>
Re-submission of previously rejected paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only re-submit if invited by Editor and when requested changes have been actioned.</li> </ul>
Plagiarism issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advise careful review to remove overreliance on specific previous work.</li> </ul>

researchers, to adequately assess the alignment of the manuscript with the aim and scope of the journal. Professors Dwivedi and Cheung cite this rejection reason for the largest proportion of desk rejections. Editors receive submissions that are either too technical or focused purely on other out-of-scope topics. Professors Viglia, Sigala, Janssen and Jones articulate similar perspectives on scope, where researchers have submitted manuscripts that are clearly out of alignment with the journal and are subsequently rejected.

Researchers are recommended to decide on the target journals(s) while structuring the paper, rather than leaving it to the end, and to ensure close alignment with the journal aims and scope. If a journal is not appropriate then don't submit. Manuscripts should demonstrate that the research topics and approach align with the journal's general aims and reference recent publications from the journal that support the research. The Editor's advice and guidance for researchers for these types of rejections are detailed in [Table 3](#).

### 3.3. Rejection reasons: research contribution and novelty

This factor has been highlighted extensively within the literature ([Ashkanasy, 2010](#); [Billsberry, 2014](#); [Craig, 2010](#); [Sigala, 2021](#)) and, without any exception, is cited by each of the contributing Editors. This factor is likely to result in desk rejection unless researchers can demonstrate clear novelty and contribution in alignment with the journal's aims and scope. Professors Cheung, Duan and Janssen discuss these issues relating to manuscripts that fail to highlight their unique contribution, omit to offer evidence of novelty and are subsequently desk rejected. Professor Dwivedi states that some researchers have tended to examine issues that have been significantly examined in the past but have less current relevance, therefore, are unlikely to make a sufficient contribution. Professor Conboy illustrates these points well, where he posits the benefits of telling a single story with clear contribution, highlighting that such problems occur when the story is not strong, and the contribution does not flow logically from the objectives, theory or method.

Researchers are advised to be explicit on contribution and novelty, and to ensure that any claims early in the paper are followed through in the results section. Editors discuss the significant volume of manuscripts to process and the importance of researchers to view the desk review process from the Editor's perspective and make it easy for them to clearly judge the novelty of the paper and how it will contribute to the journal and its readers.

The specific Editor advice and guidance for researchers for these types of rejections are detailed in [Table 4](#).

**Table 3**  
Scope and lack of alignment rejection reasons and Editor guidance.

Editor Rejection Category	Editor Guidance Summary
Lack of fit/Lack of relevance to the journals' readership/Aims and Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check that the manuscript is within the scope of the journal prior to submission.</li> <li>• Have a clear view on the scope and an appreciation on what makes a good paper.</li> <li>• Selecting the target journal should not be left until manuscript completion. Consider which journals to target when developing research ideas.</li> <li>• Understand the focus of the journal by exploring its Aims and Scope via the journal website.</li> <li>• Read papers from the journal to understand how your study is further developing the conversation in the research area.</li> <li>• Early familiarisation with the journal and their target group to ensure compatibility or to determine that there is no fit and the outlet is not suitable early during the process.</li> <li>• Contact Editors directly to ascertain whether a manuscript would be suitable for the journal.</li> </ul>
Lack of familiarity with existing work published in the target journal/ Not connected with existing research conversations in the journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain how the research fits with the goal and style of the journal.</li> <li>• Cite relevant, including recently published, papers from the target journal to demonstrate awareness and alignment with relevant research on the topic.</li> <li>• Submissions should have a clear focus and relevance to the issues published in the target journal.</li> <li>• Problems addressed should be clearly described and should relate to the journal and the research challenge should be founded in the literature.</li> </ul>

### 3.4. Rejection reasons: theoretical and methodological issues

Editors generally assess whether the paper offers a significant new theoretical and practical contribution at an early stage of a manuscript review. Studies that fail to offer a cohesive theoretical justification or development are likely to be desk rejected early in the review process ([Ashkanasy, 2010](#); [Craig, 2010](#); [Eden, 2009](#); [Hulland, 2019](#)). Methodological rigour is a key early-stage Editor assessment. Quality journals are likely to desk reject manuscripts that fail to demonstrate validated results, relevant timely data and application of the methodology that aligns with the journal's aims and scope ([Lake, 2020](#); [Phillips, 2019](#); [Stolowy, 2017](#); [Tarafdar & Davison, 2021](#)).

The contributing Editors have expressed the importance of researchers demonstrating clear application of relevant established theory and application of methodological rigour. Professors Dwivedi, Cheung and Dr Dubey highlight the negative implications of manuscripts that simply apply a well-established theory and test it within a new context and exhibit a lack of theoretical underpinning and consideration. The contribution from Professors Jones, Janssen, Viglia and Dr Dubey on this topic posits the importance of the methodology clearly explaining the research process undertaken and for researchers to methodologically demonstrate the necessary academic rigour to show the study has been well executed and impact of fatal methodological flaws. Professor Duan discusses the conceptual confusion in some manuscripts where researchers seem to have applied an inappropriate research methodology, incorrect sampling strategy or demonstrated a lack of rigour in data analysis stage of the research. These points are further emphasised by Professors Conboy and Sigala who illustrate the resulting negative



**Table 4**  
Research contribution and novelty.

Editor Rejection Category	Editor Guidance Summary
Insufficient research contribution/Lack of novelty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communicate the novelty and significance of the study in the cover letter.</li><li>• Include a literature review table to demonstrate contribution against other relevant articles.</li><li>• Look through “Editor lens” and the 15-min test where the Abstract, introduction, methodology and conclusion are read in 15 min to judge whether novel insight exists into a research phenomenon that the Editor was not aware of.</li><li>• Tell a single story from start to finish.</li><li>• Authors must convince the Editors that their work offers a suitable contribution that is of international significance.</li><li>• Researchers tend to either over or undersell the contribution of their work. Ensure the novelty claimed in the Abstract aligns with that in the Findings.</li><li>• Demonstrate how the research aligns with that of the journal and explain why and how it will enhance the value, contribution and diversity of the journal.</li><li>• Clearly identify the research gaps addressed and clearly substantiate the claim of new contributions.</li><li>• Always ensure that the paper makes a clear and well-articulated contribution, don’t leave this to the last sections to make this known.</li></ul>

**Table 5**  
Theoretical and methodological issues.

Editor Rejection Category	Editor Guidance Summary
Lack of robust theorisation/ Does not build or test theory/Just testing a well-established theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review relevant theories and apply them to support your arguments and/or propositions explaining how you have made a contribution to theoretical development by extending current theories or developing new theoretical understanding, concepts or models.</li><li>• Be pragmatic in assessing if the paper provides a significant new theoretical and practical contribution.</li><li>• Manuscripts should demonstrate adequate consideration of relevant theories in the field and the contribution to theoretical development.</li><li>• Single study with a cross-sectional data unlikely to make the level of contribution expected by high quality journals.</li><li>• Submissions should demonstrate advancement of theoretical boundaries and advance existing debates.</li></ul>
Lack of methodological underpinning and rigour/Single administration self-report survey instrument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Submissions should have very well-developed methodological sections.</li><li>• Methodology must clearly explain the research process undertaken to investigate the phenomenon and draw upon appropriate methods, literature and academic precedent.</li><li>• Researchers should ensure rigour and robustness of research methodology to negate Editor viewing submission as ‘fault by design’ and desk rejecting.</li></ul>

outcomes for methodologically weak manuscripts where the method fails to answer the objectives, or where the researchers simply replicate existing theories using new samples or context without adding anything substantive to existing knowledge.

Researchers are advised to clearly demonstrate theoretical and methodological rigour that aligns with the scope of the target journal

where the manuscript can extend current theories or methodological approaches. Studies targeting quality journals should consider application of mixed or multi-methodological approaches to offer unique perspectives and novelty.

The specific Editor advice and guidance for researchers for these types of rejections are detailed in Table 5.

4. Concluding remarks

The task of journal Editors to judicate on the quality and potential of a submitted manuscript is multifaceted within a framework and process that aims to be fair whilst demonstrating rigour and due process specific to the journal’s aims and scope. This editorial articulates the key considerations from contributing Editors on the main reasons for desk rejection and to distil the recommendations and guidance to researchers on how to avoid some of the pitfalls and progress to the reviewer stage by submitting a strong, cohesive paper, with clear contribution and novelty. Researchers can gain valuable insight by viewing the process from the Editor’s perspective and accepting that progression past the Editors desk needs to be earned rather than assumed. The recommendations and guidance from the contributing Editors offer a valuable and timely contribution to the knowledge of researchers seeking to publish within high-quality academic journals.

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