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Editorial

From the Editor: Writing a scientific structured article: the ILMRAD format

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In this issue, I am introducing a new feature to the journal: a series of editorials entitled 'From the Editor', which will be offered as free open access. The goal of these editorials will be to support potential authors meeting the expected standards to be considered for publication and choosing the *Journal of Qualitative Research in Tourism* (*JQRT*) as their publication outlet. In addition, this series aims to provide practical information and recommendations to help inexperienced, and maybe also experienced, authors in the art of writing academic papers. A number of topics will be addressed to discuss many current topics and capture areas of inquiry and discovery that will further the frontiers of knowledge and understanding of qualitative tourism research. This is the first editorial in the series focused on presenting in an organized and logical fashion guidelines on how to write each section of an empirical article.

1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, universities are increasingly demanding that their academic staff publish in 'top-tier' research journals (Buckley, 2019; Kock et al., 2020). Although many academics, particularly early career ones, might invest a lot of time, energy and sometimes money, they struggle to publish their work effectively (Chin et al., 2020). A reason for this might be that few of them have received specific training, and may therefore lack sufficient proven skills to write a scientific article suitable for publication. However, publication might be one of the main requirements to obtain academic qualifications, such as a doctoral thesis, to improve career advancement (promotion, tenure and salary) and to secure grants and other funding (Chin et al., 2020; Weber and Ladkin, 2008).

Competition for publishing in top journals is fierce. It is therefore of paramount importance to get the basics right in order to get a paper published. With that in mind, this editorial presents a step-by-step guide to writing a scientific article – not necessarily specific to papers published in the *Journal of Qualitative Research in Tourism*. Although this editorial focuses on tourism, the principles it suggests apply to several other fields, especially in business and the social sciences. It aims to help young researchers with little experience of writing to create a good-quality first draft of their work, which can then be circulated to their co-authors and senior mentors for further refinement and finally publication in a scientific journal. It should be noted that the guidelines provided in this editorial relate to empirical papers collecting and analysing primary data, and not to independent or standalone review articles and literature reviews aiming to synthesize different sources (for such examples see Andriotis, 2001; 2007; 2014) or non-empirical

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case studies referring to cases based entirely on secondary data (see for example Andriotis, 2005; 2010; 2011; Andriotis and Mavric, 2013).

The structuring and writing of a research paper follow a number of steps and specific formats. The most accepted and discussed format is the introduction–methods–results–and discussion structure (IMRAD). However, IMRAD is just a broad framework within which modifications can be made as long as there is a strong rationale for them. That said, this editorial reviews an improved model of IMRAD for writing research articles: namely ILMRAD – where the 'L' stands for 'literature' and consists of a review of the literature on a particular topic. This model can be applied to all empirical papers submitted to the *JQRT*, as well as several other journals, whether concerning tourism or otherwise. In contrast to IMRAD, which includes a brief literature review in the introduction and discussion sections, ILMRAD proposes a separate literature section to assist authors in understanding a research article in a better way. This editorial starts by describing in detail the main elements that should feature in each section of an academic paper, and gives a few pointers for the abstract, the title and references of the article.

2 THE ILMRAD FORMAT

While the so-called IMRAD model of writing academic papers gained momentum during the 20th century (Day, 1989; Huth, 1987), before 1935 there were very few scholarly publications based on that model (Sollaci and Pereira, 2004). Only after the 1940s was IMRAD used extensively as a standard research writing format; and by the 1980s it had evolved into a universal style of reporting research output across the disciplines of arts, social and health science scholars (Day, 1989; Kumar, 2023; Oriokot et al., 2011; Sollaci and Pereira, 2004). However, there were exceptions to this format that may be due to the nature of each discipline.

Although peer-reviewed articles in several disciplines include detailed, but not always lengthy, literature reviews aiming to help researchers understand a topic better, a dedicated literature section was missing from the IMRAD model, and instead it was divided and spread around the text. In this context, the model was improved by adding this important section. In practice, while IMRAD has been increasingly used by the academic community, tourism scholars (with a few exceptions) – see for example the studies of Ahmad, (2018), Vargová et al., (2020), and Kato and Takizawa, (2022) – in their attempt to reveal the trends and gaps in current research, tend to report their literature in a separate section (Charles, 2019).

For the purposes of this study, a revised version of the IMRAD format – namely ILMRAD – will be discussed as it is the most widely used in tourism publications. ILMRAD presents in an organized and logical fashion guidelines on how to write each section of an empirical article. It proposes five sections in the following order: introduction, literature, methodology, results and discussion. Added to this are the title, which reflects the main issues of the article; the abstract, which is more or less a summary of the main sections; and finally, of course, a list of references at the end. Below, I will detail the sections proposed by ILMRAD, outlining the main points to keep in mind when writing them.

2.1 The introduction

As editor of two journals and member of the scientific committee and reviewer for numerous tourism journals, I have handled and reviewed a plethora of papers.

Through my extensive experience gained, it is obvious that, with a few exceptions (for example, short case reports and commentaries), all papers have an introductory section, and this section is of prime importance because it aims to grab the readers' as well as the editor's and the reviewers' attention. For this reason, the introduction needs to be strong so that all readers will be able to understand what the paper is about and its contribution to theory and practice. It needs to leave a positive impression on the readers about what is to come in order to convince them to read more. By outlining the rest of the paper and extant knowledge about the study topic, the introduction is the authors' opportunity to state the added value of their work and the new information that the work will yield.

Dewan and Gupta, (2016) propose that authors structure their introduction like an 'inverted pyramid'. This implies that the first component of the introductory section should introduce and discuss the topic of the paper in a broad context by providing sufficient background information about the particular field of interest – that is, a brief summary of what has already been done. This does not mean that a list of all references found from an extensive literature search is required. Instead, it is paramount to cite only the most pertinent publications, since a careful selection of the literature will lead to a description of existing gaps in the knowledge that the study aims to fill. Of course, it is impossible to cite all published studies in the introductory section, not only due to word count limitations but also because a lengthy literature review in the introduction can put readers off reading the text. Also, as proposed by ILMRAD, an extensive literature review will be presented in a specific section. As Dewan and Gupta support, 'the introduction is not a review of literature but it should convince the readers that you have thoroughly researched the topic' (2016: 240).

Following the brief literature review you need to narrow down the research problem and working hypothesis, followed by the aim and objectives and, very briefly, the methods you have adopted to achieve them. By doing so, you should identify the specific gaps in knowledge that your research aims to address – that is, highlighting the lacunae in existing research, and why your study constitutes a useful addition to the existing body of knowledge by explaining how it will contribute something new and useful. You also need to justify your research with appropriate references and, in the last paragraph of the introduction, briefly present the main contents of your study.

Many journals have a limit on the length of the introduction, with a maximum number of words or pages allowed – that is, usually around one to one and a half pages. For this reason, you should always check the submission guidelines of your target journal carefully for the appropriate length for the introduction.

2.2 The literature review

Papers published in academic journals need to map out the literature published and identify existing gaps. In doing so, some authors argue that a bibliographic or systematic metadata review can be a powerful tool for identifying, describing and processing information (see for example Fan et al., 2022; Mukherjee et al., 2022; Ulrich et al., 2022). However, such studies simply present the metadata of the manuscripts (author, year of publication, keywords, main themes and so on), which are downloaded quite easily from databases and are being selected without saying anything new about the content of the papers under review. While such studies enable researchers to understand how to collect a reliable and valid set of articles based on keywords and in a wide range of scientific contexts, this is not always enough. Instead, critical or narrative literature reviews in empirical papers that seek to contribute to the existing literature by citing papers and identifying research problems from that stream are preferred in the social sciences, including tourism.

Although some authors support that purely bibliometric analyses may advance theory and that co-occurrence analysis of keywords can lead to nomological clarity of a field in an objective way (see for example Fan et al., 2022; Mukherjee et al., 2022; Teixeira and Ferreira, 2018), many top-tier tourism journals reject bibliometric literature review articles. This is because their editors believe that such studies are primarily scoping studies driven by a search for narrow gaps in the literature and merely describe (count) categories without any focus on a true understanding of the field they are describing. For this reason they believe such articles do not contribute to knowledge. Just to name an example, the PRISMA approach, which is a method of collecting papers and reporting reviews in a reproducible way, produces attractive, but often meaningless diagrams with limited (if any) intellectual effort. Thus, systematic literature review articles might just be simply good in data analytic techniques, without being able to make theoretical sense of the literature.

Based on severe criticism of systematic reviews, most leading tourism journals – such as *Tourism Management*, *Annals of Tourism Research* and *Current Issues in Tourism* – do not publish purely bibliometric studies or systematic literature reviews. Instead, they prefer scholarly articles that signpost the subject, outlining where it has been developed from, and that have a strong conceptual, theoretical or practitioner focus. According to Rowley and Slack, (2004: 31), ‘a literature review needs to draw on and evaluate a range of different types of sources including academic and professional journal articles, books, and web-based resources’.

In practice, most tourism journals require authors to perform an extensive literature review that establishes the current state of knowledge on the topic under study and ensures the originality of the research. A substantive and thorough literature review should describe the foundation of the study you are conducting in the context of other works; at the same time, it should also evaluate their methodologies and findings as well as discuss how your work differs. In doing so a critical literature review that looks at other authors’ findings and arguments in a deeper and critical context is of vital importance. By stating your opinion in the literature review you will adopt a holistic approach to the relevant literature, and you will be able to evaluate the arguments presented by others against your thesis or research questions.

A literature review does not have to be exhaustive, as it would be for a dissertation, but instead focused, avoiding the more comprehensive textbook-like approach. To this end, you should cite the most relevant and important studies that demonstrate the relevance and uniqueness of your study. The best approach is to group your chosen articles in a logical way and write enough about each one so that the readers can understand why you have chosen to cite them. In brief, a paper should have a clear conceptual framework – that is, the readers will be able to identify which are the proposed additions to the existing theory that will provide an understanding of the subject area.

2.3 The methods section

Describing the methodology lies at the core of a scientific paper because it outlines the philosophical background of research methods to be used, either qualitative or quantitative, along with the reasoning behind their use. Therefore, a well-written methodology is indispensable for a high-quality academic paper. The methodology section aims to clearly define and explain in detail all steps of what was done and how so that someone else could reasonably reproduce the same study. Every test or analysis used in the presentation of the results needs to be mentioned in the methodology as these will lend credibility to the research. The section should start by specifying the design of the study: for example, descriptive (Tubey et al., 2020), correlational (Zhang et al., 2020), comparative (Elgammal et al., 2020) or experimental (Mohamad et al., 2023) in quantitative research; and phenomenology (Andriotis, 2009), grounded theory (Shang and Zhuang, 2023) or ethnography (Raj, 2012) in qualitative studies.

The choice of methodological approaches for the design of the study should be justified either by using relevant references or by explaining the specific context calling for your particular approach. In this section you need to choose and describe the most appropriate instrument you will use for a meaningful outcome – that is, to collect your primary data. To choose and design the most appropriate instrument you will need to read related literature and talk with peers to see how other scholars have conducted their data collection. In qualitative research the research instrument aims to collect non-numerical data (such as interviews, observations or textual data) and quantitative research numerical data that will yield vital information to your study, such as questionnaires or surveys. The structure of a questionnaire should be similar to an essay. It is a good idea to begin your questionnaire with an introduction explaining your research, its purpose and a brief introduction of yourself, continuing with the main themes to be explored and ending with a conclusion.

Sampling is also of vital importance in order to take an appropriate portion of your population that will represent your population without bias. Good sampling indicates that you have selected an adequate number of respondents/interviewees who are representative of your target population. Based on the responses of this sample, you will be able to make informed conclusions about your results. It is sometimes thought that the larger the sample, the better the results and the more accurate the outcome. However, in Anderson's words, 'size does matter', but 'more is not always better' (2017: 127).

Among the main problems in sample selection are that there is no universally accepted 'rule of thumb' and that there is a plethora of sampling approaches, such as probability and non-probability, making the selection of one of them a difficult task. Overall, the selection of sampling techniques should be context-specific, guided by research objectives, study scope and budget. The procedures for selecting a small eligible group from a subset of the population, as well as a general description of participants, should be explained in detail in your paper. For the vast majority of tourism studies the study population is comprised of human subjects, such as tourists, residents, entrepreneurs, decision-makers and various other stakeholders. You should clearly state where and when the study took place. Names of participants may be changed to protect privacy.

In quantitative studies, statistics can determine how accurate your sample is in representing the target population, and whether a large sample will result in more accurate results. As Faryadi supports, you 'should avoid wasting time and resources unnecessarily trying to measure a huge sample of the target population' (2019: 771). In qualitative studies saturation is the most widely accepted guiding principle for assessing the adequacy of samples. According to Hennink and Kaiser, (2022: 1), 'saturation' is reached 'when no additional issues or insights are identified and data begin to repeat so that further data collection is redundant'. Saturation has frequently been used by authors as an indicator of sample size (see for example Andriotis, 2013; Andriotis and Paraskevaidis, 2021; Eitzenberger and Thimm, 2022; Eyisi and Okpoko, 2023; Fattah and Wang, 2023; Islam and Rahman, 2024; Köchling, 2020; Liu-Lastres and Wen, 2021; Monterrubio et al., 2020; Nyau and Chin, 2023; Paraskevaidis and Andriotis, 2015; 2017; 2021; Singh and Sharma, 2023; Yeager et al., 2021).

After describing the sampling selection, a description of all methods to be used to measure the major parameters recorded in your study should be reviewed. For quantitative studies using appropriate statistical packages, such as IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), you need to describe all statistical techniques used for analysis in such a way that readers will have a complete picture of the whole analysis process. For qualitative studies you may need to read a large number of transcripts in order to identify similarities and differences, and subsequently to find main themes and sub-themes. In recent years, software packages such as NVivo have made the analytical process relatively easier by automating the 'coding' process and the searching and retrieval of data. Despite the obvious benefits of automated coding, such as saving time and eliminating researcher bias, manual coding is more popular among qualitative researchers because it is perceived to offer greater accuracy.

Finally, you may need to include a note regarding ethical considerations – that is, specific guidelines and principles you should adhere to when conducting your research. As regards the tense to use for your writing, the methods section should mainly be using the past-perfect tense because you are describing events occurring before your study has been published. In any case, your methodological approach should always depend on your aim and objectives.

2.4 The results section

The results section aims to describe what was found during the data collection process in an informative and lucid manner. In this section, it is not necessary to describe the methods you have used since they have been already described in the methods section. Instead, you need to summarize your findings in a clear and logical order, and for every method that was outlined. You need to relate your results back to your conceptual framework and focus on those data that will enable you to answer your research questions. In practice, when presenting your results, the format should be always tailored to address the aims and objectives of your study. Sometimes subtitles may be used to break the results down into easy-to-follow sections. This should be a step-by-step approach, usually starting with a description of the study subjects – that is, the socio-demographic and other related characteristics.

A major dilemma for scholars when writing the results section, mainly in quantitative studies, is whether to describe the results in the text or to use illustrations (tables and/or figures). Sometimes properly labelled tables and figures can add to the value of this section. While there are no strict rules, in practice, results that can easily be described in one or two lines are best included in the text. Tables should be used only when they contain important results that, on their own, will give the reader a clear idea of the findings. Also, Ecarnot et al., (2015: 576) state that 'figures are useful in cases where the source data is either too complex for presentation or not easily interpretable'. There may be a limit on the total number of figures and tables allowed to be included, so you need to check the submission guidelines of your target journal before including too many. Many tourism journals do not allow more than a certain number of illustrations, usually seven. Above all, you do not need to repeat data in the text that already appear in a table or figure.

2.5 The discussion section

In the discussion section you need to interpret and explain your results, and how they fit into the wider framework of what has already been reported in other studies. In this section you should not present results for the first time. Instead, you need to start with a brief recap of your main findings; you should then continue with the interpretation of your results, making sure you perform an in-depth analysis rather than simply repeating the results. At the same time, your results need to be presented factually and not over-interpreted. Make sure you will not repeat the same things again and again.

Any particularly surprising or interesting findings should be discussed in context or with regard to other populations in order to compare your findings with what other authors have found in similar contexts. The reason for this is to provide an explanation as to whether your findings fit, extend, refute or confirm previously established findings (Cuschieri et al., 2019: 115), as well as to advance knowledge in the field by challenging previous studies' findings or 'by reinforcing a small body of conflictual data that may previously have been considered merely anecdotal' (Ecarnot et al., 2015: 577).

In a recent study Paraskevaidis and Andriotis, (2023) proposed the use of 'resynthesis' in the context of qualitative empirical studies. According to the authors, resynthesis, as an approach for discussing results, compares the findings of a qualitative study (and perhaps a quantitative one) with past studies, and can help authors enhance their study's credibility. Therefore, it can be described as a specialized brief review comparing the research findings of a study with common results of past research.

Potential explanations can be put forward describing the overall significance of the results and underlining how your findings yield new evidence or a new contribution to the state of knowledge adding value to the literature, rather than just being another paper on a well-researched topic. In this respect, you will need to discuss whether or not your paper has succeeded in filling any gaps you identified in the introduction. The discussion section should end with a paragraph outlining the main limitations and future research priorities in order to allow the readers to see whether you are aware of your own shortcomings and recognize what should be done to strengthen the validity and reliability of your study. In sum, by suggesting potential areas for further research, you can advance the overall body of knowledge in your field. Bear in mind that an ideal conclusion should form around 10 per cent of the whole paper.

2.6 The title

The title of your paper needs to highlight its subject matter and at the same time be eye-catching to stimulate the potential reader's interest to read it. The title should be descriptive, specific and comprehensive, as well as short (about 10–12 words), and it should serve as a window to your work. Bear in mind that your target journal may have a word limit. If the title is too long or complicated it may put readers off right from the onset. For example, Letchford et al., (2015) used data provided by Scopus to rank papers' title length and number of citations, and found that journals that publish papers with shorter titles are easier to understand and attract more citations. Finally, you need to consider that those searching for publications on a particular topic will generally be using online repositories. Therefore, your title must contain keywords that reflect the main issues in your work that can easily be identified through online repositories.

2.7 The abstract

The abstract is the quintessential marketing tool for your work, and serves the function of 'selling' your work. Therefore, it should give readers a foretaste of the main information and convince them to read the whole paper. It is usually the first item that editors and reviewers will read when they see your paper. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to devote enough time and specific thought to its preparation in order to be succinct, but at the same time informative and attractive (Ecarnot et al., 2015). The abstract is a short summary covering all major elements of your paper in a few paragraphs – although it does not provide a critique of your research.

One of the main points to consider in preparing your abstract is that space is limited, so you must keep it short – usually between 100 and 250 words. Abstracts follow two main formats: (1) traditional, unstructured abstracts written in running text without subheadings; and (2) structured abstracts that use subheadings. For example, abstracts in the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* include the following five headings: purpose; design/methodology/approach; findings; research limitations/implications; and originality/value. While formats might differ, both types of abstract contain almost the same information, which aims to summarize very briefly the significance of the research in a clear and concise manner; to define the context and rationale of the study; to provide a clear statement of the purpose, aim or objectives for conducting the research; to outline the methodological approach adopted; and to illustrate the most salient findings, implications and conclusions of the study (Cuschieri et al., 2019: 114).

You will need to choose the format of your abstract after checking the submission guidelines of your target journal. In any case, because the abstract is a summary that showcases information that appears within the paper, it is written *after* the whole paper has been finalized. Online search databases typically contain only titles and abstracts; therefore it is vital 'to write a complete but concise description of your work to entice potential readers into obtaining a copy of the full paper' (Koopman, 1997).

2.8 References

It is every author's ethical responsibility to provide sufficient detail of their work by ensuring full transparency in identifying all references cited. In the words of Ecarnot et al., (2015: 578): 'references support your work and place it in the context of other studies on the same topic, while at the same time providing guidance for readers who would like to engage in further reading on the topic'. It is always useful to choose the most recent and reliable references, mainly those published in reputed journals. It is also necessary to avoid plagiarism by referenced paraphrasing of the literature when relying on the work of other scholars (Cuschieri et al., 2019).

The reference list at the end of the scientific paper should include all the literature sources used to build the research. In practice there are four commonly used referencing styles: MLA (the Modern Languages Association of America), APA (the American Psychological Association), the Harvard referencing system, and MHRA (the Modern Humanities Research Association). The most widely used styles in tourism journals are APA and

Harvard. However, all referencing styles include, more or less, the following details: author surname and initial(s); year of publication; article title; journal title; volume, issue number and page numbers; and, recently, the digital object identifier (DOI). In any case, for the most appropriate formatting of references for your paper, you will need to follow the style given in the instructions for authors of your target journal.

3 CONCLUSION

This editorial aimed to provide help to authors to organize their ideas in a structured way and improve their paper's efficiency by locating specific information without going through the entire paper, as well as helping the editors and the reviewers evaluate manuscripts submitted to a journal. Although the basic steps of the introduction–literature–methods–results–and discussion (ILMRAD) format reviewed in this editorial have been written for the *Journal of Qualitative Research in Tourism* they may remain the same or similar for papers submitted to other journals, whether tourism or not. The ILMRAD format reviewed here is not meant to be a formula for writing a scientific paper, but more of a guide that can help authors establish a clear structure for their paper. While ILMRAD is the most accepted format in tourism and hospitality journals, it is not the only way to structure a research paper. To find the right format of your scientific work you will need to look at recent issues of your target journal and its submission guidelines, and to look up articles in your field published in your target journal to see whether they have retained the ILMRAD format or used something different.

To conclude, although there might be some variations in the final structure of papers, I hope with this editorial to have offered some guidance on how to write an academic empirical paper, and as a result help readers produce better-quality texts.

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