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**Developing doctoral students' / researchers'
understanding of the journal peer-review process**

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Developing doctoral students' / researchers'
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Abstract

A growing body of knowledge has confirmed that the journal peer-review process is an integral part of the scientific publication process and provides demonstrable benefits to journal editors and authors. This study aims to develop doctoral students' understanding of the journal peer-review process and highlight the most common errors and pitfalls reviewers identify in novice authors' manuscripts, which could lead to rejection. A qualitative content analysis research method was used to analyse the primary data as experience collected from senior researchers, editors and associate editors. Among the major contributions of this study is an interactive diagram that provides an overview of the journal peer-review process and identifies the common pitfalls in manuscripts, as well as a comprehensive manuscript submission checklist.

Keywords: Content analysis method; peer-review process; potential pitfalls; scientific publication; doctoral education.

1. Introduction

Doctorate education and research are considered important pillars of higher education (Anderson & Gold, 2019) and expand the body of knowledge available in academia (Greener, 2021). The motivation for writing this article on the journal peer-review process was two-fold. First, the journal peer-review process is an essential component of the scientific publication process, a key indicator of scholarly success (Wilkins, Hazzam, & Lean, 2021), and a growing body of knowledge (e.g., Powell & Lindo, 2019) has confirmed that the peer-review process is an integral part of the scientific publication process. Second, during our interactions with doctoral students and young scholars at various academic events, such as defence proposal/thesis sessions, conferences, workshops and other networking events, we have learned that strong misperceptions of and confusion about the journal peer-review system prevail among doctoral students and other young scholars, suggesting that the process is a mystery. Because it is hard to understand reviewers' mindsets, it is difficult to predict how to survive the process and a 'desk rejection' or 'rejection' decision.

To empirically and effectively address these concerns and offer actionable insights and recommendations, we embarked on this journey to evaluate and elucidate the peer-review system typically used by academic journals in detail. Besides, we share our own experiences of surviving and thriving after peer-review wrath and collect first-hand opinions and perspectives from senior scholars on the common pitfalls these experts encounter while reviewing manuscripts for various established journals. If doctoral students, including novice academics, know, understand and address these fundamental issues or pitfalls, they will increase their chances of getting their work published.

The peer-review process is a critical domain in the scientific article submission, scrutinisation and publication system. Similarly, the peer-review process is the first step in bringing authors' hard work to publication, and it provides several benefits to both journals and authors. For journals, peer reviewers serve as gatekeepers of quality and significant research, providing invaluable help to editors and supporting decision-making on scientific matters (Kirman, Simon, & Hays, 2019; Marsh, Jayasinghe, & Bond, 2008; Kumashiro et al., 2005). The peer-

review process also works as a filtering system, ensuring that research is trustworthy and makes a meaningful contribution to its field. Reviewers can be considered judges for the journals (Alfonso, 2010). For authors, the peer-review process is an opportunity to obtain non-punitive feedback, which can be in use to improve the article's scientific content and determine the accuracy and the scientific merit of the manuscript being reviewed (Kirman et al., 2019). Authors should consider the reviewer as a mentor or a peer who is acting as a representative of other scholars in the field. Authors need to consider the peer-review process as an effort to convince their peers of the importance of their findings. If authors can convince their peers in this process that their research findings are innovative, new and interesting, their manuscript is likely to be accepted at the end of the review process.

Despite the peer-review process's importance, there is surprisingly little empirically rigorous research in this area (Bornmann & Daniel, 2010; Marsh et al., 2008). Anecdotal but contemporary evidence suggests much of the prior research (cf. Castello, Pardo, Sala-Bubar´e, & Sune-Soler, 2017; Wilkins et al., 2021; Madden, Madden, Rousseau, & Woehr, 2016) has considered the procedures relates to doctoral studies' completion times, how to encourage and support doctoral students to write for publication, research methods training for doctoral students, doctoral attrition, and how best to supervise these doctoral students. Moreover, most publications on the journal peer-review process are either editorials (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2018, 2019; Gerwing & Rash, 2020) or short communications (Gerwing & Rash, 2020; Linton, 2016). Journal editors write and publish these editorials and communications to share their viewpoints on the peer-review process and how it is conducted at their specific journals. However, only a few theoretical or empirical studies published in business and management journals have considered the complete peer-review process (Mandviwalla, Patnayakuni, & Schuff, 2008).

Similarly, in most universities and business schools, formal training on understanding scholarly publishing and the peer review process is missing. Fewer efforts are devoted to include explicit content on how to understand and manage the journal peer-review process. This article is a major step in identifying this gap and motivating the research supervisors in developing the content to develop this understanding among the research faculty members, including doctoral students.

The purpose of this article is multi-faceted. First, we have provided an interactive diagram that breaks the peer-review process down into a series of steps to improve doctoral students' understanding of the procedure. Second, we have identified and listed the potential pitfalls the reviewers highlighted. Third, we have developed an appropriate multi-perspective checklist of issues to consider before submission.

The study addresses three questions on the review process ('what is'), identifying common pitfalls ('what is') and avoiding the pitfalls ('how to'). These questions were specified based on the experiences the authors of the present study gathered during their years of working as editors and editorial board members of various journals. Further exploration to collect secondary data and read the opinions of other academicians and authors of 12 published editorials and short communications validated our questions. Hence, we believe that the answers to the current study's research questions will help young researchers write academic papers and strengthen the quality of future publications. To achieve these objectives, we have addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: Considering peer/review as a process, what is the typical logical workflow of this process, and what is the difference between a micro-and a macro-peer-review process?

RQ2: What are the most common pitfalls referees identify when reviewing a manuscript submitted for possible publication?

RQ3: How should academicians —including research supervisors and research students—effectively address these pitfalls in manuscripts to minimise the chances of receiving a desk rejection or rejection decision?

This article makes the following important contributions. It will help management schools in general and authors, doctoral students, contributors, and anyone who has or expects to review or supervise such papers, in particular, understand the significance of the peer-review process and recognise the most common pitfalls or shortcomings to consider before submission. Awareness of these pitfalls, which have been identified by field experts and summarised in checklist form, will help authors (especially doctoral students) advance through the peer-review process, avoid desk rejections and minimise their chances of rejection. As we collected opinions from several experts from different business and management education fields, the findings presented in this article will be useful for various authors from different scientific fields of business and management who conduct qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method studies.

Moreover, the results of this research can be included in syllabus content and course plans, particularly seminars or workshops on research methods. The findings presented in this article will be of particular value to doctoral student supervisors in supporting their students' publishing activities as part of their professional development. The terms 'peer-review process' and 'peer-review system' have been used interchangeably, as have 'reviewers', 'experts' and 'referees'. The peer-review process is undertaken for various purposes and scopes, such as determining which articles to publish, which projects to finance and which awards to approve.

Next, we present the research methodology, describing the data sources, sampling techniques and data analysis methods used. In Section 3, we discuss the journal peer-review process, including the micro- and macro-review processes: The related findings are presented under eight sub-headings. Finally, we summarise our major findings in the Discussion and Conclusion section (Section 4).

2. Methodology

Qualitative content analysis was used because it is an appropriate method to identify and trace concepts across textual matter. As there is not enough structured former knowledge and the limited available knowledge is fragmented, the inductive approach was adopted (Schreier, 2012). We moved from the specific to the general during our explorations of the data so that we could observe, tag by code, categorise and then combine particular instances into a larger whole or general statement to answer the research questions.

To answer our what and how research questions, the unit of analysis was set as a sentence or portion of a paragraph (Robson, 1993; Schreier, 2012). We analysed only the manifest content and did not have access to the latent content (i.e., silence, sighs, laughter, posture,

etc.), because the data-gathering process was conducted using open-ended questionnaires (Robson, 1993; Morse, 1994). We designed our inductive analysis processes in two main phases: data collection and preparation, followed by analysis and narration. The data were analysed using ATLAS.ti 8 software.

2.1 Data collection and preparation

Purposive sampling was used to recruit the key informants and experts, regardless of gender. The sample population comprised current and former senior editorial board members of leading business, management and education journals, including editors-in-chief, associate editors, senior researchers and editorial board members. Participants were selected based on the following criteria and qualifications: i) having published papers in highly ranked journals; ii) having more than 15 years of research experience; iii) having been actively involved in reviewing for and served on the editorial review boards of various journals; and iv) having agreed to participate in the review process at least eight times per year. All potential participants were contacted via email or through professional and academic social networking platforms such as LinkedIn and ResearchGate.

Out of 33 candidates in the target sample pool, we communicated with 11 key experts before reaching a saturation level in our analysis. We witnessed signs of saturation after analysing the eighth case and were satisfied on the eleventh case. We considered that we had reached saturation when no new code emerged following the addition of a new questionnaire, no codes were left that did not belong to a category and there were no data items that were not linked to each other (Patton, 1990; Cavanagh, 1997).

The data collection instrument was a set of open-ended questionnaires sent to the candidates; the completed questionnaires were returned with the candidates' narrative descriptive answers written under each question. The questionnaire was designed to allow the candidate to express his/her opinion in response to the question: What weaknesses or shortcomings do you usually find in each of the manuscript sections, including the introduction, theory, quantitative method, hypothesis, methodology, findings or results, discussion, contributions, limitations, future research directions and conclusion? What improvements do you suggest to contributing authors?

The candidates were asked to share any two major weaknesses or shortcomings they found and the associated improvements they recommended for each section of an article when writing their reviews for a journal. The completed questionnaires were collected as text files (or written emails) from the candidates from October 2019 to July 2020.

In addition to the primary data, we collected secondary data, including 12 published editorials and short communications in leading journals (see Table 1). The secondary data reflects the opinions of influential authors on the process and quality of peer-review publications. The secondary sources included valuable editorials and short communications published by the editors-in-chief of mainstream journals, who shared their opinions on drafting a good article for the peer-review process. We selected those publications that were aligned with our research questions in terms of the addressed concerns. We considered both the primary and secondary data as texts to explore.

Once our data-gathering process was complete, we read the data several times (Burnard, 1991; Schreier, 2012) with our questions in mind (Dey, 1993): who is narrating, where is it

happening, what is it and why. The outcome was to understand what was going on (Morse & Field, 1995) and obtain a sense of the whole (Tesch, 1990; Burnard, 1991). We realised that the three current research questions have long been matters of concern for other academicians with whom we had a chance to communicate or whose publications we read.

2.2 Analysis and narratives

After making sense of the data, we conducted our analysis using an inductive coding approach, including open coding, creating categories (axial coding) and abstraction (Elo & Kyngas, 2017; Kyngas & Vanhanen, 1999). The open coding was conducted by reading the texts and writing memos and side notes. During open coding, headings emerged in the form of codes and notes describing the codes' meanings. The texts were read through again and headings were explored and finalised to describe all aspects of the content (Burnard 1991, 1996; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Lists of the codes are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Furthermore, the relationships between the codes were investigated and the categories were determined based thereon. For example, when the experts characterised 'clarification of findings in extending existing knowledge' as 'making a relation between theory and practice' and 'generalising the findings to other disciplines', the obtained codes indicated that the theme belonged in the 'suggestions about discussion/implications' category.

The outcome of this phase was to understand the typical logical workflow of the peer-review process and the difference between the micro- and macro-peer-review processes. Comparing the identified codes to the patterns specified in editorials enabled us to create a model of the peer-review process. Once the related codes for each category were obtained, the concept models and the code networks were developed to visually depict the relationships amongst the concepts. The results are reported in the Findings section of this article. To prepare the descriptive and narrative report of the findings, we consulted our memos and side notes and referred to the codes; this enabled us to articulate the pitfalls and present solutions to overcome them. We elaborated our findings via quotations from the texts as evidence to support our claims.

3. Findings

This section reports our findings from the qualitative analysis we used to explore the collected texts. After processing the measures explained in the Methodology section, we reached a saturation point; the codes and categories we generated during this process are discussed in the following sections. We explored two major categories, 'the journal peer-review process' and 'common pitfalls and solutions'. The first of these two was divided into three subcategories: 'submitting a paper for publication', 'the peer-review system' and 'the micro- and macro-peer-review'. The second comprised eight subcategories that represent the eight sections of a research paper, narrating common pitfalls and suggestions accordingly. The categories mentioned reflect the answers to the research questions that we identified and explored. The process, the pitfalls and then the suggestions supported by the narrative quotes from the texts are reported. The summaries of the findings and codes are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

In search of responses to the second and third questions, i.e., what are the most common pitfalls referees identify when reviewing a manuscript submitted for possible publication, and how should academia (including research supervisors and research students) effectively address these pitfalls in the manuscript to minimise the chances of receiving a desk rejection

or rejection decision, the pitfalls and suggestions for improvement in each of these eight sections were identified through the latent meanings behind the accumulated texts using inductive coding; the codes and themes used are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Figure 2 presents the model of experts' suggestions for improving an article. The concepts are displayed in orange and the codes related to each concept are displayed in yellow. For example, the 'suggestions about methodology' concept is associated with related codes, including 'rational research design', 'using appropriate methods and procedures for data collection and measurement', 'answering questions about how/what and why' and 'research design'. All connections between the codes are illustrated in Figure 2, such as the relationship between 'research design' and 'answering questions about how/what and why'. Similarly, Figure 3 presents the major weaknesses in the manuscripts, as extracted from the experts' views.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

3.1. The journal peer-review process

3.1.1 Submitting a paper for publication

Doctoral students' future career success largely depends on scholarly research (Mello, Fleisher, & Woehr, 2015). Among the most important goals for publishing an article, we can make mention to 1. scientific conversation with peers, 2. contribution in the literature on the subject and 3. the possibility of using, criticising and evaluating the results of a research. The peer-review process (sometimes called the scientific peer-review system or procedures of science) is a core aspect of scholarly publishing. The peer-review process is used by scientific work publication platforms, such as academic journals and funding agencies, to evaluate a manuscript's or proposal's efficacy and novelty. The peer-review process thus plays a significant role in the advancement and acceptance of scientific knowledge.

The peer review is broadly defined as an assessment by an independent expert of scientific material submitted for possible publication (Hernon and Schwartz, 2006). According to Wager, Godlee and Jefferson (2002), the journal peer-review process is a formal system whereby a piece of academic work (e.g. a manuscript) is carefully evaluated by people who are not involved in creating the research but are considered experts on the subject.

3.1.2 Peer-review system

Prior research (cf. Blank, 1991) has described different peer-review models. These models include the single or simple-blind review model (where a journal editor allows the reviewers to know the authors), the double-blind review model (where a journal editor allows neither the reviewers nor the authors to identify each other) and the open-review model (where a journal editor allows both the reviewers and the authors to identify each other). These days, both journal editors and funding agencies evaluating applications typically use the double-blind review model.

The decisions journal editors arrive at vary in severity and extent and divided into five major types. The first type of decision is called 'accepted without revision'. This exceedingly rare

decision means that the submitted manuscript has been reviewed and accepted for publication without any changes. The second type is called 'accepted with minor revisions'. In this decision, the reviewers and journal editors recommend some changes to the manuscript before it is formally accepted for publication. The third type of decision, 'accepted with major revision', is the most common decision. The fourth type of decision is 'reject and resubmit', in which the journal editor allows or encourages the author(s) to resubmit the work after addressing reviewer comments, despite receiving a recommendation for rejection from the reviewer. Although this type of decision is very rare, it still stands true. The fifth type of decision is rejection. The journal editor decides not to accept the manuscript for publication based on his or her analysis of the manuscript and the reviewers' feedback.

At the most fundamental level, the peer-review process aims to maintain scientific rigour by accepting good articles, suggesting improvements to articles with methodological and interpretive ambiguity, and rejecting problematic articles (Gerwing & Rash, 2020). Despite these benefits, editors and editorial board members widely agree that referee evaluation reports are advisory rather than binding (La Follette, 1983). Generally, editors or associate editors initially screen articles submitted for possible publication. Those that are found to be compatible with the journal's editorial content and are appropriate, credible and of sufficient scientific merit progress to the review process. However, after considering the volume of submissions in some journals, the geographically distributed or designated associated editors (such as for North America, Asia, Europe, or Africa) screen the submissions and recommend further actions.

The peer-review process depends on two or more external reviewers or referee reports prepared by individuals with deep and relevant expertise in the field explored in the article or the methodology used, who follow a pre-defined guidance document issued by the journal (Wilby, El Hajj, El-Bashir, & Mraiche, 2018). These external reviewers recommend the journal editor whether the manuscript should be published, revised before publication or rejected. Nonetheless, according to Koltay (2010), the classification of the external reviewers' actions includes summarising judgment regarding suitability for publication, outlining the manuscript, exercising criticism, and drawing conclusions and providing recommendations for improvements. The final decision to accept a resubmission (with minor or major changes) or reject rests with the editor.

The review process varies from journal to journal. Editors traditionally select the reviewers, although, at times, they may invite the authors to suggest potential reviewers. Nonetheless, editors are cautious (Marsh et al., 2008) about relying on author-nominated reviewers' recommendations due to the element of favouritism, which could compromise the quality of the article and the reviewers' feedback. The peer-review process usually takes approximately three to five months, depending on the reviewers' availability in the field and their timely response. If another round of revision is required, completing the peer-review process and reaching a final decision on the manuscript's fate can take over one year. The timeline for top-notch journals, for example, in the business and management field, differ and takes around two years from submission to final decision; this period also usually involves two or even three rounds of revisions. A typical publication and review process consists of several interrelated steps, which are illustrated in Figure 1. For example, the diagram illustrates that the core of the publication process lies in the author's patience, proactive approach, attitude and logical flow of activities. These activities can be divided into two stages: The first stage explains the pre-publication process, while the second stage explains the peer-review system. The pre-publication process includes several important steps, such as carefully reading the

manuscript, seeking feedback from colleagues and other researchers in your network, finding the most appropriate outlet or journal, language editing and following the author guidelines diligently. On the other hand, the peer-review system explains a typical peer-review process adopted and put in place by a journal's editors.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

3.1.3 The micro-and macro-peer-review processes

The research community generally believes that work or findings are not considered scientific until they are published in a peer-reviewed journal (Alfonso, 2010). Work submitted for possible publication in a journal does not automatically enter an external peer-review process. The micro-review process (also called desk review) allows the journal editorial team to scrutinise the manuscript internally based on three major criteria, as explained by Powell and Lindo (2019): 1) Does the manuscript fall within the aims and scope of the journal, and would it be of interest to the journal's readership?; 2) does the manuscript have any obvious flaws, for example, in the rationale, design, or interpretation of the research, which will not stand up to reviewer scrutiny? And 3) has the scientific work been described in a way that will allow the reviewers to assess it fairly? A number of submissions are usually desk-rejected at this stage of the review process within the first two weeks after submission, depending on the volume (quantity) and value (quality) of submissions to a specific journal.

Manuscripts that pass the micro-review are sent out for the macro- or external peer-review. Academic journals are critically dependent on high-quality reviews submitted by independent experts in the field. Therefore, the opinions received from the external reviewers are considered critical to journal editors' decision-making process and support academic citizenship.

3.2 Common pitfalls and solutions

3.2.1 Introduction section

When reviewing the introduction section, experts ask five key questions:

    1) To what extent does this manuscript match the scope of the journal?

    2) Why is the topic of the paper important?

    3) What kind of knowledge can I gain from this manuscript?

    4) Did the author explicitly define the purpose and scope of the study?

    5) Are the research questions articulated properly?

The experts surveyed, however, drew authors' attention to the presence of a logical flow of activities and a classical structure of the introduction section, which consists of five steps (see USC Libraries, 2017): First, define and introduce your phenomenon of interest and make a case for why studying the phenomenon is important; second, describe the complexities and practical challenges associated with your phenomenon of interest; third, identify and explain the gaps in the existing literature, for example, by problematising the prior literature and the

potential benefits of addressing them and/or negative consequences of not addressing them (also see Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011); fourth, describe the purpose and potential contributions of your study; and fifth, formally state your research question(s).

Some pitfalls stressed by the experts regarding the Introduction section are a lack of coherence and flow in the introduction and a failure to address the main components of the introduction. One of the experts made the valuable point that the important components expected to be included in the Introduction are as follows: 'Refine the storyline. Use: what the problem is, why it is a problem and 'so what?' (what is the big deal you are addressing?)'. Authors often fail to address the research incentives and value of the study, such as stating the assumptions and limitations of previous studies or citing some statistics to support the value of the research. One expert commented:

> The introduction should clearly mention the value of the paper and introduce some stats, sources that support that the research statement will be a value of investigation.

Presenting the research gap to formulate research questions can also be considered a research incentive. The research gap points to evidence demonstrating that, despite the importance of the present research problem or question as emphasised in the literature, it has not yet been addressed and answered. For example, one can refer to studies pointing to the necessity of conducting such a study in their recommendations for future studies section. Another expert mentioned:

> [A] good introduction section, besides the overview, should [include] a brief synthesis of literature to [cover] what has been done, what is yet to be done, [and] its importance to literature and practice. This will naturally open the research gap.

Lack of a clear definition of the research topic, research questions, or research objectives are also frequent problems. One respondent asserted that

> Research objectives should not be broad but be succinct, concise and straight to the point. …. One objective with two to three max research questions. And follow these questions throughout the paper until you answer them.

A lengthy introduction and neglecting to present the study's organisation in the last paragraph of the introduction are also considered failures in an article.

3.2.2 Literature review/theory section

The review of the literature is not a summary of previous studies, and the purpose is not to convince the readers that you know the field of study; rather, it is a critical synthesised report of the reviewed literature so that traces of critique and the researcher's voice can be seen in the report. One expert commented:

> Go beyond description by [presenting] a critical comparison/contrasts of findings. Build tables sometimes, that allow [your readers] to perceive what

[has] been done and how [your work] is different compared to what [other scholars have done].

Another pitfall is failing to do a thorough literature review or using out-of-date sources, ignoring current developments in the field of study and causes one's paper to lack coherence and cohesion. Using old sources, citing invalid sources (low-ranked journals) and having lengthy, non-linear and incoherent text harm the literature review section. Moreover, it is highly advisable to supplement the literature review or theory section with a conceptual framework, figure, or model to convey the article's story visually. The experts surveyed also suggested that authors sometimes review literature that has no bearing on the problem under study or fail to position the study topic within relevant theoretical debates.

The major issues reported in the theory section are that authors fail to identify the key theory(ies) driving the study. The initial conceptual model of the study is not derived from a basic theory or theories: Our experts commented that authors should:

> …refine the storyline to identify the best theoretical underpinning' and 'a good Literature Review section should not only identify the driving theory but…explore the various components including contextual applications and results.

Failure to justify selecting theory, lack thereof and presenting different theories without explaining the connections between them are some other pitfalls of the theory section. Sometimes, research addresses issues that are not related to the important and basic contemporary theories, highlighting others irrelevant to the current theoretical discourse. A good theory section clearly articulates a strong theoretical and conceptual foundation. Theory that is borrowed or original is acceptable and welcomed by reviewers and journal editors.

3.2.3 Hypothesis section

A conceptual model is a representation of a theory or synthesised theories. The hypothesis can be defined in three types of research: whether the researchers seek to describe the phenomenon (descriptive); whether they seek to understand the interplay between the factors (relational); or whether they seek to draw higher-level conclusions through comparison across populations, contexts, times or methods, and so on (comparative) (Hanafizadeh, Keating, & Khedmatgozar, 2014).

In relational research, a conceptual model consists of several variables, factors or antecedents, which fall into three major categories: dependent variables, independent variables and outcome variables. A conceptual model depicts the direct, indirect, mediating and moderating relationships between two or more variables. One of the experts valuably advised:

> Ensure that [the] hypotheses clearly [link] two concepts and only three when there is a moderator.

In the theory section, these relationships should be properly justified and explained in light of the prior literature and the context of the technology or phenomenon under study. Thus, the experts noted that hypotheses should have a supporting theoretical background; the following statement is a representative example of their comments in this regard:

Provide relevant literature, theory and examples, even from the same context of the study or other relevant contexts or fields to provide logic for the hypotheses proposed.

The experts identified a few more pitfalls in the hypothesis section. For example, this section sometimes lacks a thorough literature synthesis. Some authors also fail to present the relationships and results of previous studies related to their present study. In contrast, others lack a supporting theory, literature, evidence for the hypothesis or a clear, logical build-up to the hypothesis. One expert advised that:

…authors should be mindful of the usefulness of logical reasoning.

Hypotheses must be based on theoretical bases and findings of previous studies or empirical evidence, presented and discussed clearly. Usually, hypotheses based on theory can be easily explained and argued, while those presented without any theories need strong argumentative support and evidence. There are cases where hypotheses are formulated without theoretical underpinnings or a clear rationale, only based on the critique and evaluation of previous studies' results or empirical findings. The experts surveyed believed that such hypotheses might suffer from a lack of logical argumentation and are not attractive, particularly to editors and reviewers.

3.2.4 Methodology section

Here reviewers look for rigour and the appropriateness of the method used. Therefore, the research methodology section needs special attention from the authors. Authors avoid providing text-book explanations of their research type, their chosen approach/methodology and method. While authors avoid generalisations, experts advise them to provide detailed explanations in accordance with the nature of the research topic. For complex methodologies, our experts using 'a diagram of the steps completed'.

After aggregating the experts' views, we observed that authors sometimes fail to provide important details. Such omissions include explanations of the protocol or survey design, the pre-testing strategy (for example, for scale-testing purposes), how and when the data were collected, measurement scales and the sampling procedure. Improper use of data processing methods is one of the issues emphasised by most experts. The rationale of the data collection method is also an important issue that should be appropriately justified in this section. One expert recommended that

[the] sampling procedure should be explained clearly and logically, including the rationale for its choice. I once reviewed a manuscript that did not indicate the software used to analyse the data. It is not enough to include the type of software used for the data analysis; …the particular version [must also be indicated].

The experts also discussed deficiencies in the research methodology section, especially concerning the research design. For example, the research design may lack a theory development phase or a validation phase (validation is different from testing). Authors need to explain why following the research design leads to answering research questions and explaining how they use it. Inconsistencies in research designs have also been observed. Nonetheless, Phillips (2019) was more sceptical when it came to the methodology section. In

one of his editorial notes written for the *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, Phillips suggested that authors must 'state the methodology to be used, and use the methodology… stated' (2019, p. 2). According to Phillips' opinion, empirical studies should separately describe the methodology for data collection and data analysis. Any pitfalls in the methodology section could lead to the rejection of the manuscript.

3.2.5 Findings section

The feedback collected from the experts suggests that the findings section should not be unnecessarily long, and it should not report the findings of other studies unless those findings support their own findings. Authors are expected to describe their studies' findings in their own words based on data processing and testing. It is, however, highly advisable to use tables and figures to display the findings for the benefit of the readership visually. The experts believed that authors did not link the findings to the data analyses or support their interpretive claims with empirical evidence. They also noted that the use of empirical evidence was sometimes not supported by the theoretical narrative or the logic of interpretation. The referees often found misalignments between data and theory in the findings section.

In this section, the experts argued that the reader expects to find the answer to the research question(s) presented convincingly:

> Refine the storyline by explaining why we should trust/accept the findings.

Another expert emphasised that the findings must be presented in such a way that the reader trusts the results and that the discussion creates a credible insight. The results of the study should also provide new insights regarding the research topic and questions. Points appropriate to the discussion section are sometimes mistakenly presented in the findings section or interwoven with it. One weakness pointed by the experts regarding the findings section is that results are often not presented straightforwardly; sometimes, even the interpretation of statistical analyses is not presented but left to the reader. However, readers are usually lazy-minded. In this regard, one of the experts commented:

> Good manuscripts also tie the findings to the data analyses, [which] should also naturally confirm or disprove the hypothesised relationships.

The analysis and interpretation of the findings related to the research question(s) are the authors' main responsibility in this section. In a nutshell, the respondents recommended that authors never put the burden of interpretation on the readers' shoulders.

3.2.6 Discussion section

The discussion section needs to mirror the study's findings. One of our experts believed that authors should ensure that their discussion is related to the purpose/objectives of the study. Authors should explain how their findings extend existing knowledge and how their findings can be generalised to other settings outside the domain of their study. As previously stated, another expert argued that authors:

> …must tell the audience why they should care for the findings. [In other words,] what is the most important part of the paper/research.'

However, the layout of the discussion section remains a point of contention among various scholars. Some provide a single section entitled 'discussion and conclusion'. A few divide the discussion section into various sub-sections, such as theoretical implications, managerial implications and social implications, separating their conclusions into a different section. One expert explicitly mentioned that authors must:

> discuss the results in relation to [their] theoretical foundation and…research statement. [They must] discuss the results of [their] own study and not anything else, and show their implications [for] theory and…practice.

According to the experts, any developed or tested theory should be evaluated and compared to competing theories in the subsection on theory implications. The proposed theory's similarity to competing theories indicates that the findings will align with the body of extant research. A proposed theory should involve the emergent and essential properties or concepts of the research topic. For example, one expert believed that:

> the study must also tie to existing discourses on the theory. Again, the paper must answer the question such as what has this paper added, challenged or contributed to previous knowledge… .

Furthermore, it is expected that differences between a proposed theory and competing theories highlight the advantages and contribution of the proposed theory. In other words, the researcher should be able to argue that the differences in a proposed theory are meant to resolve the deficiencies of competing theories.

Some experts also believe it is necessary to provide real-world evidence to support and validate a study's results in a sub-section entitled 'implications for practice'. For example, suppose that there are traces of the application of previous research findings contributing to a study's findings' success or realisation in the real world: This could be considered evidence of the new study's practical validity. One of our experts emphasised that:

> the critical aspects must [include] how the study contributes to extant business practices. The author must seek to answer the question 'what can managers learn from this study?'

The latter structure looks more promising, appropriate and scientific than the former. Likewise, from the reviewers' perspective, dividing the discussion section into these sub-sections is easier to read and comprehend, thereby increasing the authors' chances of receiving a favourable decision from the reviewer. Nonetheless, in either of these settings, the experts explained that the discussion and conclusion section should reiterate the study's findings and explain the results in light of the previous findings, either by supporting them or challenging them. Restating the findings in the same or even similar words as the findings section weakens this part. The experts also stressed answering the research questions in the conclusion section—using different words, of course—and that authors should explain the study's main implications or contributions (theoretical, managerial and social). Recently, reviewers and editors have strongly encouraged including a discussion of social implications, so authors should consider doing so.

No research is without limitations or barriers, so these issues should be explicitly explained in a manuscript's Conclusions section. While reviewing the articles, some experts found that authors were not conscious of their studies' limitations. One of our experts mentioned that:

> [authors must] ensure that [they] are aware of the limitations of [their] study and that these limitations can open the door for future research agenda without minimising the [value added by their] own paper.

In line with the limitations, the authors should present a future research agenda to offset those limitations and provide a glimpse of the future of their field of research. Reviewers do not look favourably on the authors' failure to mention the assumptions of their research outcomes.

3.2.7 Reference list

The list of references should be considered carefully. Having a long list of references is not appropriate for an article. The following points should be considered. 1) The presence of predatory journals in the list of references is considered highly inappropriate by reviewers and editors. 2) Although there are a few exceptions, most established journal editors do not like to see conference proceedings or internet resources in the list of references unless they are deemed necessary due to the study's objectives and scope. Therefore, authors should consider primarily including journal articles from prestigious journals which have gone through a rigorous peer-review process. Other issues include failure to follow referencing instructions fully, failure to arrange the references alphabetically, lack of relevant references in the text or reference list, references in the reference list which are not available in text form or otherwise, failure to cite literature published in the last five years or failure to use highly ranked sources, such as A* and A (ABDC) or 4*, 4, 3, 2 (ABS/AJG) or Q1, Q2 (Scimago), particularly when an author has borrowed their theory(ies) from such a source. Failure to observe a journal's guidelines, especially concerning citation and referencing, is another pitfall. Observing the journal's standards and structure usually makes a positive impression on the editor or associate editor. It implies that the article has been developed for that journal from the beginning. One of our experts offered the following suggestion:

> Read the 'instruction for authors' to be guided on what to do with the references. Since there is no assurance that your paper will be accepted by the journal, I would recommend the use of citation software such as Mendeley, EndNote, etc. It is always easier to change the styles of both the in-text [references] and reference list to suit the specific journal.

3.2.8 Other improvements

In short communication articles, some editors have expressed particular concern about the study's title and suggested a few insights. For example, in their opinion, the study's title is no less important than any section of the study and should be short, crisp, jargon-free, eye-catching and thought-provoking. Along the same lines, experts also observed that abstracts were sometimes inappropriately drafted: They explained that the abstract is one of the most important components of the manuscript and contains essential information, but they found that authors often failed to utilise the allowed word count from the target journal when drafting their abstracts. At a minimum, an abstract should anchor the reader by including the purpose, research gaps, research methodology, major findings and contributions.

Before submitting an article for publication, every author should read the target journal's author guidelines diligently and follow them carefully. Every journal maintains its flavour and scope. One-size-fits-all does not apply in the scientific publication process. Any manuscript that does not fit within the target journal's scope should be redirected to other more appropriate and relevant journals. To improve the manuscript's comprehensibility, having the article edited by a professional language editor and then proofread by a native speaker of English familiar with the topic under study to ensure that the ideas are not lost in editing is highly advisable.

In a few of the experts' opinions, it was noticed that some doctoral students approach the editorial office to seek an opinion on the appropriateness of the research idea or manuscript with the journal scope and objectives. Discouraging this practice, Phillips (2019) instead suggested that the submissions should be made. If the article does not suit the journal's scope, the same shall come in the form of feedback and a decision from the editorial office.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The journal peer-review process provides several benefits to journal editors and authors and is increasingly synonymous with being scientifically sound and approved. Originating in the mid-1600s, the peer-review process has undergone many changes and improvements over the centuries. Journal editors have realised how indispensable the process is to advancing and enhancing existing knowledge and screening articles for quality, credibility and meaningful contributions.

After listening to young scholars' viewpoints and concerns, we realised that a rejection decision is deeply disappointing to many authors, especially when striving to produce and submit their best work for publication. To offer some relief to young scholars, the purpose of this article is to streamline young scholars' understanding of the peer-review process with the help of an interactive diagram, a list of the potential pitfalls identified by reviewers and a checklist to review before submission. The data were collected from multiple primary and secondary sources. The data analysis suggests that authors should understand what each section of a manuscript is supposed to accomplish. This study's major results are summarised in Tables 4 and 5 in the form of a checklist, which could be useful for young scholars when drafting manuscripts for publication.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

[Insert Table 5 about here]

The experts who participated in this research generally agreed that writing and publishing a good academic or scientific article is daunting. In addition, the expert's viewpoint suggests that formal training on research & publication should remain a major component of doctoral education, the fact which is endorsed by prior research (cf. Madden et al., 2016).

Most experts considered the abstract and the introduction to be the most important sections in a manuscript. They establish the groundwork and explain why a study is important and worthy of publication. As Roggeveen and Sethuraman (2018, p. 2) explained, the questions contributing authors should address in the introduction section include the following: Why does this research matter? Is the research question interesting and important? Does the research helps shed light on an unresolved issue? Will the findings add theoretically or

conceptually to extant literature? Failure to answer these questions makes the manuscript less likely to be cited by other authors and suggests that the manuscript is enigmatic and egocentric. Such manuscripts often leave reviewers wondering why the study is important.

Moreover, when targeting a well-respected established journal, authors must meet even more stringent criteria. For example, research scholars should use the most rigorous and appropriate methods to collect and analyse their data and report their findings, and an article must fall within the journal's scope. Any overlapping with existing literature should be kept to a minimum. Articles should be subjected to a thorough language edit, and must fully comply with author guidelines.

Here, the role played by teachers and supervisors is paramount. A research culture could be developed through a systematic approach involving short workshops, seminars, conferences (including meet-the-editor sessions), training and access to the most up-to-date scholarly database or resources. Such a research culture should enable research faculty members and research students to understand the scientific research and publication process. These efforts could be supplemented by faculty including the scholarly publishing and/or journal peer-review process in the taught components of doctoral programs in the business and management field.

In summary, research faculty and young scholars should continue improving their skills and consider the peer-review process as a help rather than a hindrance. After all, writing and publishing require proper planning, patience, devotion, rigor and the purpose of scientific research to inform and impress.

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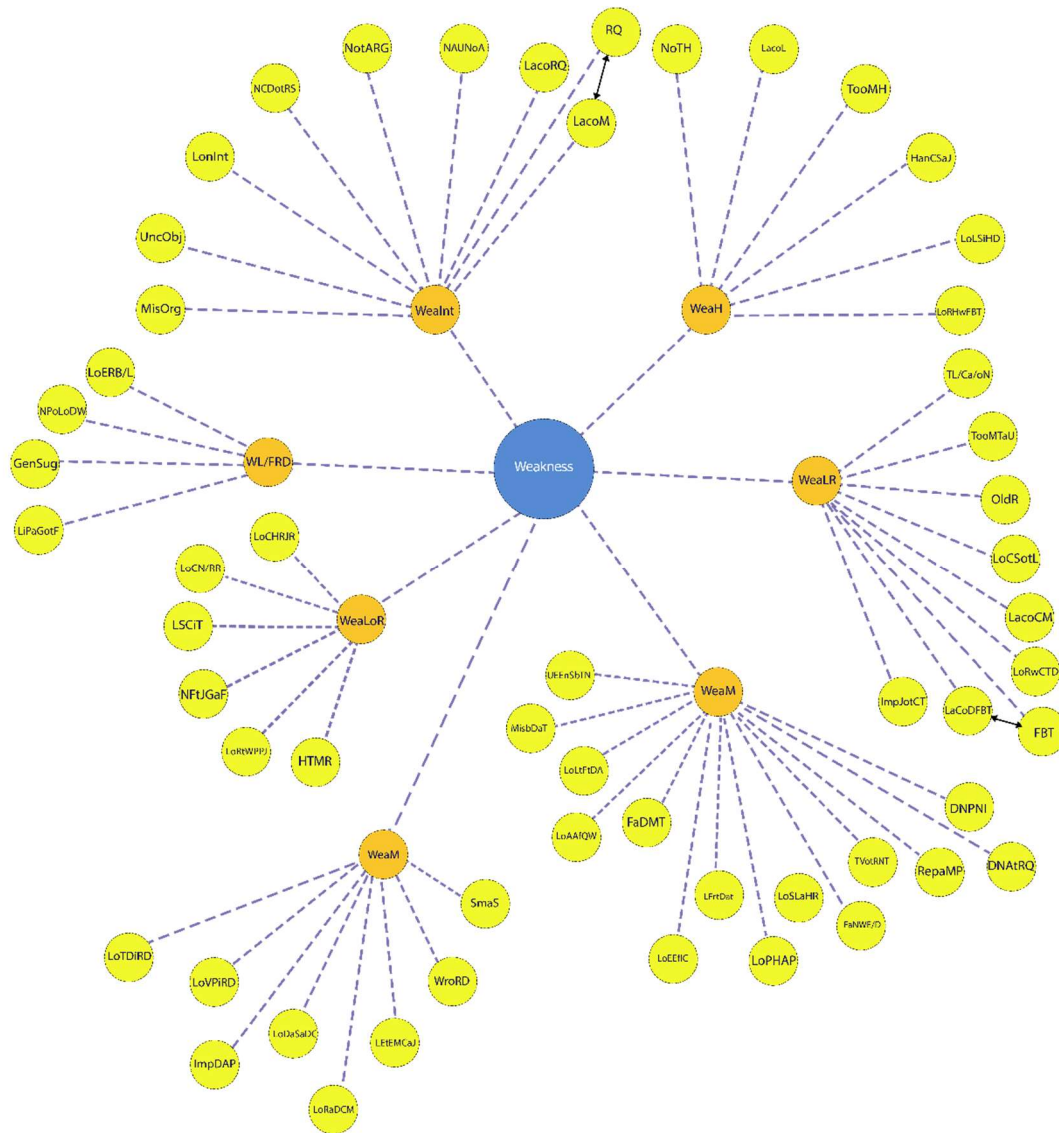
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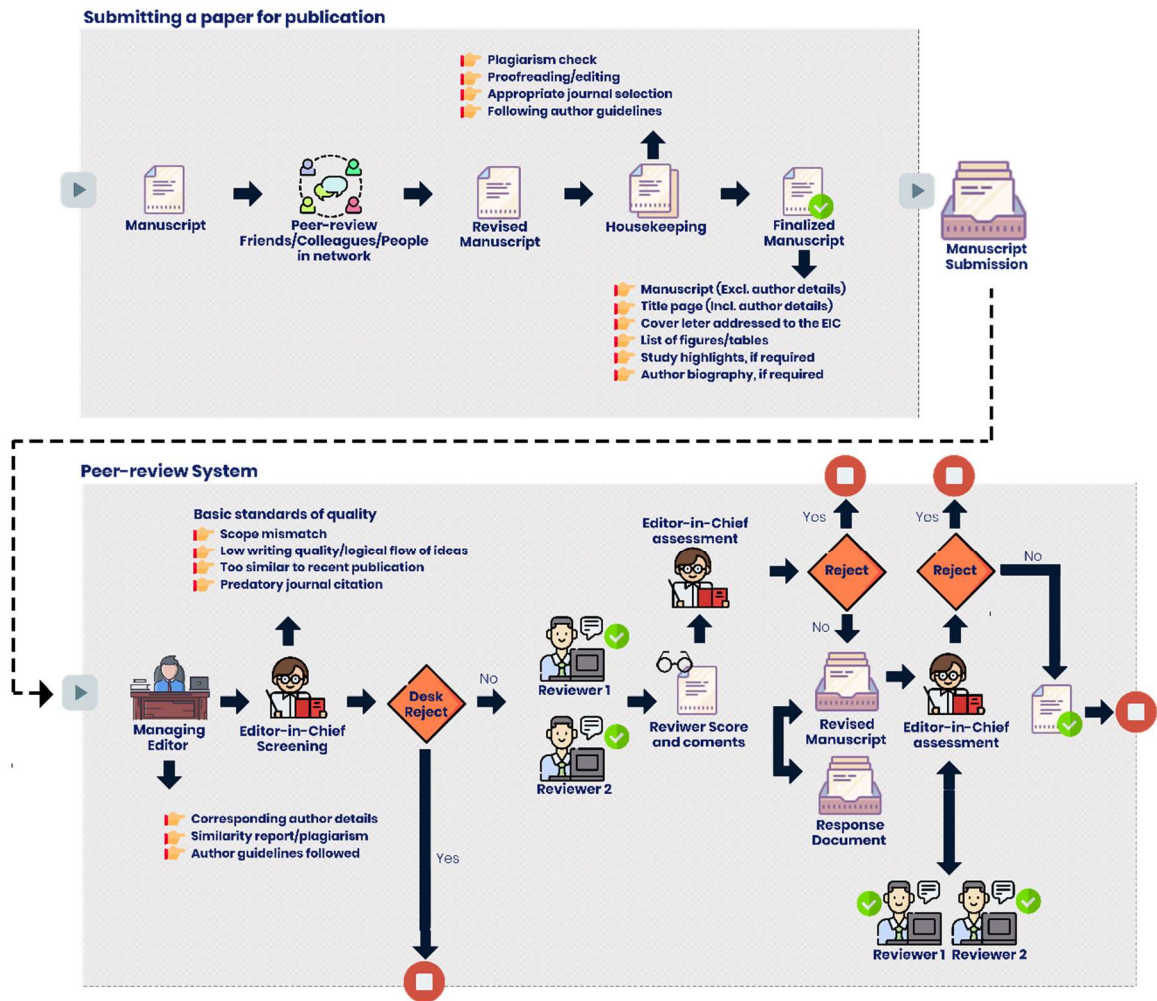
Figure 2: Key suggestions from the experts
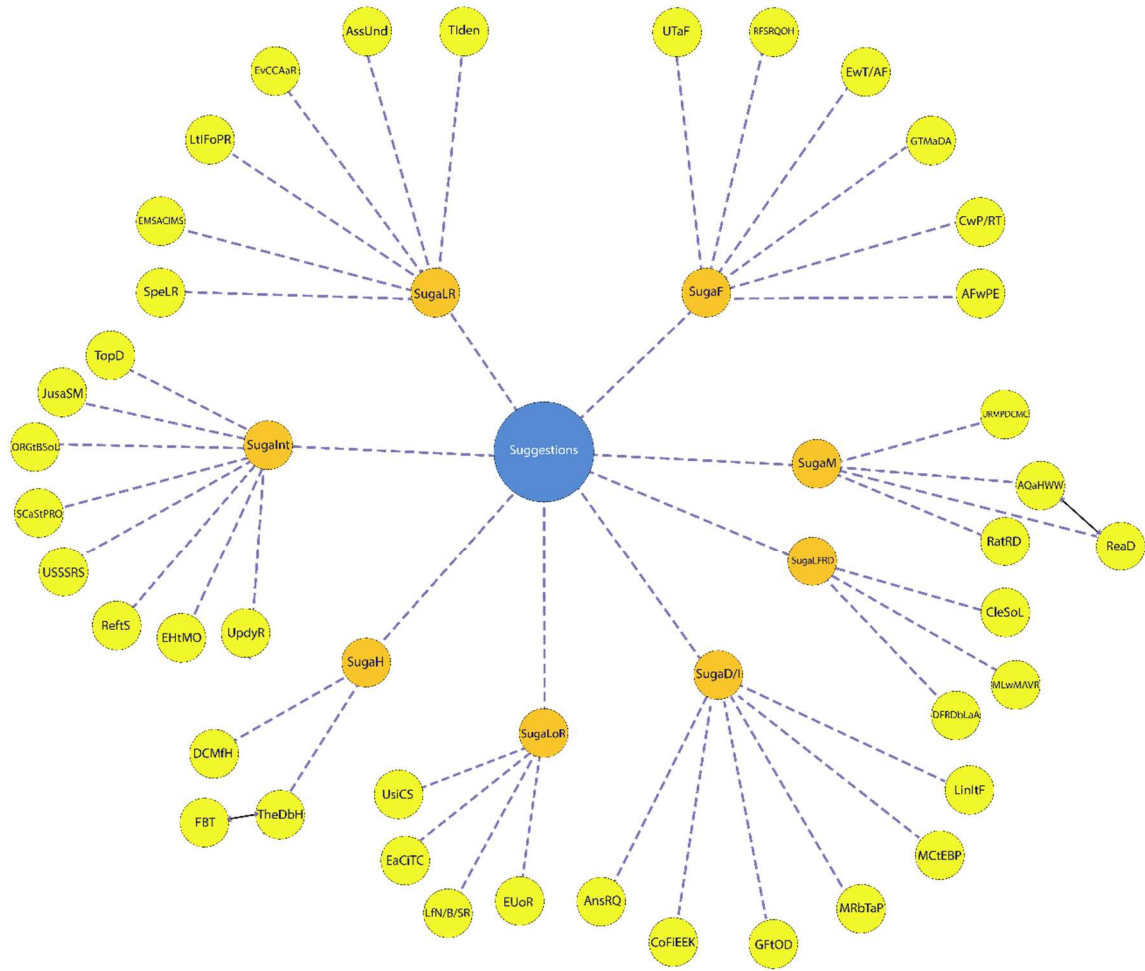
Figure 3: Major weaknesses in the manuscripts as identified by the experts

List of Tables

Table 1: Editorials and short communications included in this article

S#	Citation	Title of the study	Publisher	Nature
1.	Gerwing & Rash (2020)	Constructive and Collegial Peer-Review as a Necessary Precursor to Data-Driven Environmental Policy	*Marine Policy*	Short Communication
2.	Roggeveen & Sethuraman (2019)	From Manuscript Submission to Article Publication: Shedding Light on the Review Process in Journal of Retailing	*Journal of Retailing*	Editorial
3.	Powell & Lindo (2019)	A Review of Peer-Review for *Pedobiologia–Journal of Soil Ecology*	*Pedobiologia*	Editorial
4.	Jull & Moore (2019)	The Peer Review Process: Giving and Receiving Advice	*Musculoskeletal Science and Practice*	Editorial
5.	Justman (2019)	A Necessary Complement to Transparent Peer Review: Editorial Transparency	*Cell Systems*	Editorial
6.	Roggeveen & Sethuraman (2018)	Understanding the JR Heritage, Publishing in JR, and the Evolving Retail Field	*Journal of Retailing*	Editorial
7.	Linton (2016)	Improving the Peer Review Process: Capturing More Information and Enabling High-Risk/High-Return Research	*Research Policy*	Short Communication
8.	Alfonso-Kaspar (2013)	The Integrity of Editing, Peer Reviewing and Authoring.	*The Journal of Academic Librarianship*	Editorial
9.	Mungra & Webber (2010)	Peer Review Process in Medical Research Publications: Language and Content Comments	*English for Specific Purposes*	Short Communication
10.	Hernon & Schwartz (2006)	Peer review revisited	*Library & Information Science Research*	Editorial
11.	Kohl (2007)	Peer review and the academic "Twelfth Man"	*The Journal of Academic Librarianship*	Editorial
12	Lindgreen and Di Benedetto (2020)	How reviewers really judge manuscripts?	*Industrial Marketing Management*	Editorial

Table 2: Key suggestions from the experts

Parent Node	Abbreviation	Node Phrase
SugaM	URMPDCMC	Using appropriate methods & procedures for data collection & measurement
	AQaHWW	Answering questions about how/what and why
	RatRD	Rationale research design
	ReaD	Research design
SugaLFRD	CleSoL	Clearly statement of limitations
	MLwMAVR	Mentioning limitations without minimizing the adding-value of research
	DFRDbLaA	Suggesting future research directions based on limitations & assumptions
SugaD/I	LinItF	Link implications to findings
	MCtEBP	Make contribution to extant business practices
	MRbTaP	Making relation between theory and practice
	GFtOD	Generalizing findings to other disciplines
	CoFiEEK	Clarification of findings in extending existing knowledge
	AnsRQ	Answering research questions
SugaLoR	EUoR	Explained use of references
	LfN/B/SR	Look for new/best/strongest references
	EaCiTC	Ensure that all the citations in text are considered
	UsiCS	Using citation software
SugaH	TheDbH	Theory development before hypothesizing
	DCMfH	Deriving conceptual models from hypothesis
SugaInt	UpdyR	Update your references (check author guidelines diligently)
	EHtMO	Explain how the manuscript is organized
	ReftS	Refine the storyline
	USSSRS	Using stats, resources that support the research statement
	SCaStPRO	Succinct, concise and straight to the point research objectives
	ORGtBSoL	Opening the research gap thorough a brief synthesis of literature
	JusaSM	Justification about subject matters
	TopD	Topic description
SugaLR	SpeLR	Specific literature review
	EMSACIMS	Ensure that key sources and authors are cited
	LtIFoPR	Acknowledging the ideas and findings of previous research
	EvCCAaR	Exploring the various components including contextual applications and results
	AssUnd	Assumptions understanding
	TIden	Theory identification
SugaF	UTaF	Use tables, figures, appendix (where necessary)
	RFSRQOH	Follow the sequence such as research questions, objectives, hypothesis, etc.
	EwT/AF	Explaining why we should trust/accept the findings
	GTMaDA	Good tie between the manuscripts and data analysis
	CwP/RT	Comparison with previous/rival theories
	AFwPE	Aligning findings with practical evidence

Notes: SugaM, Suggestions about methodology; SugaLFRD, Suggestions about limitations/future research directions; SugaD/I, Suggestions about discussion/implications; SugaLoR, Suggestions about list of reference; SugaH, Suggestions about Hypothesis; SugaInt, Suggestions about introduction; SugaLR, Suggestions about literature review; SugaF, Suggestions about findings

Table 3: Major weaknesses in the manuscripts as identified by the experts

Parent Node	Abbreviation	Node Phrase
WeaH	NoTH	No testable hypothesis
	LacoL	Lack of logic
	TooMH	Too many hypothesis
	HanCSaJ	Hypothesis are not clearly stated and justified
	LoLSiHD	Lack of literature synthesis in hypothesis development
	LoRHwFBT	Lack of relating hypotheses with FBT
WeaLR	TL/Ca/oN	Too long/confused and/or nonlinear
	TooMTU	Too many theories used
	OldR	Old references
	LoCSotL	Lack of critical synthesis of the literature
	LacoCM	Lack of conceptual model
	LoRwCTD	Lack of relevancy with current theoretical debates
	LacoDFBT	Lack of determining FBT
	ImpJotCT	Improper justification of the chosen theory
WeaInt	LacoM	Lack of motivation
	LacoRQ	Lack of research question
	NAUNoA	Not addressing Urgent need of attention
	NotARG	Not addressing research gap
	NCDotRS	No clear definition of the research stat
	LonInt	Long introduction
	UncObj	Unclear objectives
	MisOrg	Missing organization
WeaL/FRD	LoERB/L	Lack of explaining research barriers/limitations
	NPoLoDW	No presentation of limitations or future work
	GenSug	General suggestions
	LiPaGotF	Lack in providing a glimpse of the future
WeaLoR	LoCHRJR	Lack of considering high ranked journals references
	LoCN/RR	Lack of considering new/relevant references
	LSCiT	Lacking sources cited in the text
	NFtJGaF	Not following the journal guidelines and formatting
	LoRtWPPJ	Lack of reffering to work previously published in the journal
	HTMR	Having too many references
WeaM	LoTDiRD	Lack of theory development in research design
	LoVPiRD	Lack of validation phase in research design
	ImpDAP	Improper data analysis procedures
	LoDaSaDC	Lack of detail about sampling and data collection
	LoRaDCM	Lack of the rationale about data collection method
	LEtEMCaJ	Lack of effort to explain methodological choices and justify them
	WroRD	Wrong research design
	SmaS	Small samples
WeaF	UEEnSbTN	Use of empirical evidence not supported by theoretical narrative
	MisbDaT	Misalignment between data and theory
	LoLtFtDA	Lack of linking the findings to the data analyze
	LoAAfQW	Lack of adequate analysis for qualitative works
	FaDMT	Findings and discussion mixed together
	LoEEfIC	Lack of empirical evidence for interpretative claims------------ Interpretive claims
	LFrtDat	Listing findings rather than discussing about them
	LoPHAP	Lack of post hoc analyses particularly

LoSLaHR	Lack of structure, long and hard to read
FaNWE/D	Findings are not well elaborated/discussed
TVotRNT	The validity of the results are not tested
RepaMP	Repetitive and monotonous presentation
DNAtRQ	Does not answer the research question
DNPNI	Do not provide new insights

Notes: WeaH, Weak hypothesis; WeaLR,Weak literature review; WeaF, Weak findings; WeaM, Weak methodology; WeaLoR, Weak list of references; WeaL/FRD, Weak limitations/future research directions; WeaInt,Weak introduction.

Table 4: Checklist for Contributing Authors

	Section	Description
Pre-submission		
1		[ ] Did you check the target journal's purpose and scope? Does this manuscript match the scope of the journal? If unsure, email the editor and seek his or her opinion to save time and lower the chances of receiving a desk rejection.
		[ ] Did you format the manuscript according to the target journal's requirements (including citation style, list of references, general manuscript layout and lists of tables and figures)?
		[ ] Did you check the plagiarism/similarity percentage? (The lower the better, but most journals prefer less than 15 percent. Check the author guidelines carefully or email the editor for a quick confirmation.)
		[ ] Has your manuscript been edited by a professional language editor? (Ensure that you obtain an editing certificate from the language editor.)
		[ ] Did you prepare a cover letter addressed to the editor-in-chief explaining why your research is worthy of publication in his or her journal?
Manuscript design and layout		
1	Title of the study	[ ] Is the title short, crisp, jargon-free and compelling?
		[ ] Did you delete the name of the country where the research was conducted from the title of the study to increase the generalisability of the study?
		[ ] Does your title comply with the author guidelines?
2	Abstract	[ ] Did you carefully follow the author guidelines on how to write an abstract?
		[ ] Have you utilised most or all of the word count allowed by the target journal?
		[ ] Does your abstract anchor include the purpose of the study, research gap, research methodology, major findings and major contribution?
3	Introduction	[ ] Did you explain the context of the study (e.g. the problem or opportunity)?
		[ ] Did you establish the motivation and purpose of your paper?
		[ ] Did you define the key terms or concepts outlined in the introduction section?
		[ ] Are the research questions articulated properly?
		[ ] Does the research help shed light on an unresolved managerial issue? Explain briefly.
		[ ] Will the findings add theoretically or conceptually to extant literature? Explain briefly.
4	Literature review/theory	[ ] Did you identify the key theory/theories driving the study?

		[ ] Is the review done thoroughly and supported by contemporary literature, thereby considering the current developments in the field of study?
		[ ] If the research has been conducted in a specific country or company context, have you included a brief description of the country or company?
		[ ] Did you supplement the literature review or theory section with a conceptual framework, figure or model in order to convey the core theme of the article visually?
5	Hypotheses (survey studies)	[ ] Do you present a supporting theoretical background for the hypotheses developed for this research? [ ] Have you justified the hypothesised relationship between variables in light of the prior relevant literature? [ ] Did you define the key constructs used in the conceptual model?
6	Methodology (data collection and analysis)	[ ] Have you explained what type of data (online or offline, qualitative or quantitative, internal or external, primary or secondary or both) you considered? [ ] Did you include each and every step you performed with regard to data collection (location, language, duration, timing), sampling, data analysis, survey and interview protocol design and pre-testing (when and how)? [ ] If the research design has a theory development or validation phase, have you explained it? [ ] Did you explain your use of a single- or multi-method approach?
7	Results/ findings	[ ] Does your findings section appropriately answer all of the research questions? [ ] Have you used the tables and figures to visually display the findings of the study, if necessary?
8	Discussion and conclusion	[ ] Have you divided the discussion and conclusion section into different sub-sections, such as theoretical implications, managerial implications, social implications, limitations and future research directions? [ ] Does the discussion section reiterate the study findings and explain the results in view of the previous findings, whether supporting or challenging them?
9	List of references	[ ] Does the list of references contain any predatory journals? [ ] Have you cited too many conference proceedings and internet resources? [ ] Have you followed the referencing instructions? Are the references arranged alphabetically? Have you included articles published in the last five years? [ ] Does the list of references include highly ranked references, such as A* and A (ABDC) or 4, 3, 2 (ABS) or Q1, Q2 (Scimago)?

Table 5: Checklist to avoid the desk-reject

	Description
1.	Too few or no citations of related papers in the target journal.
2.	High similarity/plagiarism score, suggesting excessive use of passages published elsewhere.
3.	An ample number of papers on this topic have already been submitted to the target journal, or the topic of the manuscript has been covered adequately by recent articles.
4.	Paper should be re-submitted as a different article type.
5.	Awkward or ungrammatical English would bias reviewers against this paper.
6.	The paper is not written at the level demanded by our readers, editors and reviewers.
7.	The research contribution is too incremental or too narrow in its applicability.
8.	The research paper or research note lacks a clear statement of the research question, and/or a statement of data collection or analytic technique which will be used to answer it.
9.	The importance of the research question is not well established.
10.	The paper is unnecessarily long.
11	The topic is already well developed and/or the problem has been solved in prior literature.
12.	Technology focus is missing or at most incidental to this research.
13	Insufficient sample size.
14.	Concept or model is presented without test.
15.	The language used in the paper is too specialised for our interdisciplinary audience.
16.	The Research Highlights and/or the Abstract does not conform to target journal guidelines.
17.	The title is too long, does not describe the paper's content, is obscurely phrased, ungrammatical and/or uses acronyms.
18.	Paper falls outside of, or is at best peripheral to, TF&SC's theme and scope.
19.	Conclusions are common-sense or broadly obvious, even without benefit of research.

Note: Checklist modified from Phillips (2019).