Industrial Marketing Management 68 (2018) 202–209

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Industrial Marketing Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/indmarman

Research paper

How to write really good articles for premier academic journals

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Academic writing
Publication success rate

ABSTRACT

Most of the leading journals in all fields routinely have rejection rates of 80%, 95%, or higher. All journals prefer articles that make significant contributions to the field. This article discusses ways of how authors can improve their publishing success. We discuss the up-front end of an article (title, abstract, keywords). Specifically, three types of abstracts are considered: the indicative (descriptive) abstract, the informative abstract, and the structured abstract. Subsequently, we discuss the article's introduction that serves four purposes: to focus the reader on the research question or purpose; to establish the proper frame of reference for the reader; to demonstrate the gap in knowledge that the research will fill; and to convince the reader that there is justification for undertaking the research. Then we discuss hypotheses and methodology. Regarding the methodology, we consider methodological considerations and analysis considerations. The final part of the article considers the research findings section and the discussion of these findings, as well as limitations to the research and opportunities for future research. Specifically, the discussion links back to the article's introduction. Dos and don'ts are offered for each of the article's sections. Throughout the article we present means of doing research of the manuscript to improve the manuscript and its probability of acceptance.

1. Introduction

Since its inaugural issue, *Industrial Marketing Management* has grown substantially in both qualitative and quantitative metrics. With the introduction of the Google Scholar search engine, new citation counts offer an alternative measure of journal impact and thus additional insights to those offered by the Thomson ISI Impact Factor. In 2009 and again in 2010, articles ranking marketing journals according to Google Scholar citations placed *Industrial Marketing Management* 5th out of 69 journals (Soutar & Murphy, 2009; Touzani & Moussa, 2010); its Google Scholar ranking was third among all marketing journals in 2015. Leonidou, Barnes, Spyropoulou, and Katsikeas (2010) show IMM as making the largest contribution of leading mainstream marketing journals to the international marketing discipline.

Three reasons for the continued increase in quality and influence of *Industrial Marketing Management* have been proposed (Touzani & Moussa, 2010):

(1) *Industrial Marketing Management* is read by, and is of interest to, academics in related fields.
(2) The quality of articles published in *Industrial Marketing Management* has increased.
(3) Research topics covered by *Industrial Marketing Management* have grown in importance.

In this article, we discuss how to improve one's success rate when submitting manuscripts to major journals. (A later article will discuss the review and revision process that submitted manuscripts go through.) These helpful hints can make the journey to a successful author easier with more acceptances and fewer rejections, albeit there are no guarantees. Clearly, the most critical factor in having one's research results published is the contribution(s) to the field. However, most of the leading journals in all fields routinely have rejection rates of 80%, 95%, or higher. All journals prefer articles that make significant contributions to the field. Seminal articles are highly cited thereby increasing a journal's impact factor. Many manuscripts routinely are sent to journal after journal after being rejected. Many potentially good manuscripts are rejected simply due to poor presentation. It is to combat this problem that we have put together this manuscript highlighting the dos and don'ts for preparing better manuscripts thereby

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.11.014

Available online 06 December 2017

significantly increasing the likelihood of manuscript acceptance.

Before beginning any research project, it is therefore wise to do a small bit of research about the proposed topic. Ask a dozen or so people about the topic and the likelihood of citation should a manuscript eventually be published. Also look at various calls for manuscripts from journals; these calls for papers state specifically what types of papers journals are interested in publishing. Likewise, talk with companies to find out what their most important marketing problems and top priorities are. Occasionally, research centers such as the Marketing Science Institute or the Institute for the Study of Business Markets will issue statements on research needs. There are numerous videos available on the Internet discussing methods to find research topics; simply Google "Finding research topics" and articles, publishers' hints, and YouTube videos will be easily identified. Conducting timely and interesting research topics, will increase the chances of a manuscript being accepted for publication because, with potential for citation being a top factor in manuscript acceptance, editors are increasingly checking manuscripts on their originality and relevance. Before beginning any research project, ask yourself the following questions: 1. Is the proposed research new and interesting? 2. Is it challenging? 3. Is the work directly related to a current hot topic? And 4. Will it provide solutions to any difficult problems? Researchers clearly must delineate the type of contribution being claimed in the article.

Following the general format of typical academic journal articles, we structure the remainder of this article in the following six sections. First, we consider an article's title, abstract, and keywords. Second, we focus on the introduction and literature review of an article. Following that, while not all manuscripts deal with hypothesis testing such as exploratory research or descriptive case studies, manuscripts that do include hypothesis testing are frequently rejected due to the poor quality of the hypotheses themselves. We therefore discuss an article's hypotheses. The fourth section deals with the research methodology behind an article and the subsequent analysis. Finally, we discuss an article's findings and conclusions in the fifth and sixth sections.

2. An article's title

A published manuscript usually begins with a general introduction and proceeds through literature review, then hypotheses, research propositions, or research objective, then research methodology and analysis, then findings, and, finally, discussion and conclusions. However, when writing the actual manuscript, we usually start with the body of the manuscript, that is, conceptual framework and data (quantitative or qualitative) that serve as the foundation of the manuscript. Once this is complete, we can move forward to the introduction and backward to the conclusions. In fact, the last thing we should settle on is the title. In doing this, the research topic should not be confused with the title of the manuscript. The purpose of the title is to get the reader excited about the manuscript, and to invite the reader into the manuscript. The title provides an opportunity for the author to research their manuscript (as opposed to research for their manuscript, which they already have completed at this time).

We suggest that authors send their proposed title (nothing more) to six people who have not been involved with the research and ask them the following two questions:

1) If you saw this title, what would you expect in the manuscript?
2) Does this title make you excited to read the manuscript?

The first question is important because if authors get multiple responses then their title is poor because it is too ambiguous; if authors get six similar responses but these responses are not what the authors intended, then the title is poor because it is misleading. The answers to the second question will tell the authors if the published manuscript will stand out in the increasingly congested world of academic research. Once authors have received the responses from the six people, they can call the people to discuss why they responded so. The title of a manuscript creates the first impression with the reader and sets expectations of what will be in the manuscript. One should always write for the reader and remember that the very first reader is the reviewer. Unless one makes a good impression with this first reader, there is no second reader.

We suggest that a good title should contain the fewest possible words that adequately describe the contents of the manuscript and captures the reader's attention. As a general rule, effective titles identify the *main issue* of the manuscript; distinguish the subject of the manuscript; are accurate, unambiguous, specific, avoid unnecessary details, and complete; and do not contain infrequently used abbreviations. A good title attracts readers.

3. An article's abstract

The abstract serves as an advertisement for the article. Although on many journal websites only subscribers to the journal (either individually or through their university or company) can access the entire article without charge, anyone can access the article's abstract. Therefore, the abstract must create sufficient interest in the article to justify its purchase, for example, the research question, the framework of the research, the research methodology, and/or the findings. Prices for individual article downloads can range from $25 to $75 dollars depending on the journal and its policies. It is therefore a good idea to do some research on the abstract before submitting a manuscript to a journal because, just as the abstract can interest a reader to purchase the article, the abstract can influence a reviewer to develop a favorable bias toward the manuscript.

There are three main types of abstracts. The indicative (descriptive) abstract outlines the topics covered in a manuscript so that the reader can decide whether or not to read the entire manuscript. The informative abstract summarizes the manuscript based on the so-called IMRaD structure (i.e., introduction, methods, results, and discussion) but without these words explicitly presented in the abstract. Finally, the structured abstract follows headings required by the journal. For example, Emerald Publishing requires an abstract to be divided up into the following headings: purpose, design/methodology/approach, findings, research limitations/implications (if applicable), practical implications (if applicable), social implications (if applicable), and originality/value. One should check carefully which type of abstract fits the journal where one wants to submit.

We suggest that you again identify six people who are not involved with the research (and are not at your own institution) and send them just the abstract asking them the following questions:

1) Is the abstract written clearly, and is it jargon free?
2) Does the research described in this abstract interest you?
3) Does the research make a significant contribution to the field of study?
4) Would you pay $50 or €50 to download the article described in this abstract?

To create favorable answers to these questions, the abstract must emphasize the research's findings and its contributions to conceptual perspectives, methodological considerations, and/or managerial practices, among others. The abstract is the only place where authors can summarize their research, but they are typically only allocated 150–200 words to accomplish this. So what should be contained in this short space? We believe that, first and foremost, authors should state the research question or the focus of the research: what did they set out to accomplish? and why the research is relevant, interesting, and/or important. Then the abstract should give a one- or two-sentence summary of the research methodology (case study, survey, and/or experiment) and the research setting (industry). The rest of the abstract should focus on the research findings. After all, this is why the authors did the

research, and this is why people read journal articles. Authors need to be very specific in telling people what they found out and why it is important. We frequently receive manuscripts where no findings are included in the abstract; it is as though the authors do not want people to know until they have read the article. However, unless people know what is coming in the manuscript, they will not bother to download, read, or cite the article.

The abstract should be written only when the manuscript has been finished to ensure that the abstract adequately summarizes the writing and also entices the reader to venture into the manuscript itself. Technical jargon should not be used; and no references should be cited. Statements that lack specifics must be excluded. One should never over promise in the abstract. It may take a week or more to write an excellent abstract, and it is one area where rushing can cause irreparable damage to an author's success. Thus, time is not of the essence; careful wording and clear thought are critical.

4. An article's keywords

Keywords are used for indexing. Appropriate keywords will influence strongly whether or not readers will be able to locate the article and thus ultimately determine whether or not the article has a chance for being referenced. Keywords also help the editor select appropriate reviewers for the manuscripts. Words and phrases selected should reflect the essential topics of the manuscript, but words with a broad meaning should be avoided. Here, as elsewhere, we recommend that only abbreviations firmly and unambiguously established in the field should be used.

5. An article's introduction and literature review

There are three main objectives for a good introduction to a manuscript: focus the reader on the research question or purpose of the manuscript; establish the proper frame of reference for the reader; identify the manuscript's contribution to the field; and convince the reader that there is justification for undertaking the research.

For a manuscript to be accepted it is critical that the reviewers and authors have a consistent frame of reference. The introductory section of the manuscript must present a complete framework for the research including historical development, current state of knowledge, and theoretical orientation. If the writing in the introduction is not sufficiently clear to bring the reviewer into the mind of the authors, there is ample opportunity to see things in a light different from what was intended by the authors with the reviewers reaching a sometimes conflicting basis for evaluating the manuscript. Many times, we receive responses from authors stating that “this is not what we meant” when they respond to reviewer comments. That this happens, however, is the authors' fault, as their manuscript did not establish the intended frame of reference in the reviewers' minds.

The literature review and theoretical development also are introductory aspects of a well-written manuscript. These aspects may be labeled as separate sections, or they may be imbedded into a general introduction. While it is necessary to discuss adequately the knowledge base upon which the research is based so that readers can evaluate the work, it is not necessary to cite every possible reference or to go back in times to prehistoric eras. We regularly receive 30- to 40-page manuscripts, which have 10 or more pages of references. Only the most relevant prior published works need to be cited. It is a good idea to be respectful to other researchers' theoretical frameworks and research findings before one starts to criticize.

As part of the introduction the authors frequently demonstrate a gap or shortcoming in the existing literature or a conflict in previous studies and discuss how their research will help cover the gap or explain possible conflicts in previous studies. Authors also need to argue why this gap in knowledge or shortcoming about previous studies is important (e.g., how this gap may hinder progress in the field, how the gap may lead to companies making wrong decisions or biased view of a phenomenon). The introduction therefore answers a series of questions: What is the problem? Are there existing solutions? Which solution is the best? What is the main limitation in existing theory? How are these limitations problematic? And what do you hope to achieve? In answering these questions, the thematic scope of a manuscript usually progresses from general over particular to general. Words or phrases like “however,” “remain unclear,” “novel” and “first time” help convincing readers that the research is necessary although such words should not be overused.

A manuscript may for example present new, original results or methods or rationalize published resulted. A manuscript may also present a review of a particular field or summarize a particular topic. Literature reviews survey critical points in current literature relevant to a particular topic. By describing, summarizing, and evaluating critically previous work relating to a topic, such reviews should make a significant contribution to our understanding of a topic by providing integrative framework(s) and/or paths for further research.

However, just because some research has not been carried out before, this is no justification for undertaking that research now. Authors also should not publish reports of no academic interest; work that is out of date; exact duplications/replications of previously published work; or research with incorrect, unacceptable or unjustifiable conclusions. Research that is purely descriptive or lack theoretical implications is not interesting enough. We sometimes see research that although it is very well executed, it does not make a sufficiently large contribution to literature because, for example, the research is purely descriptive, is of no practical use, or it merely replicates exactly past research. Authors also should be aware of so-called ‘salami’ manuscripts, which are manuscripts based upon datasets too small to be meaningful. It should be noted that some journals including *Industrial Marketing Management* do accept case studies, but please do not extrapolate results from a single case study to an entire market! In short, manuscripts should present something new, interesting, and challenging that (often) relates directly to a current hot topic, and manuscript should provide solutions to difficult problems. The introduction needs to answer the ‘so what?’ question.

As with the title and abstract, it is a good idea to conduct some research on the introduction. Authors could send just the introduction to six people not connected with the research and ask them to describe:

1. The research question or the manuscript’s contribution.
2. The underlying framework of the research.
3. The gap that the research will fill and the importance of doing so.

If the responses to the above three questions vary among the people, the writing is not clear and needs improvement. If the responses are not what the authors intended, the writing needs clarification; and if the people respond that the gap is of little importance, authors have to demonstrate that the gap is indeed important (or submit the manuscript to another journal).

6. An article's hypotheses

Let us look at a typical research manuscript dealing with the testing of hypotheses. Researchers have identified a contribution earlier in the introduction and then detailed a theoretical framework that predicts how this contribution can be substantiated. This conceptual framework, which forms the basis for the research, has been well developed; and conceptual definitions of constructs are precise. To determine if predictions are valid, specific hypotheses are developed and then tested. But what constitutes good hypotheses? Perhaps this question best can be answered by looking at reviewer comments concerning poorly developed hypotheses.

Reviewers frequently complain about hypotheses that are obvious, results that are so expected that for the hypothesis not to be supported

would be earth-shaking news. The fact that there may be no prior published research on the specific hypotheses is not justification for proposing it and testing something that is common knowledge.

Another common reviewer complaint concerns compound hypothesis, that is, single hypotheses that is comprised of multiple components. Rejection of these hypotheses, therefore, has multiple possible explanations, and support (non-rejection) is difficult to interpret due to the same factor.

Reviewers—and editors—sometimes are amused by manuscripts that have so many hypotheses that they wonder why the researcher cannot be more focused. Sometimes, authors try to diminish the number of hypotheses by grouping them with many sub-hypotheses (1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e; 2a, 2b, 2c, …). This, however, rarely fools reviewers.

Hypotheses must be derived from the theoretical development, but often reviewers note in their rejection comments that the hypotheses are not linked to the theory, but simply are stated in a vacuum. One wonders what the authors were thinking when they conducted the research and when they wrote the manuscript. When reviewers are left to wonder, manuscripts get rejected. Sometimes, authors write hypotheses that predict null effects. A null effect hypothesis is the default position that there is no effect, no difference (i.e., equal effects), no association between variables, and so on. In classical statistics, null hypotheses cannot be tested, however. To advance knowledge (and thus correctly test hypotheses in classical statistics), authors need to show that there is an effect, an association, a difference, and so on (this effect is the "alternative hypothesis") meaning that they need to reject (i.e., disprove) the null hypothesis thereby showing that the alternative hypothesis is true (i.e., there is a difference, a relationship, an effect, and so on).

If authors cannot reject the null hypothesis, their results simply are inconclusive. Null results are not advancing knowledge because very different reasons could explain that the results are not significant. For example, it could be that the sample size is too small to detect the effect (power issue), but it also could mean that the theory is wrong (in fact, many null results are *type 2 errors*). Another common caveat is hypotheses that are stated in a non-directional matter (e.g., variable A and variable B have a different effect), but the interpretation of rejection depends on whether the inequality is positive or negative (e.g., the effect of A is larger or smaller than the effect of B). This may occur in research about relationships. While there may be one relationship between two actors, there may be two perceptions of that relationship by the actors (i.e., the perceptions of actor A and actor B differ). Which perception is more positive and which perception is more negative is often relevant to know, but is frequently not discussed. A good hypothesis should include a specific prediction so that it is very clear what pattern of results the authors expect.

Finally, when developing hypotheses, authors mostly focus on *type 1 error*, rejecting the null hypothesis H_0 when H_0 is true (e.g., saying that variable A has a larger positive impact on the dependent variable than has variable B when this is not true) and neglect to consider *type 2 error*, failing to reject the null hypothesis H_0 when the alternative hypothesis H_A is true (e.g., reporting non-significant results when, in reality, the effect of A is larger than is the effect of B). To avoid *type 2 errors*, authors need to pay careful attention that their study has enough power (i.e., ability to detect statistically significant relationships when these truly exist). This includes using reliable measures and avoiding sloppy coding of data, use standardized procedures if authors carry out experiments, and use larger sample sizes. Consideration of both types of errors will result in better crafting of hypotheses and, therefore, better theoretical development (Mitchell & Jolley, 2006).

So what are some guidelines for preparing excellent hypotheses?

1. Avoid obvious hypotheses; avoid hypotheses that are truisms; avoid hypotheses that are common knowledge.
2. Make sure each hypothesis focuses on a single testable item.
3. Limit the number of hypotheses in a single manuscript.
4. Link hypotheses to the theoretical development in your manuscript.
5. When writing hypotheses, make sure to avoid null hypotheses and to specify directional effects and clear patterns of expected results.
6. Do not forget about *type 2 error* when writing hypotheses.

7. An article's research methodology

A well-written methodology section of a research manuscript serves two primary purposes: to demonstrate that you have followed acceptable scientific standards in conducting your research and to enable another researcher to replicate your study so that their results can be compared to your results. Empirically focused manuscripts in industrial marketing management research can employ either a case research methodology or quantitative methods. In the remaining parts of this section we present methodological and analysis considerations. We subsequently focus specifically on case research methods.

7.1. Methodological considerations

While researchers have a very broad field of methodologies from which to select, chosen methods need to be justified and linked back to research objectives ('why and how does the chosen method address the objectives in an appropriate manner?'). One needs to ask: Is the methodology used in the research clear? Is the methodology appropriate for the research question?

Methods have limitations; one needs to be cognizant about these limitations (e.g., discuss possible rectifications in the limitations section of the manuscript's closing discussion). One should not assume that limitations are infinitely flexible; at some point, the methodology becomes inappropriate. Limitations also point to possible avenues for future research.

Methods also have assumptions. For example, one analytical method may require continuous and/or normally distributed data, while another method requires skewed data or is to be used for ordinal or nominal variables. Failure to recognize and satisfy the requirements for a specific analytical technique is a fatal flaw and will result in rejection of a manuscript.

Research methods often seem to follow a fashion cycle with one or more methods suddenly being in vogue. Researchers see what recently has been published and try to apply currently fashionable methodologies to their specific research project. One always should link the methodology to the needs of the research and not the research to the needs of the methodology. Too often we see manuscripts employing a certain "hammer" to inappropriate problems. Sometimes, a screwdriver is necessary; leave the hammer in your toolbox for a future project.

One should not always 'play safe' with one's method choice; new methods can provide new insights and stimulate new discussions (see for example the current developments around fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis, variance and covariance based structural equation modeling/partial least squares, Bayesian modeling, multi-level modeling, and event structure analysis, as well as computational models such as agent-based modeling, simulations and their applications in business-to-business marketing and supply chain management).

One should not be afraid of borrowing a research methodology from different fields to investigate a research problem. Established methodologies in other disciplines often can be used successfully to explore marketing issues, frequently providing unique and enlightening perspectives.

Methodology that uses multiple methods in a step-wise progression normally delivers added value. Each step complements the preceding one(s), builds on them, and adds a specific contribution. This can include mixed methods (e.g., a qualitative study to define concepts and overall model, followed by a quantitative survey using structural equation modeling), or the use of the same method in different steps (e.g., multiple experiments, where outputs/results of one experiment provide the input for the subsequent follow-up experiments).

However, good methodological considerations usually include a

discussion (and often also a pictorial representation) of the overall research process or model. In quantitative studies, this could include the underlying logic of a causal model (i.e., a nomological model) for use in structural equation modeling (this can be done also in the context of the hypotheses development), or, for qualitative studies, it can outline a research framework (e.g., a dimensional model of concepts of interest), which is juxtaposed with data. If no preconceived model or framework is integral to the chosen study (e.g., for grounded theory approaches), a clear process overview of the research progression and reasoning steps can be provided.

As with the other sections of your manuscript, you need to substantiate your evaluation of this section by obtaining the opinion of others. Send the methodology section to a half dozen other people and ask if the methodology used in this research clear and is it appropriate for the research question? If there are any "Nos," you need to fix the methodology section or redo the research.

7.2. Analysis considerations

7.2.1. Quantitative analyses

When it comes to the analysis, one needs to ask the following questions: Is the analysis used in this research clear? Is the analysis appropriate for the research questions? Most quantitative studies submitted to *Industrial Marketing Management* use survey instruments for data collection. When a single informant design is used for answering the questionnaire, common method bias is a concern that has to be cleared, particularly when both the antecedent and the dependent variables are perceptual measures derived from the same source. Common method bias refers to deviations in observed relationships from "true" relationships caused by the similarity in methods used to obtain the data. It can bias the estimates of reliability and validity of latent constructs, as well as the estimates of empirical relationships between constructs (inflate or deflate). One should avoid or minimize common method bias in the *ex-ante* research design stage by using different sources of information for dependent and independent constructs (e.g., multiple informants, objective data, or time intervals), or by considering remedies in designing and administrating the survey (e.g., use different methods—interview, paper/pencil questionnaire, and so on—and response formats for gathering data for the dependent and independent constructs; include a measure of response style, impression management, or social desirability; use an ideal marker variable, which is a variable with no expected theoretical relationship with variables of interest in the study). It always is preferable, as said, to obtain information from both sides of a dyad (buyer-seller) than to only question one side and then ask the same respondent to estimate the other side's perspective. *Ex-post* approaches also should be used to verify and, if necessary, reduce common method bias through a variety of statistical procedures. Using more complicated models (e.g., introducing non-linear interaction effects) makes it more difficult for the respondents to second-guess the aim of the survey and hence it reduces common method bias. Harman's one factor test is insensitive and therefore insufficient to prove that common method bias is not a concern. Instead, one should try to use more sophisticated tests such as common latent factor or common marker variable methods. The recommendation here is to use a combination of multiple *ex-ante* research design and *ex-post* statistical analysis remedies.

For quantitative studies, construct operationalizations (e.g., item wordings) and validity and reliability tests should be shown clearly. Often, reviewers want to see certain things that may not make it into the published version of the manuscript (e.g., a confirmatory factor analysis for all constructs); thus, this information should be provided in an appendix.

Robustness tests of one's analyses should be done. For example, one should not just run the model for the whole sample; rather, one should test for heterogeneity in the sample (through latent class analysis, split-half comparisons, or multi-group analysis, especially if there are hypotheses about the causes of heterogeneity).

Researchers need to be cognizant that the overwhelming number of quantitative methods normally used in business marketing and supply chain management does not corroborate causality (this is only stipulated by the nomological model). Thus, most studies are open to the question of the issue of 'reversed causality' (i.e., is it, in fact, not the dependent construct, which drives the independent one?). This needs to be discussed and possibly even tested as part of the analysis (e.g., Granger-causality tests), or recursive models may need to be considered.

7.2.2. Qualitative analyses

For qualitative studies a clear narrative and logic about how the researcher reaches a certain result or interpretation needs to be provided. Too often, manuscripts laconically state that a 'content analysis was done'…without providing any further details.

Case studies and interviews in particular both constitute a relevant minority of research studies published during the years 2014–2016 (Di Benedetto & Lindgreen, 2017). Thus, of the 412 articles published in this period, these two categories accounted for 17% and 20%, respectively, of all articles published. In addition, we find evidence that the research quality of the qualitative case analyses published in *Industrial Marketing Management* steadily has increased over the years (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010), and therefore we would like to encourage high-quality submissions using case studies and interviews.

Case method research is an in-depth investigation (description) of a specific situation or phenomenon. The research may focus on a company, an agreement, a sale, a dyad, or a network. As such, a case analysis cannot be extrapolated beyond the specific focus of the case; the case is illustrative only. Researchers should argue why the situations they study are somehow interesting for revealing new aspects of a focal phenomenon or a group of phenomena.

However, this single focus limitation of case studies does not mean they are without value. Indeed, due to the extended buying process involved with many industrial buying decisions, as well as the time required to develop buyer-seller relationships in business-to-business settings, an extended case study may be the only way to gain an understanding of the underlying processes involved in industrial marketing. Indeed, *Industrial Marketing Management* always has welcomed well-researched case studies. But what constitutes good case research?

One of the characteristics of case method research is the ability of the researcher to dig into the specific situation and provide many details that would be lost in a broad quantitative study (Yin, 1994). A case focuses on a point, not on the average or typical results. Yet, case method researchers, maybe in an effort to emulate quantitative researchers, attempt to generalize the case to the broader market. In doing so, they tend to move away from the very details that are so enriching of case method research and instead focus their analysis on broader theoretical constructs. But how can one generalize based on a sample of one? Quantitative research, primarily as used in consumer markets, looks to uncover underlying antecedents and mediators of activities and results to develop theoretical linkages among components to the buying decision process. Increasingly, reviewers focus on the question "where is the theory?" Authors respond by generalizing and removing discussion of details, which would be quite interesting and informative to the readers.

However, case method researchers should not avoid a discussion of theory, particularly in setting the case framework. What aspect of extant theory is relevant to the case description? By launching directly into the case with little attention to theory, many case method researchers reinvent the wheel. Situation "A" demonstrating a trait or process already described in situation "B" does not constitute new theory. Another weakness of case method researchers is trying to create a large case rather than developing a series of comparative cases (looking for differences rather than similarities and discussing why they may occur) or focusing on a longitudinal series of cases looking at one

situation over an extended period of time. We are in need of more theory-based comparative and longitudinal case method research.

Case method research presents an opportunity to fully explore complex phenomena, but case method researchers tend to rush the process. They only interview one half of a dyad, asking that party how the other party might perceive the situation under study. It would be far better to expand the case investigation to interview parties from both sides of the dyad. Further, a single interview in a company or organization does not explain, nor fully describe how that company or organization thinks; multiple interviews at multiple levels are needed to fully explore the nuances and different perspectives involved in the case. In a similar vein, case method researchers should go beyond the sales or marketing department and include interviews with customers and their customers. After all, by its very nature, industrial marketing includes a series of buyer-seller dyads. This is particularly evident in network-based cases. If selling organizations are reluctant to divulge customer names, perhaps the case method researcher should start with buyers and ask them for contacts in their supplier organizations. This would be working up the supply chain rather than down the demand chain.

Wherever possible, case method researchers should include quantitative data to complement qualitative data developed as part of the case method research process. Actual sales data would reinforce managerial perceptions (or show managerial biases). Even if, in a case study, the empirical material does not warrant generalization, and the focus is on complex, detailed, and underlying processes, reporting the outcomes, and documenting the activities-to-outcomes link is very valuable and helps increase our understanding of the situation and the ramification of decisions made. (Note: Likewise, quantitative researchers would do well to add illustrative qualitative data to increase understanding of the quantitative results by providing a fuller context from which the results are derived. This is actually an opportunity for co-operative research undertakings.)

Useful protocols for conducting and reporting on case studies have been developed (see, for example, Eisenhardt 1989, 1991). For example, an article needs to consider the study's sampling procedure and sampled cases. How and why were the particular cases selected? Another important issue relates to how data were collected to build the cases. Which kind of data was used (primary and/or secondary data)? If an interview protocol guided in-depth interviews, then this protocol should be reported in the article. Especially important for qualitative case studies is how the case method researcher analyzed the case(s) to understand, for example, the processes behind the phenomenon of interest. Data can be analyzed within and across cases; and tools such as SQR: NUD*IST often can be a useful tool. Open, axial, and selective doing procedures for elaboration on theoretical categories should be considered (cf. Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The article's methodology section should discuss such issues. The final issue mentioned here concerns methods to improve the quality of a case study research. For example, did the case method researchers apply criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, integrity, fit, understanding generality, and control in order to improve the trustworthiness of their findings?

As a final note, one needs to be aware that there are sophisticated qualitative methods available that provide a rigorous frame for the systematic comparison and interpretation of case studies.

7.2.3. Methodological pluralism

For both qualitative and quantitative analyses the issue of time effects is crucially important, but often neglected in research: the independent construct may affect the dependent one, but not immediately. Thus, it is important to model such time issues in the analysis (which has implications for the data capture) to test for time-lags. Qualitative studies, for example process analyses such as event structure analysis, can provide a granular understanding of such phenomena, but are used only rarely in business marketing and supply chain management studies.

Overall, we would advocate a call for methodological pluralism. Structural equation modeling (for quantitative researchers) and, to a lesser extent, case studies based on content analysis (for qualitative researchers) may dominate the field, but there is much more methodological richness out there. Cross-fertilization from other disciplines is a good thing in boosting methodological and analytical rigor, and in developing study contributions based around method usages.

As with the other sections of your manuscript, you need to substantiate your evaluation of this section by obtaining the opinion of others. Send the analysis section to a half dozen other people and ask if the analysis used in this research clear and is it appropriate for the research question? If there are any “Nos,” you need to fix the analysis section or redo the research.

8. An article's findings

As the name implies, this section is a descriptive presentation of what was found out in the research. Differences between the findings in the research and what was known from previous publications can be highlighted. The section can include the results of a survey, results of hypotheses testing, a regression model, structural equation modeling/partial least squares, or other type analysis, as well as a summary of the key aspects of a qualitative study. That is, the research findings section must be associated with qualitative and quantitative research reported on earlier in the manuscript. One would not usually include a findings section in a review article or a theoretical article, as there really are no findings per se.

One of the most common problems when authors prepare this section of their manuscript is combining findings with interpretation or discussion. In fact, many manuscripts have a section called “Findings and Discussion” or “Results and Discussion.” The section is then a jumble of what was found with how it fits in with the authors' theoretical development or research question(s). In fact, it is, unfortunately, not that uncommon to find no findings in the entire section, merely a discussion purportedly supporting the authors' original perception of the phenomena being investigated. While a few authors can present findings and then discuss them in a “Findings and Discussion” section, it is usually far better to separate these two critical components of the manuscript so as to clearly delineate them. A true “Findings” section should not have any interpretations or conclusions.

Let us look at presentation of quantitative data first. When writing the findings section, one should follow the same sequence used in the development of the research framework in the manuscript. If one has a series of hypotheses, one should present the findings for each hypothesis in the same order. Similarly with a regression or other model, present the findings in a way parallel to the theory or model developed earlier in the manuscript. It is difficult for readers and reviewers to understand the findings when these findings are presented differently than how the authors first explained what they set out to discover. When presenting quantitative results in this section, one can show descriptive information such as means, modes, medians, and measures of variance. Correlations, significance statistics, ranges, and confidence levels also are given, as are key statistics from other analytical techniques. However, authors often forget to show beta error or any power statistics; these statistics would help convince the reader of the conclusiveness of the analysis. Indeed, when only considering alpha error, researchers can end up with incorrect conclusions!

Care must be taken when presenting the findings of qualitative data. Sandelowski and Leeman (2012) define these findings as the “informational content or thematic syntheses, grounded theories, phenomenologic descriptions, ethnographic or narrative/discourse descriptions or explanations, or other integrated or coherent interpretations” derived from interviews, observations, and documents of the organizational component being investigated. These findings must be presented in a manner that clearly describes them to the

readers so they fully understand what happened. This is not the place where authors interpret what it all means or why it happened.

To guide the reader one can consider including figures and tables, as these often are the most efficient way to present findings. However, a lengthy table, which can be summarized easily in the text, should not be included. It is imperative that the captions of figures and tables contain clear and sufficient information to make these self-explanatory; and tables should not be too crowded. Figures and tables should not duplicate the information described elsewhere in the manuscript. Well-selected scales and appropriate axis label sizes should be used, and symbols must be clear to see and data sets easy to discriminate.

As with the other sections of your manuscript, you need to substantiate your evaluation of this section by obtaining the opinion of others. Send the findings section to a half dozen other people and ask if the findings as described are clear and interpretations logically derived from them. Likewise send any figures and tables to them and ask if they are clear? Can they understand the purpose of each figure or graph without the supporting text? Is each figure or graph important? Is there anything missing? If there are any “Nos,” you need to improve the tables and figures.

9. An article's discussion

As stated previously, there are three main objectives for a good introduction to a manuscript: focus the reader on the research question or purpose of the manuscript; establish the proper frame of reference for the reader; and demonstrate the gap in knowledge that the manuscript will fill. The discussion section of the manuscript is where the authors demonstrate to the reader how they fulfilled these three objectives. Here is where the authors turn the descriptive material from the findings section into a meaningful discussion or answer to the research question(s), and how the contribution to knowledge described earlier is now substantiated. Findings now can be related to the frame of reference and theoretical development previously established in the manuscript.

While previous sections of the manuscript were based on existing knowledge (introduction and theory development, hypotheses, etc.), established protocols (case method, experimental design, survey methodology, and analytical methods), and observable facts (qualitative and quantitative research data), the discussion section permits the authors to explain their research results as they accomplish the following:

- Describe how the results relate to the original question or objectives outlined in the introduction section.
- Develop a logical linkage from the data and findings to the conclusions.
- Provide interpretation for each of the results presented.
- Show how the results are consistent with what other investigators have reported or explain how, and why there are any differences.
- Demonstrate the importance of the research and why it deserves publication.
- Mention any limitations of the research and why, despite these limitations, the research is important and adds to our knowledge base.
- Describe logical extensions of the research and provide direction for future research.

In doing this, authors should not make statements that go beyond what the results can support; nor should authors introduce new terms or ideas.

Non-quantitative words (e.g., low/high, extremely, enormous, rapidly, dramatic, massive, considerably, exceedingly, major/minor, etc.) should be avoided, as they often are qualified by very, quite, slightly, etc. Quantitative precision, in fact, always is preferred.

10. An article's conclusions

The conclusion section is the final place where authors can demonstrate that the manuscript deserves to be accepted and published. It is where they close the circle from the questions posed in the beginning to the answers they established. A clear conclusion section helps reviewers to judge the authors' work easily.

What should be included in the conclusion section? Authors should present global and specific conclusions in relation to the objectives of their research. The authors should show how they have fulfilled the research questions and have made a contribution to existing knowledge. With so much trivial research being conducted today, authors should demonstrate why the research is significant and important. Authors also can indicate uses, extensions, and limitations of one's findings if appropriate, and suggest future research and point out that this is underway.

There are some things that one should not say in the conclusion section. One should not summarize the manuscript (the abstract is for that purpose) or make a list of trivial statements of one's results. Of course, one should not overstate the impact of the research but, on the other hand, one should not accidentally undermine one's work by the use of words implying uncertainty such as “might,” “probably,” or “maybe” when discussing the results.

If appropriate for the journal where one submits, the manuscript should include clear managerial implications of the research. Implications should not be extended beyond the ability of the data to justify.

Many authors, unfortunately, sabotage otherwise well-written manuscripts with poorly done conclusions. This is the final place where one can influence the reviewers' decisions to accept or reject one's manuscript. Just as the title is where one creates the first impression of the manuscript, the conclusions section is the last impression left with the reader.

11. Other considerations

As there are over 250 marketing journals published in English around the world (plus many marketing journals published in other languages), with new journals being launched almost daily, authors need to choose the journal that is right for their particular research. Authors will need to investigate candidate journals to find out about their aims and scope, types of articles, readership, and current hot topics. Let us discuss these and other issues a bit more in the following.

Authors may get help from their colleagues when deciding for the right journal. Articles in their references also likely will lead authors to the right journal. In considering the journal's audience, is the goal to reach specialists, multi-disciplinary researchers, and/or a general audience, and is the journal's readership worldwide or local? Depending on the answer(s), information and writing style will need to be adjusted accordingly. To find about current hot topics, authors are advised to go through regularly recent abstracts of articles published in the journal under consideration, as well as to read statements that the journal's editor may have made.

Also, it is important to realize that journals, even in similar subjects, reach readers with different background, and that, because of this, journals have their own style. To get a feeling of the style, authors should read other articles from the journal they want to submit to, and they need to adhere strictly to the journal's Guide for Authors, as poorly prepared manuscripts are a sign of disrespect and likely to be desk rejected.

The content of a manuscript is essential, and the manuscript accordingly must contain a clear, useful, and exciting scientific message. Also, the presentation of a manuscript is critical. The manuscript must convey the author's thoughts in a logical manner such that the reader arrives at the same conclusions as the author. Therefore, a manuscript must be constructed in the format that best showcases the author's

materials, and the manuscript must be written in a style that transmits clearly what the message is. For example, authors of referenced materials should be kept consistent throughout the manuscript and follow the journal's preferred style. It probably is advisable to avoid citing personal communications, unpublished observations, manuscripts submitted but not yet accepted for publications, as well as articles published only in the local language, which are difficult for international readers to consult. Authors should avoid excessive self-citation and journal self-citation. Spelling needs to adhere to Standard English; and alternative spellings lead to confusion and must therefore be avoided; and the terminology should be consistent. Abbreviations—unless they are established firmly in the field—should be avoided. In an abbreviation is used then this should be defined on the first use in both the abstract and the main text.

An ideal manuscript typically consists of 25–40 pages that includes essential data only. The abstract is of 100–150 words. The introduction is up to two pages long, the literature review and hypothesis section between four and six pages, the methods section about two to five pages, the results and discussion between 10 and 15 pages, and the conclusions about one to three pages. The number of references could be anywhere between 20 and 50. The number of figures and tables could each be about four to six.

Given the limited space available in journals (and time available for reviewers to evaluate submitted manuscripts), it is important that authors convince editors and reviewers that the manuscript deserves to be published. Therefore we recommend that at the end of every page, the authors ask themselves: “What did I do on this page to convince the reader that the manuscript is worth publishing?” This simple step can greatly advance a manuscript's probability of acceptance.

Authors could consider including an acknowledgment section to thank people who have helped with (note: ask them if they can be named), for example, technical expertise, funding organizations, and (in the final accepted manuscript) reviewers and editor(s). The acknowledgment also states one's affiliation to research projects and programs, as well as grant number or reference.

12. Conclusions

This articles summaries our thoughts on how to improve one's publishing success. A manuscript begins with a question or objective, and then a framework is presented within which the authors want the reader to evaluate their research. Existing knowledge is surveyed, and a theoretical framework is outlined, and, oftentimes, hypotheses are developed. A manuscript describes the research methodology, the findings, and what all of these mean. Importantly, the manuscript along the way demonstrates that it makes an impact on what we know about business-to-business markets.

Specifically, we discussed the appropriateness of the title of a manuscript, as well as the role of the abstract and how a properly written abstract can improve the likelihood of the article being accepted, read, and cited. Following that, we discussed the introduction of a manuscript. We then considered methodology issues. For quantitative methodologies, we discussed hypotheses, and we stressed that a well-written methodology section of a research article serves two primary purposes: to demonstrate that one has followed acceptable scientific standards in conducting the research and to enable other researchers to replicate one's study so that their results can be compared to one's results. For qualitative methodologies, we particularly focused on case method research. Then we moved on to discussing one a manuscript's research findings section and the discussion of these findings.

We hope this series of comments will help prospective authors prepare manuscripts that fare well in the submission process in *Industrial Marketing Management* and other top journals.

Acknowledgments

Parts of this article previously have appeared in editorials in this journal. As such, this article has not undergone the traditional reviewing process.

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