

Editorial: How to get published in high impact journals? A practical guide for early career scholars

Publishing in high-impact academic journals is an exciting endeavor. It is a pleasure, for any researcher, to have the work he or she has dedicated so much time and effort to finally get published. However, this process is also not free from hard work, discussion, disappointment, or even prior rejection. After all, highly ranked journals tend to have a relatively low acceptance rate, which can be as low as 5%. *REGE* is no exception: its current acceptance rate is roughly 8%.

This editorial aims to spark a reflection on why these rates are so low and what can be done to increase the odds of having your pieces published. We outline and discuss the main reasons for desk rejection, based on the experience we have accumulated as editors, reviewers and/or authors. Our view combines our perspectives as early career, established and experienced researchers.

Our intention is to help, especially, early-career scholars better prepare their manuscripts prior to submitting them to high-impact journals. We do not intend to delve deeply into a methodological discussion but to provide an overview of the main points that deserve attention. This is the first editorial composing a series of texts we intend to publish in the coming editions, directed towards guiding scholars into new methodological insights.

(1) Lack of a clearly defined and impactful contribution

The most important aspect of every piece of research is the question being addressed. This will guide and substantiate the entire paper. The theoretical perspective, as well as the research methods, depends on what the paper aims to explore. Although this may seem obvious, a surprisingly large number of manuscripts fail in this respect.

Authors quite often get carried away with their exciting research topics and forget to explicitly state the question they seek to answer. We do not refer to the complete absence of a question, but rather, struggling to get the message across. Instead, what many of these papers do is present a rather long introduction, filled with certainly relevant information about the research topic, but with no focus either on the question to be explored or on the theoretical debate into which the question is inserted (Bansal & Corley, 2011). A clear research question must be easy enough to understand, even by non-specialists in the field, and, most importantly, must dialogue with the existing literature. Authors should communicate what is being challenged or added to the existing body of knowledge.

There are many interesting research topics, the vast majority of which can for sure be inserted into a theoretical debate. However, make sure that your research question not only addresses a relevant research topic but also brings novelty, challenging literature or even practice. How does your research question advance prior debate on the topic? Which relevant contributions does it bring into the debate? What is the potential for creating a relevant impact on both theory and practice? Keep in mind that theoretical contributions should not be seen as an end in themselves but as a means to the end of solving or at least better understanding and



Therefore, what are our recommendations in this respect? First, writing a rather assertive introduction, presenting the research question at the outset, preferably in the first two or three paragraphs. Keep it short and focused on what is most important. Dedicate the next two or three paragraphs to position the paper within the extensive body of existing literature. The idea here is not to develop the theoretical section already in the introduction but merely to help the reader understand what is previously known about your topic and which authors dialog with your research. These simple steps can help you better communicate your research question, contribution and what is being challenged by your research.

(2) Mismatch between method and research question/objectives

Another major shortcoming leading to desk rejection is the relationship between the research question and the methods employed to answer it. A significant number of papers employ methods that are ill suited to answering their research questions. This is due to a number of reasons, including lack of data, convenience, data availability, proximity to interviewees, etc. Needless to say, the findings are highly questionable. This is quite obvious, and if you are reading this editorial, you have most probably figured this out already. But what is most surprising is the high number of papers that get rejected for precisely this reason. In the coming lines, we provide the example of systematic literature reviews (SLRs) to illustrate our point, but note that this caveat deserves attention in many other methodological contexts, including quantitative and qualitative methods.

We often see some very well-developed SLRs that fail to move forward in the editorial process simply because they do not answer the research question at stake. In fact, in many of them there is not even a question. Good SLRs must add some new knowledge to existing literature. A proposition or hypothesis to be empirically validated later, a framework, novel research questions, scrutiny of previous knowledge – these are just a few examples of desirable outcomes arising from SLRs (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009).

To put it differently, SLRs are not mere compilations of previously published papers. Just like case studies are not mere illustrations of phenomena or regressions mere correlations of data. Research methods need to be closely aligned with what is being investigated in order to shed light on the matter at stake. Our advice is as follows: Take some time, before conducting your research, to reflect on what information you need in order to answer your question. Start backwards and outline what you would need in order to address your objectives. Next, choose the method that would best lead to this information.

(3) Lack of methodological rigor

Not only should the method be well aligned with the question, but it also needs to be well performed. We outline in the coming sections the most frequent pitfalls, segmented by type of method. Of course, our list is not extensive, but for the sake of simplicity, we have focused on those that we tend to see more often at REGE: a. SLRs; b. Case studies; c. Quantitative methods.

- Systematic literature review (SLRs)

Again, we begin with the case of SLRs and before giving you the impression that we are not open to this type of text, we emphasize that we are indeed open to SLRs, because they can provide valuable information about a given topic. And they do make great papers. As long as they are well performed and answer a relevant research question (as we have already discussed). Sometimes, we get compilations of texts – many of these extracted from dissertations – positioned as SLRs. These are not real SLRs. Well-performed SLRs should first be well aligned with the research question. They must also clearly outline and justify the choice of the i. research database; ii. keywords; iii. types of publications. It should also address

very well the criteria for inclusion/exclusion. There are several good and popular ways of performing SLRs, including the PRISMA (Page *et al.*, 2021) model to guide the presentation of the criteria used in order to perform the SLR. Regardless of the one you choose, you should remember that above all, this type of text should provide new insights into a particular theory or empirical object. Do not just compile several works, but compare them, extract information and shed light on what is already known, what can be challenged and what are the potential gaps for future contributions (see Denyer & Tranfield, 2009).

- Case studies

Another popular method used in the manuscripts we get at *REGE* is case studies. These are great ways of exploring, in depth, new real-world phenomena and investigating “how” or “why” something happened (Yin, 2018). They are also useful tools for illustrating novel theoretical approaches and composing exploratory evidence for a given aspect. Of course, we welcome this type of work. However, special care must be taken during the execution of the case (Eisenhardt, 1989). We often get some very good and detailed cases that indeed describe very well a particular issue. However, many of these lack a theoretical foundation or connections with the existing literature (Bansal & Corley, 2011). What propositions are being challenged or potentially validated? What concepts or theoretical variables underlie the case [1]? Associating variables solely with quantitative studies is nothing but a myth. Of course, qualitative cases do not always intend to measure them, but it would still be important to explicitly connect these variables or concepts to the study. Also, take care to mention the coding criteria and how data has been treated. Finally, take care to avoid common traps related to the shortcomings and limitations of this method. Do not attempt to generalize your findings to other contexts or extract causal inferences, although hypotheses and suggestions for future work are welcome.

- Quantitative papers

Many manuscripts submitted to *REGE* also employ quantitative methods. However, methodological shortcomings remain frequent. These deficiencies span from an inadequate description of data, variables, and measurement procedures to a misalignment between the research question and the analytical method selected. Quantitative analysis is not intrinsically superior to qualitative inquiry; rather, it addresses distinct questions - typically “what”, “how many/much”, or “to what extent”. A common pitfall is the confusion of correlation with causation: authors often apply correlational models while interpreting the findings in causal terms (e.g., claiming that X causes Y, rather than that changes in X are associated with changes in Y). Furthermore, researchers should resist the temptation to adopt fashionable techniques and instead choose methods that are adequate to their research questions, as well as appropriate to the data-generating process, and consistent with the assumptions required for valid interpretation of the results. Of course, correlational approaches remain useful when they are theoretically motivated and suited to the available data and study design.

Equally important is full transparency in the data description and analytic workflow, enabling readers to reproduce results or test them in alternative contexts. Questionable research practices such as p-hacking must be avoided (see Head, Holman, Lanfear, Kahn, & Jennions, 2015). Running multiple models is useful, but only when reported honestly as robustness analyses with a clear mapping between each specification and its corresponding results. Failure to meet these conditions can jeopardize replicability and hinders scientific progress. Even carefully executed studies may find null results or have limited external validity across settings or populations, which is acceptable provided these boundaries are acknowledged and theoretically explained. Pre-registration of hypotheses and analysis plans offers one practical safeguard against many of these concerns (Nosek, Ebersole, DeHaven, & Mellor, 2018).

Finally, quantitative studies also have certain limitations. Authors should avoid over-generalizing; instead, they should clearly describe the constraints, encourage new analyses, and point to specific directions for future research.

(4) The bottom line: what is well suited for *REGE*?

REGE welcomes contributions in many disciplines of management and relies on a variety of methods, both qualitative and quantitative. We are open to manuscripts by early-career scholars as well as those by experienced researchers. Indeed, what matters most to our journal is the general level of quality of the paper, specifically its innovativeness and potential impact, combined with methodological rigor. We have outlined here the most frequent reasons for desk rejection. But what do we take home? What is suitable for *REGE*?

- (2) Theoretical and empirical contributions that advance the field of management and discuss the literature – clear research questions and relevant contributions, combined with potential social impacts and implications.
- (3) Appropriate and well-applied research methods – aligned with the research question at stake
- (4) Rigorous and robust methodology
- (5) Relevant findings – aligned with the research question and methods, with theoretical and/or practical implications for both organizations and public policies.

We hope that this editorial can help scholars better prepare their manuscripts. In the coming editions, we shall dive deeper into specific methods in order to encourage early-career scholars to venture into novel methodologies that can enhance the quality of their contributions.

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Note

1. We take the hypothetical-deductive method as our assumption here. Purely inductive cases are also possible, although harder to sell, especially by early-career scholars. In this case, it would be best to combine a deductive case with some inductive insights.

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