# The review process in tourism academia: An elaboration of reviewers' extrinsic and intrinsic motivations

Antónia Correia [a, b], Metin Kozak [c, *]

[a] CEFAGE, University of Algarve, Faro, Portugal
[b] Universidade Europeia, Lisbon, Portugal
[c] School of Tourism, Dokuz Eylul University, İzmir, Turkey

A B S T R A C T

The process of review is one of the most powerful influences in social sciences. But this process may have either a positive or negative impact on the quality of research outputs. The broader discussion about the paths to develop research surprisingly does not include the understanding of reviewers' and editors' procedures, which are the lifeblood of the system. This paper provides an analysis of the review process through the perspective of reviewers and editors. A mixed method approach was used to assess the motivations, goals and intentions of reviewers to keep collaborating with tourism research. Results suggest that, even under pressure, reviewers are willing to contribute in a positive way, though the added value of this duty is decreasing. Editors are aware of this evidence although they keep trying to push reviewers to deliver qualified contributions. Overall this process seems to be fed by the sense of belonging to the tourism academic community. This community is small but strong enough to keep the wheel turning. Finally, the research suggests the ways in which the review process can be improved to ensure its quality.

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## 1. Introduction

The basis of the dissemination of academic research relies on the dedication of the efforts of the three main bodies present in the peer-review system: authors, editors, and reviewers. All three must comply with ethical rules to maintain the continuity, objectivity, and integrity of the publishing system to share scientific results with the members of both academic and public communities. In this regard, the first case of peer-review practice was applied in 1752 by establishing the Committee on Papers by the Royal Society of London to review the first scientific journal entitled *Philosophical Transactions* (Kronick, 1990). Today, the process has spread into all fields in international academia, including those studies submitted to tourism journals.

In recent years, tourism research has arisen within an interdisciplinary paradigm, shaping knowledge creation in this field. The increasing pattern of tourism research has been occasioned by tourism development (Leiper, 2000), although education and research in tourism nowadays outreach tourism development itself (Formica, 1996; Xiao & Smith, 2008). A review of tourism research in the last few decades shows that there is a paradox: on the one hand this is a multidisciplinary field (Jafari, 2001, 2002, p. 7; Tribe, 1997, 2008; Xiao & Smith, 2008) while on the other it is undergoing a generalized phase of entropy, which Xiao & Smith call "insularity" (2008, p.74).

Although tourism research is multidisciplinary, and although it has evolved from an amorphous area to a distinct field of knowledge, research in this area is limited to an academic community that publishes mainly in a number of limited journals (Jamal, Smith, & Watson, 2008). Those in the scientific community are only familiar with each other, within a network of researchers and educators who share topics, interests and common research methodologies and discuss them in a limited scope (Jamal et al., 2008; Tribe, 1997). This, in a certain way, compromises the peer review process.

In fact, research in tourism has developed as "a communication network including professional associations, conferences, books and peer review journals" (Tribe, 1997, p. 645). Journals are the primary vehicles of this dynamic and strict means of communication. In the last decade, the number of tourism journals crossed the

* Corresponding author.
  E-mail addresses: ahcorreia@gmail.com (A. Correia), M.Kozak@superonline.com (M. Kozak).

threshold of 300 and the number of articles about tourism published in various journals has increased by about 15% to 20% a year (McKercher, Law, & Lam, 2006). The sense of community or even the sense of tribe (Tribe, 1997) is somehow compromised by the huge increase of research in tourism. The number of publications in tourism in the 1950s was almost inexistent, whereas nowadays the number of publications accumulated reaches 54,520 (http://www.scopus.com, last access 10.08.2016), of which 64% are published articles.

This number is even greater when counting submissions; taking into account the average rate of acceptance, we can anticipate a number of submissions five times greater. Such a large amount of submissions raises the discussion of the assessment of tourism research as pivotal in shaping the future tourism research (Oviedo-García, 2016). In fact, nowadays, the editorial process, a major concern for ensuring quality and sound contributions to the quality of tourism research, is also compromised by the number of submissions, and the multidisciplinary approach in tourism research compromises the review system.

On the other hand, the approach in the tourism literature has tended to focus on output measures, e.g., the ranking lists of journals, authors or institutions based on publication outputs (e.g., Zhao & Ritchie, 2007), citations for authors (e.g. Law, Ye, Chen, & Leung, 2009), citations for journals (e.g., McKercher, 2005, 2008; McKercher et al., 2006), or how to publish in tourism journals (e.g. Yuksel, 2003). However, there has been only very limited empirical investigation into efforts invested on the production side, e.g., how reviewers are motivated to keep the wheel turning. The only exception, to the authors' best knowledge is Oviedo-García (2016), stressing the need to diversify and enlarge the body of scholars involved in the review process.

This research aims to understand the reviewers' compliance to collaborate with this process that ultimately contributes to tourism research. Data were collected on a voluntary basis and the conclusions of this research may be regarded as an introspective reflection about our own behavior, as all of us are part of this process that is critical for the body of research. Reviewers are usually motivated by external factors, such as reward systems, to enhance their image/reputation in the tourism community or even by their personal growth, though the influence of these internal and external factors on reviewers is not yet clear. Reviewers may also be motivated by intrinsic motivations (i.e., personal interests, importance, pressure/tension or relatedness), which may or may not be rewarding.

Furthermore, the reviewers' compliance with the process is based on a goal-oriented attitude as well as on the support which editors may provide. Self-determination theory (SDT) is grounded on extrinsic and intrinsic motives, goal-oriented behavior and environmental support. SDT is a broad framework for understanding how intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, life goals and environmental support play a role in facilitating or undermining people's sense of volition and initiative and in the quality of their performance, widely discussed within social sciences about reviewers' feedback (e.g. Guskey, 1987; Jackson, 1980; Lather, 1999).

This theory has been employed in other fields, including education, among others (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2013). However, its application has been limited, both in the specific context of reviewers' experiences, and in tourism and hospitality research more generally. Data were collected for the year 2014, through an online system. An extensive list of reviewers was created by scanning the editorial/advisory/scientific boards of the 20 tourism and hospitality journals with the highest impact factor either in the web of science or Scopus. The list contained 502 reviewers and each was emailed requesting participation in the survey. At the end of four weeks, 190 valid responses were

obtained, representing 37.8% of the population.

## 2. Literature review

A review is a means of gatekeeping to foster quality published work, enabling legitimation and the development of social knowledge creation (Lather, 1999). The review process is never easy. This process, despite the efforts which editors have made to improve the refereeing system in different ways (e.g. Alfonso, 2010; Lau, 2016; Min, 2014), is mostly dependent on the quality of the feedback which the reviewers provide to the authors. Feedback is conceptualized as information provided by the reviewers regarding aspects of one's contribution to the body of knowledge (Lather, 1999). "Feedback is information with which a learner can confirm, add to, overwrite, tune, or restructure information in memory, whether that information is domain knowledge, meta-cognitive knowledge, beliefs about self and tasks, or cognitive tactics and strategies" (Winne & Butler, 1994, p. 5740). How feedback contributes to the review process depends largely on the focus of feedback and the level at which it is directed (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This literature review is organized to characterize the peer review process and the role of the reviewers in this process. Self determination theory supports the model that reasons this research.

### 2.1. Characteristics of peer-review process

Overall, reviewers' feedback relies on determining whether each manuscript would advance tourism research (Oviedo-García, 2016). However, the study findings point towards concern over subjectivity or bias in the review process. Several studies have confirmed that open-review procedures are likely to drive the reviewers to be more biased as the authors' names and institutions are not disguised (e.g. Ross, 2006; Lee, Sugimoto, Zhang, & Cronin, 2012). Thus, the responsibility of reviewers to be neutral is immense. Any suspicious perception of their subjectivity may lead to authors' dissatisfaction at the other end (Weber, Katz, Waeckerle, & Callaham, 2002).

As a result, the review process should be ensured mostly by editors and reviewers who are the lifeblood of any journal (Alfonso, 2010; Min, 2014). The editor invites reviewers and authors to contribute to the development of the field, out of the mainstream; he/she defines the aims of the journal and the guidelines of authors' contributions. The reviewer's contributions rely on providing critical, constructive and collegial insights, able to redirect authors to advance in the body of knowledge. The remarkable boom over a very short period of time is a critical issue for journal editors, who struggle to motivate scholars to carry out what amounts to an ever-increasing quantity of reviews.

For instance, generally speaking, according to the results of a survey that John Wiley undertook in 2015 to better understand the peer review experience (Ware & Mabe, 2015), more than 22 million hours were spent reviewing manuscripts for the top 12 publishers in 2013. The primary reason that reviewers freely give of their time and expertise is to support their research community and "pay forward" the goodwill of others who have reviewed their work. The reviewers are more likely to accept the invitation from prestigious journals, to spend more time reviewing these manuscripts, and to adhere to the journal's deadlines. Moreover, 49% of the reviewers engage in a peer-review process for more than five journals. Finally, recognition and feedback are more important for the reviewers than gaining more tangible rewards.