

To cite this article: Czernek-Marszałek, K., & McCabe, S. (2022). Why qualitative papers get rejected by *Annals of Tourism Research*? *Annals of Tourism Research*, 92, 103338. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103338>

WHY QUALITATIVE PAPERS GET REJECTED BY ANNALS OF TOURISM RESEARCH?

Graebner, Martin and Roundy (2012) claim that doing qualitative research is like “cooking without a recipe”. This is true because each qualitative study is different and requires a different approach. However, as authors, reviewers and editors in *Annals of Tourism Research*, we have noticed a range of common issues specific to qualitative research papers, which are often cited as reasons for rejection. Therefore, the aim of this viewpoint is to identify some of these problems and offer potential approaches to overcome them.

Inconsistency between philosophical approach and methodology/research problem

The first issue concerns contradictions between the philosophical approach and the selection of qualitative methods or approaches to data analysis. Additional incongruences happen between choice of qualitative approaches and research problem specification. Inconsistency between theory and method, specifically the ontological (the nature of reality), epistemological (theory of knowledge associated with a paradigm or ontological position) and the methodological approach, and how that informs data collection and *especially* the approach taken to analyse data, often leads to the formulation of incorrect or superficial findings (Gephart, 2004). A classic example is Grounded Theory, an approach to theory generation based on philosophies of Pragmatism (Dewey, 1925) and Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1986) and developed by sociologists (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, with its own procedures for data collection and analysis (see: Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Yet, very often it is confused or conflated with Thematic Analysis, developed by psychologists (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and widely popular (the article has over 100,000 citations) across the disciplines for its flexibility and practical applications for analysing qualitative data. Yet, thematic analysis is widely associated with realist epistemology. Whilst it may be justifiable to combine them, the approach should be justified. A lack of consistency between the research problem and methodology is apparent, for example, when authors begin with positivistic assumptions and language but apply qualitative data and analysis. Authors should ensure alignment between theory and methodology *and* approach to data analysis as well as consistency between qualitative paradigmatic assumptions and research problem.

Vague methods section

The most common issues arise in the methods section. Firstly, papers often lack details on all methodological aspects, instead favouring greater emphasis in the conceptual positioning of the research. Authors often fail to describe and justify the sample strategy and size of qualitative interviews. Sometimes, we are asked what is an adequate number of interviews or responses? There is no correct answer. In qualitative research every study is unique. Every research problem is different and the sample should be sufficient to provide credible answers. Moreover, in qualitative research, it is not the quantity that matters, but the depth of analysis of the data that is important. Secondly, authors very often do not explain the position of the researcher in the research process or acknowledge the *situatedness* of the study, by which we mean recognition of the context in time and space and the roles of the participants (researcher-

subject) in co-production of the findings. It is important to indicate, for example, that the interviewees' interpretations create the reality described in the study, and that the researcher's task is to present this reality as the interlocutors see it. Descriptions of data analysis approach are often perfunctory. Yet if authors indicated the coding procedures, provided examples of the codebook, coding framework, and explained the coding process, e.g. whether multiple authors worked independently or collectively etc., intercoder consistency, this would demonstrate greater rigour (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Finally, authors often do not refer to the criteria of research trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is becoming increasingly essential to demonstrate how a qualitative study meets criteria of trustworthiness. For this reason, authors should present the research tool (e.g. interview protocol) which is now mandatory issue in many journals (including Annals), or provide access through open data repositories (see [Mendeley data](#)).

Poor story

Another problem is the lack of a story that gives a *Wow!* or *Shazzam* effect. Editors seek original, interesting quotes that are rich in detail and highly illustrative of the analytical themes. Poor fit between the quotes and analytic concepts risks rejection. Good qualitative analysis invokes 'thick' description (Geertz, 1973) which describes phenomena not only through conveying facts, but also meanings and interpretations allowing an explanation and understanding of the social context. This helps demonstrate a strong fit between the raw data and the analytical categories or themes. Moreover, to ensure a good story, authors should think creatively, either by presenting data in a chronological way or according to the coding method, or linking the raw data with the emerging theory, possibly using diagrams or graphical representation.

Qualitative research is time-consuming and onerous, but a high degree of consistency between the theory and methodology, rich detail in the methodology section that demonstrates trustworthiness in the research process, and a strong and coherent narrative presentation can increase the chances of a positive review outcome.

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