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Editing for IMPACT: clarity, appeal, and human judgment in the era of AI

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When we began our editorship 5 years ago, we sought counsel from previous *JHTR* editors. One piece of advice stayed with us: the work of an editor is sacred. That counsel led us to approach the role with humility rather than authority—offering suggestions rather than verdicts. As our 5-year tenure draws to a close, we reflect on what we have learned from handling more than 6,000 submissions. From this corpus we observed recurring patterns and pitfalls. We share the following reflections in the hope that they prove useful as authors strengthen their scholarly work.

On the Object of Inquiry—Clarify, Don't Confuse

It may sound obvious, yet we frequently encounter manuscripts that are unclear about their precise object of inquiry. Our field continually surfaces new phenomena—inviting exciting, but sometimes bewildering, topics. A current example is the rapid rise of AI-related studies. At the outset authors must ask: Is this study fundamentally about AI (AI as the object), or about how AI alters an established concept (AI as the context), such as technology acceptance? If AI is the object, articulate how the work advances the AI literature. If AI is the context, foreground the contribution to the established domain (e.g., technology acceptance in AI-mediated settings). Too often, authors claim major contributions to AI while merely replicating known constructs in an AI environment—diluting both theoretical and practical impact.

On Appeal—Dazzle, Don't Puzzle

Authors sometimes assume the value of their research is self-evident and thereby neglect appeal. Dense titles, abstract jargon, and technical introductions can overwhelm rather than engage. Do the opposite: make the value proposition unmistakable. Signal why the topic matters beyond a narrow niche;

communicate broader significance for non-specialist readers—who comprise the majority of our audience. When the study is geographically specific or context-bound, spell out its generalizable insights. Invite readers in; do not make them work to discover why they should care.

On Perspectives—Engage, Don't Estrange

Titles, abstracts, and discussions are too often the least developed elements—but are precisely where readers decide whether to invest their time. Step outside the researcher's vantage point and adopt the reader's. What is obvious to you may be opaque to others. Resist mechanical summaries. Craft entry points that signal significance, spark curiosity, and make the core message clear. A strong paper is not only about what you say, but how readily others can receive it. Neglect this, and strong ideas risk being overlooked. Be your reader.

On AI Tools—Enrich, Don't Entrust

Since generative AI became widely available, the baseline quality of writing in submissions has improved—a welcome development. Poor writing is now less defensible given near-universal access to proofreading tools. Yet, AI-polished prose can be mechanically fluent, emotionally cold, and thin in novelty. Our concern is the erosion of human cognitive craft when core intellectual labor is outsourced to machines. Some doctoral students, in particular, appear less motivated to acquire painstaking scholarly competencies. As generative AI evolves, we anticipate a paradox: human originality, creativity, and genuinely soulful writing will become scarcer—and therefore more prized. Scholarship will not become easier; standards for originality, theoretical depth, and methodological rigor will rise as linguistic fluency becomes a

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baseline expectation. We have also begun to suspect AI assistance—and, at times, AI-generated text—in manuscript reviews. Our position is firm: peer review must be conducted by human scholars. Nuanced arguments, theoretical advancements, and judgments about methodological rigor require hard-won expertise that exemplifies the beauty and power of human cognition. Use AI to enrich your work, not to entrust it with the thinking. Collaborate without ceding judgment to automation.

On IMPACT—Think Before You Submit

Our Author Guidelines are not an afterthought. Developed with our Editorial Board and grounded in collective review experience, they capture what we value at *JHTR*. Summarized by IMPACT, we seek work that is Innovative, Meaningful, Practically relevant, Academically rigorous, Cross-disciplinary, and Theory-focused. Submissions that merely re-situate generic studies in a hospitality or tourism setting rarely meet this bar. Nor do manuscripts that chase citation trends, offer modest empirical tweaks, favor quantity over quality, or prioritize metrics over contribution. We urge scholars to submit work that pushes boundaries: challenge assumptions, generate novel insights, and develop concepts or frameworks that genuinely advance understanding and inspire future research. Think before you submit—think IMPACT.

Departing Words

As we hand over the reins, we hope this editorial serves as a helpful resource for authors and readers. Throughout our tenure, we prioritized author engagement to make *JHTR* a preferred scholarly outlet, and we are grateful for the encouraging feedback affirming that emphasis.

Across the years, one signal of quality stood out: a compelling, relevant research question paired with rigorous methodology. Submissions that made a clear case for why the work mattered—whether to scholarship, to practice, or both—distinguished themselves immediately. Too many, however, did not explain how their findings advance understanding of the focal phenomenon, either in framing or in discussion. This partly explains our stringent acceptance rate (approximately 5.4%): of 1,200+ submissions received annually, about 70 ultimately reach publication.

Our editorship coincided with a period of notable development in hospitality and tourism research: growing methodological innovation and heightened attention to global imperatives such as sustainability and digital transformation. At the same time, we welcomed research that speaks to

emerging scholarly communities and pursues questions outside prevailing trends. Recognizing that the field can be inward-looking—adapting established themes more often than setting new agendas—we introduced two submission categories, Insight & Foresight and Registered Research, to widen the aperture for contributions. Together, these efforts underscore *JHTR*'s role as a venue where scholarship addresses both enduring questions and emerging challenges.

A journal's success is never a solo achievement. It rests on the dedication and expertise of an entire editorial ecosystem. We extend our deepest gratitude to our associate editors, editorial board members, ad hoc reviewers, and social media editor for their time and wisdom. Their commitment to thoughtful, timely, and constructive reviews has been the bedrock of our quality—ensuring that every submission, regardless of origin, received careful critique and an opportunity to grow. We also thank our editorial assistant, whose professionalism and efficiency have kept the journal running smoothly.

Although our role now concludes, we are confident the journal will continue to evolve as a forum for high-quality, high-impact research. We encourage authors to be bold in their questions, transparent in their methods, and explicit about their contributions to knowledge.

We leave with renewed awe for the collaborative spirit that drives scientific inquiry. Thank you for the privilege of serving. We are confident that *JHTR*'s legacy of excellence is in the most capable hands.

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