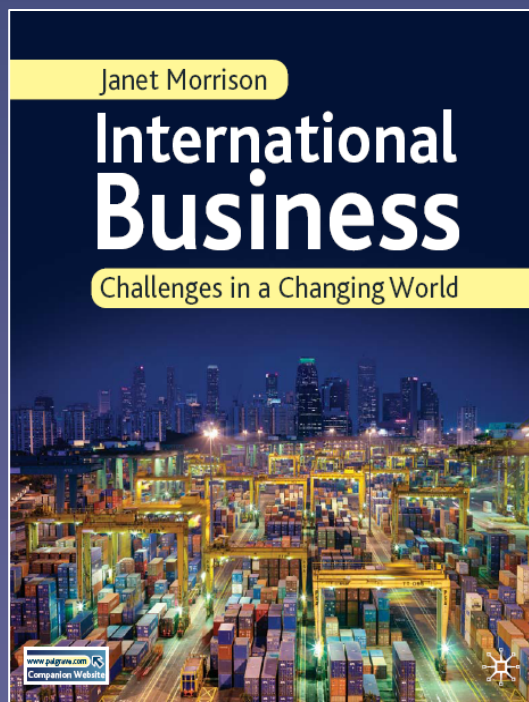


**INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS:
Challenges in a Changing World**
Janet Morrison

**GETTING THE MOST FROM
JOURNAL ARTICLES**



Introduction

Academic journals provide a wealth of resources for the student of business and management, but they may seem rather daunting at first sight, and less user-friendly than ordinary articles in newspapers and magazines. This introductory section provides an easy guide on how to choose, read and use articles. Its aim is to enhance your understanding of relevant academic research and develop your own research skills. Citing articles in your assessed work and referring to them in seminar discussions are evidence of good academic method, by which you will gain in confidence and authority in both oral and written presentations.

These notes are addressed to students of international business, but their general points will be relevant to studies in numerous other subject areas, particularly in areas related to social studies.

A note on accessing journal articles

Journal articles are now accessible in a variety of ways. Academic journals typically publish four issues a year. Most publish their in printed format, and these are available in educational libraries. Increasingly, however, online publication is taking the place of hard copies. Some journals offer online editions only. Universities and colleges subscribe to journals as part of their electronic database resources. These are available to part-time as well as full-time students. These are a superb learning resource – all you need is a little guidance in how to use them. Libraries and online databases provide guidance notes and even tutorials on how to use these resources. It is worth taking the time to study them, and will probably save you time in the end.

Getting the most from journal articles

Why read journal articles?

Journal articles can seem difficult to read – so why bother? News reports and blogs certainly give us information about what is happening in international business, and offer the writer's comment on events: these are helpful to keep up-to-date – but they are ephemeral; soon superseded by fast-changing events.

Taking a considered overview of events and comparing what is happening in different places, based on a deeper understanding of the background is a job for academic scholarship. Academic research helps us to fathom underlying trends and make forecasts for the future. Academics also devise theories which help us to explain what is happening. As you will have discovered in *International Business: Challenges in a changing world*, theories are often criticized by other academics: this is a recognized way in which theoretical tools are revised and enhanced, helping us to better understand and apply them to international business.

Nowadays, many scholars write both for academic audiences and for more general readers, crossing over between the two. The economist, Paul Krugman, is an example. The ability to reading, understand and evaluate both types of writing is a valuable asset for students.

Types of journal article

Journal articles are of different types, involving different research methods. The following are the main types likely to be encountered:

- *Theoretical article* – The author advances concepts and theory in a particular area, such as CSR. He/she will probably draw on existing theories, showing their limitations and explaining why this new theoretical development is more insightful.
- *Empirical study* – The author analyses data, posing hypotheses which are tested using statistical techniques. This type of research can produce interesting results which help us to understand underlying trends. Often, the author carries out research on primary data – that is, via the results of a survey (usually by questionnaire) of an identifiable group of people (such as women CEOs in a particular country). The findings can be highly illuminating, letting us in on how a given group views their roles and whether they have experienced discrimination.
- *Modelling study* – This type of research often combines theory and empirical analysis. The author constructs a model of a system with a number of variables, often set out as a diagram or set of equations. Economic reasoning relies heavily on this type of research. Values can be assigned to variables, and relationships between variables can be tested, providing the basis of forecasts for future trends.

- *Case study* – This type of article focuses on a particular company (or a comparison of companies) in respect of a specific issue or challenge. It tells a narrative of how the issue was resolved, citing reactions and responses of individuals involved firsthand. This type of article is interesting and accessible to read, and sheds light on how firms work in practice.
- *Literature review* – Although most articles, whatever the method, begin with a literature review (see below), some are devoted exclusively to this purpose. They offer a comprehensive review of the existing published research on a particular topic (such as culture theories). The author tends to make comparisons and group research in categories according to their differing approaches. This type of article is helpful in gaining an overview of research on a topic, but it does not attempt to address the topic itself!

To find out what types of article a particular journal specializes in, you need to find its statement of editorial policy, which is usually placed at the front of the printed copy or on the journal's home page. *JIBS* (www.palgrave-journals.com/jibs/index.html) is a good example. It lists many topics and states that theoretical as well as empirical research is welcome. It describes itself as 'methodologically pluralistic'.

How the article is organized

Journal articles tend to follow a pattern of presentation, whatever the topic. The following is an outline of the elements and their functions:

Title

Ideally, the title is informative and has at least one key word in it, which makes it easy to identify the subject of the article. However, some titles can give an impression which is not borne out in the text. Some authors go in for catchy or witty titles, which can sometimes be confusing. Therefore, you cannot always judge the content by the title, and reading the abstract is essential.

Author(s) names

There may be a sole author, co-authors or several authors. It is informative to look at what organization(s) they are associated with and where they are from. For example, if the article is about Chinese business and has three authors based in mainland China, Hong Kong and the UK, then the likelihood is that a variety of perspectives will emerge.

Abstract

This is a short paragraph at the outset of the article which explains the author(s) aims and what the article contributes to the academic scholarship in the area. The abstract is the article in a nutshell.

Keywords

These appear beneath the abstract. They might simply repeat the words in the title, but they can add helpful clues if the title is rather vague.

Introduction/literature review

In this section, the author(s) set out what they are attempting to show in the article, usually in the context of building on existing research. They attempt to demonstrate that there is some gap in our knowledge or understanding, which they will fill. There could well be many references in this section, as the author(s) are citing relevant prior research.

Body of the article

In **empirical** research, the body of the article will consist of:

- *Hypotheses* - The author(s) set out the propositions or model which they will test through their research.
- *Methodology* - The author(s) state how they are testing their hypotheses.
- *Results* - Analysis and correlations are presented.
- *Discussion* - Interesting correlations are examined and explained in light of this and prior research.

In **theoretical** research the body of the text explain concepts and place them within a theoretical model, developed in sections.

In **case study** research, the body of the text will set out the background and present the findings are presented as they unfolded over time.

Implications for future research

Here, the author(s) state what interesting avenues of research can be pursued as a result of their findings. This heading is not always included.

Conclusions

The conclusions sum up what the author(s) feel is the significance of the article. For empirical studies, they sum up their findings. They should not be stating anything new at this stage, but bringing it all together in a coherent statement of what they feel they have accomplished that is helpful for readers.

References

The references are self-explanatory. Where the author has carried out extensive review of the literature, the references are a helpful resource in their own right. Following up some of the key references is good academic practice. The use of references is a distinguishing feature of academic articles which articles in newspapers do not have.

How to read an article

Simply reading an article from beginning to end is not necessarily the best way to grasp its key points. The following tips should help:

- Read the **abstract** carefully and highlight the key points, as these will form the themes of the article.
- Then, **skim** the article, noting the function of each section. Which ones are clearly literature review? Note that they are not always labelled as such, and might have substantive section headings. Which sections contain the main body of the author(s) research contribution? You can now go back and read more carefully, having grasped its overall structure.
- Many authors use **acronyms** which are specific to their research. Unlike books, articles do not normally have a list of acronyms at the beginning. This can be frustrating to readers, who might miss them as they read and then have to search the text for what, for example, 'MKW' stands for. From the author's perspective, they are helpful because they are more economical. Note the acronyms as they arise and highlight them or write them down.
- The literature review may contain many **references**, implying that the authors are widely read and informed. Which are the key ones, and what is their importance? Note particularly the ways in which the author(s) say they will build on or contradict existing research.
- The main body of the research should follow on coherently. If the author builds a theory or set of hypotheses, these are likely to be numbered, and can be **highlighted** to make them stand out.
- Ask yourself whether the author(s) have accomplished what they set out to do. How does this article enhance our knowledge or improve theory? Take a **critical** perspective towards the article.
- It helps to write your own **summary** of an article's contribution, as if you are writing a literature review. You may need it for your own research, and even if you do not, writing a summary is an aid to understanding it. In it you can cite the pages and references which contain the main points. Even if the information does not seem relevant now, you may find you want to refer back to it for a future assignment, and your summary and page references be a useful resource.

Conclusion

Like all good journal articles, we will conclude with a few points by way of summary. Journal articles are sometimes thought of by students as good cures for insomnia. We hope this brief guide has shown that there is a lot of interesting academic research in journals, which can be easily accessed. By understanding how articles are constructed, it is possible to retrace the author(s) steps and become acquainted with the research process. The fruits of research from scholars across the globe provide much insight into the world of international business.