

20

A Synthesis of Tourism Research Topics

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Tourism has grown into an important and coherent field of academic research in the second half of the 20th century (Meyer-Arendt & Justice, 2002). Researchers acknowledge that tourism is a multi-faceted phenomenon. This is a reflection of the complexity of the tourism experience, the domain of human activity where a wide scope of organizations and business services join together to cater to the needs of travelers while managing the impact of this activity on the host communities. Disciplinary inputs to the tourism field come from many disciplines including psychology, anthropology, sociology, economics, geography and management. While many established social science disciplines provided the conceptual and methodological foundations for tourism research and education, there seems to be an increasing orientation towards a business administration and management emphasis (Dann and Phillips, 2000). With tourism identified as the leading economic activity in the world and the shifting business patterns brought upon by the changes in technology affecting the distribution of information and delivery of tourism products and services, these changes and shifts in research attention come as no surprise.

Changes in research attention raise questions about important areas of investigation in tourism research. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the recent research trends in tourism and identify leading areas of investigation.

Synthesis of Findings

Trends are different from predictions. Predictions are educated guesses of future events, but trends are based on historic precedents. In order to understand tourism research trends, it is necessary to review recent tourism research. Therefore, this chapter synthesizes trends based on a cataloging process where recent tourism publications were viewed and categorized. The cataloging

framework suggested by Jafari (1977) and Jafari and Ritchie (1981) was employed with some modest modifications. The topic reviews were based on an examination of almost 50 years of dissertation topics and publications in the past five years in three of the major tourism journals: *Annals of Tourism Research (ATR)*, *Tourism Management (TM)*, and the *Journal of Travel Research (JTR)*. A total of 723 journal papers were reviewed and indexed using titles, keywords and abstracts (see Table 1).

The number of articles about a given theme (e.g., *tourism marketing*, *host-guest relationships*) certainly serves as one indicator of the importance and influence of a particular tourism topic. In this review, many topics emerged based on a measure of how often they appeared in the literature. This measure, in addition to quality indicators provided by processes such as the Social Science Citation Index, help identify the trends and topics that are most important and salient to natural resource and tourism practitioners, and researchers, today.

From 1999 to 2003, the most popular tourism topics in the three journals included marketing, planning and development, host-guest relationships, tourism management, and travel motivation. More than half of the reviewed papers were related to one of these five categories. Marketing, planning and development, and host-guest relationships were especially prevalent: They collectively accounted for about one-fifth of the 723 papers. From the popularity of papers, strong interest was expressed in sustainable development and "how to" promotion of tourism destinations.

However, while most tourism journals acknowledge the multi-disciplinary nature of the field, each has its own focus. For instance, in the past five years the *Annals of Tourism* has demonstrated a tendency toward publishing conceptual and theoretical development, including an emphasis on social psychological and anthropological analyses of tourism. *Tourism Management* and *Journal of Travel Research* have a decidedly more practical bent. They are clearly more focused towards empirical applications of theories and models, and their practical implications for tourism organizations.

Host-guest Relationships

One key agenda in tourism research is analysis of host-guest relationships through social psychological and anthropological analysis. In fact, host-guest relationships appear to be one of the most dominant themes across all publications. The focal points of these discussions are the authenticity of the tourism experience and the social impact of tourism on the host community.

With the emergence of heritage and/or culture-based tourism in recent years, challenges as to how academics conceptualize authenticity have been presented in numerous discussions. Such theoretical debate has implications for the tourism industry regarding how to measure the perceived authenticity of tourism experiences (Waitt, 2003). Research concerning the authenticity of tourism experience adopts the guest approach: the concern about the authenticity from the tourist's perspective. When a tourism product involves the representation of another or the past -- especially in ethnic, history, heritage or culture tourism -- authenticity becomes a concern.

Wang's (1999) article is a critical piece on the issue of authenticity. Further advancing the two conventional definitions of authenticity (i.e., *objective* and

Category	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total
Marketing of Tourism	27	35	31	37	22	152
Tourism Planning and Development	22	25	16	22	8	93
Host-Guest Relationship	27	13	14	22	14	90
Management of Tourism Organizations	12	12	21	5	13	63
Motivation	6	15	16	19	6	62
Design with Nature	8	7	10	16	6	47
Research Methodology	22	6	11	5	1	45
Economic Implications	9	10	12	8	2	41
Sociology of Tourism	9	5	8	7	4	33
Role of Hospitality in Tourism	5	6	2	4	3	20
Tourism Education	3	5	1	5	5	19
World Without Border (Political)	3	3	5	2	3	16
Recreation Management	2	1	2	3	4	12
Rural Tourism	2	2	3	4		11
Tourism Laws	3	2	2		2	9
Fundamental of Transportation	1	1	3	1	1	7
Geography of Tourism		1			2	3
Total	161	149	157	160	96	723

Table1. Research Papers by Topic of Three Major Tourism Journals (1999-2003)

constructive), Wang proposes a third dimension: *existential*. He suggested that both objective and constructive authenticity are object-related notions, whereas existential authenticity more effectively explains activity-related tourism experiences, such as shopping or visiting friends and relatives. Existential authenticity is further classified into two different dimensions: intra-personal and inter-personal. This article has been cited frequently and contributes significantly to the body of knowledge in tourism host-guest relationships.

A second theme frequently addressed is the social impact of tourism on the host community. This is a “host” approach: the issue about preserving the authenticity and tradition of the host community. Although discussion on development of cultural and heritage tourism and its benefits has been center stage, more attention has been paid to whether the development contributes to or depreciates the very existence of the local cultural and heritage resources. For example, Palmer (1999) argues that heritage

tourism contributes positively to the construction and maintenance of national identity. A step further, Tucker (2001), suggested that host communities are in a position to negotiate both their own traditional identity in the presence of tourists, and their personal quests and experiences as a result of their close interactions with tourists. The article challenges the assumptions that host communities must remain authentically traditional to meet the expectations of the tourists.

Tourism Product Planning and Development

Tourism product planning and development, especially in that of cultural and heritage attractions as well as regional development, has had high visibility in recent research. Involving stakeholders in the planning and development process has been a much discussed issue. For instance, Ritchie (1999) argued that optimum destination planning requires that a destination have a value-driven vision, one that includes the values and perspectives of the stakeholders, rather than a market-driven vision.

The concept of participatory development has been frequently discussed in the literature. Public participation in tourism in both the decision-making process and in the benefits of tourism development has been viewed as a paradigm to healthy and sustainable tourism development. Participatory development has also been explored and applied in the context of developing countries, with discussion about the constraints that exist within such countries for its successful implementation (Timothy, 1999). The main constraints were identified as: a) cultural and political traditions, b) poor economic conditions, c) lack of expertise, and d) lack of understanding by residents.

Various models have been proposed to actively and effectively involve stakeholders. Tourism development and planning tends to involve entities both from the public and private sectors. As a result, inter-organizational collaboration and partnerships in destinations have been considered as an effective planning framework. Bramwell and Sharman (1999) revisit the issue of collaboration among stakeholders in the process of destination development, and further enhance this model by presenting an analytical framework to assess whether local collaborative arrangements are inclusive and involve collective learning and consensus-building.



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Another prominent topic is the issue of sustainability, related to the relationship and balance between conservation and use. Garrod and Fyall (2000) argue that there is a close association between the fundamental elements of the heritage mission and the widely acknowledged principles of sustainable development. Their study investigates the major constraints and imperatives relating to the long-term management of built heritage attractions. One major constraint is that heritage establishment tends to place more emphasis on conservation and education, and less on contemporary use and local community. As a result, heritage managers tend to reject the practice of applying the so-called "user pays principle" and, as a result, frequently lack financial resources for the development of sustainable products.

Tourism Marketing

Tourism marketing themes are very persistent in virtually all three journals. The most prominent issues appear to be destination image, internet marketing and market segmentation. An emphasis for the journals is often to publish significant theoretical pieces that outline a theme or direction for subsequent research. One example is Woodside and Dubelaar's (2002) article that discussed a conceptual framework for thoughts, decisions, activities and behaviors in a before, after and during trip timeframe. Other examples include Botha, Crompton and Kim's (1999) competitive positioning models; Bonn, Furr and Susskind's (1999) model of internet user segmentation; and Buhalis' (2000) model of marketing the competitive destination of the future.

Among all marketing issues, *destination image* appeared to receive the most attention. Image has emerged as a crucial marketing concept in the tourism industry, and its research has reflected several different perspectives. These include the relationship of image to destination choice, the image formation process, image modification and change, and image measurement (Baloglu & Shoemaker, 2001; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Murphy, Pritchard & Smith, 2000; Prentice & Andersen, 2003; Uysal, Chen & Williams, 2000).

Baloglu and McCleary's (1999) article is frequently cited within destination image literature. Their research suggested a model of the important determinants of destination image formation and empirically tested the framework. The authors found that travel motivations and travelers' characteristics appear to play a key role in image formation, in addition to stimulus factors such as cognitive perception of destination attributes, information sources and affective factors.

Image modification due to incidental factors are also explored extensively in previous research. For instance, the effect of a festival on destination image modification is examined by Prentice and Andersen (2003). The authors study the effect of Edinburgh's festival positioning and its impact on the overall image modification of Scotland. The study revealed that the festival is judged successful in its international arts positioning in terms of the core of serious repeat tourists it attracts, but much less so in modifying the image of Scotland as a landscape and tradition destination.

The impact of organic information sources such as motion pictures and similar coverage has also been addressed extensively. Kim and Richardson (2003) examined the powerful role of autonomous image formation agents such as news coverage and

popular culture (e.g., films, television programs, literature) and discovered that motion pictures increase the awareness of the places they depict, and have strong tourist-inducing effects.

Technology and Tourism

Another key topic in the literature and research is the issue of technology, especially the Internet and its profound impact on tourism organizations and travelers. Frew (2000) indicated that the number of research articles on this topic increased tenfold from 1988 to 1999. Since information is viewed as the lifeblood of the tourism industry, the technological revolution brought upon by the Internet has driven a process of business re-engineering. While researchers are tackling the issue from many perspectives, three major research trends can be identified.

The first area that has received increasing research attention centers around applications of information technology (IT) in tourism organizations, online business models and business strategies. There are a number of forces encouraging the tourism industry to adopt different business models and develop different markets in response to IT. Connell and Reynolds (1999) focused on IT implications on tourist information centers; Siguaw, Enz and Namasivayam (2000) examined the utilization of IT in hotel sectors; and Yuan, Gretzel, and Fesenmaier (2002) identified the key factors influencing the adoption of IT by conventions and visitors bureaus.

A number of articles have focused on propositions of business models for electronic tourism markets and strategies for their development. For instance, Buhalis and Licata (2002) discussed the evolution and adaptation model of the traditional global distribution systems that supported travel agents to the new concept of Internet-based eMediaries. According to the research, the Internet created the conditions for emergence of new eMediaries based on three ePlatforms: 1) Internet, 2) interactive digital television, and 3) mobile devices. The new eMediaries include a variety of organizations including suppliers (e.g., airlines, hotels) selling direct on the Internet, web-based travel agents, Internet portals and vortals, and auction sites. The expected proliferation of digital television and eCommerce will gradually intensify competition further. As a result, traditional eMediaries must re-engineer their business processes in order to remain competitive.

The integration of the online virtual community strategies within the overall business strategy has also been a focal point. The growing online travel consumers market and online communities have also contributed to a growing market environment that demands research attention. Wang, Yu and Fesenmaier (2002) proposed a theoretical foundation based upon the core characteristics of a virtual community and the fundamental needs of community members. Perspectives of how one can define and interpret virtual communities within the tourism industry are discussed and issues related to the functions of virtual communities are explored from members' viewpoints.

Tourism website performance evaluation appears as another much discussed area, especially in regards to quality of information. With the dramatic expansion of online information, information overload and online trust are common discussion points in recent research. Different methodologies and criteria have been developed and used to evaluate the performance of websites of different industry sectors

(Doolin, Burgess & Cooper, 2002; Tierney, 2000; Wan, 2002).

Other researchers propose and empirically test models that profile and compare travelers who are engaged in online travel-related activities such as information searching and online reservation booking. For instance, adoption and diffusion models have been frequently proposed and tested in an attempt to better understand online travel behaviors (Bonn, Furr & Susskind, 1999; Susskind, Bonn & Dev, 2002; Weber & Roehl, 1999). Researchers have indicated that information technology will be one of the important trends for tourism industry (Butler & Jones, 2001; Cetron, 2001; Gartner & Lime, 2000). While research is tackling the issue, the technology is developing with amazing speed. As a result, research gaps still exist and there is ever stronger demand in researching the IT arena.

Implications and Conclusions

As a global phenomenon, tourism has become a leading economic activity in almost 70 percent of the states in the U.S., and represents a very important economic contributor in many nations of the world. As observed from this research effort, a major focus of much of the tourism research is the heavy emphasis on *application*. The goal clearly seems to be making a difference in the way in which public and private organizations manage, plan or develop policies and strategies. The emphasis on application is probably tied to sources of funding and expectations for deliverables. It is also likely that the research will have implications for both rural and urban areas, and public and private agencies, particularly in terms of issues such as social and economic impacts, development, markets, infrastructure and stakeholder involvement. Tourism research will also have to be examined in light of its relationship to the longstanding research done in recreation, with the obvious linkage to activities, or products.

From the review of the three major tourism journals, there are several areas of scholarship that overlap, as previously identified. It is likely that in the short term, the leading research areas identified at the outset in this review will continue to lead the topic list. Behavioral studies that include attention to items such as demographics, experiences, product development, attitudes, motivation and satisfaction continue to grow, as is attention to the role, use and adoption of IT. The presentation of a number of theoretical models also suggests many opportunities for conceptual development and testing.

Tourism organizations are faced with unparalleled challenges and opportunities. To survive and thrive, organizations should respond by investing in research that will assist in developing innovative models of doing business and new ways of making and delivering products and services. For example, IT has contributed to the birth of new communities and cultures that cross the boundaries of geographic regions and nations. These new cultures in the virtual space will inevitably shape strong forces that will lead businesses into new ways of operating, learning and governing themselves in the dynamic commercial forefront. They also change at rates much faster than what has been experienced previously. In addition, experience marketing is likely to emerge in the research, following Pine and Gilmore's (1999) book *The Experience Economy*. Certainly in the natural resource and recreation arena, the experience area has been prominent in frameworks such as the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum.

Overall, new knowledge and information through research will be imperative for tourism businesses to successfully adapt, react and take advantage of these forces in order to stay competitive, enhance conservation and sustainability, and develop a strong vision for their future success.

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