

ANALYSIS OF THE LEADING TOURISM JOURNALS 1999-2008

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to examine the research themes, method and outcome trends that have been published in the three leading tourism journals from 1999 to 2008. This study builds upon previous research relating to tourism publications throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but includes analysis of adopted methodology and practical versus theoretical implications. This study involved a content analysis of 1584 articles published between 1999 and 2008 in the three most prominent tourism journals. It was found that greater numbers of articles are being published and a consistency of research themes is being researched. A commonality of research methods is discernible and although practical outcomes still dominate, an increased number of theoretical outcomes are evident. This is the largest content analysis conducted of research in tourism and, contributes an analysis of the development of the top echelons of tourism research over the last decade.

Keywords: Leading Tourism Journals, Content Analysis, Research themes, methods and outcomes.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Jennings (2010), O'Connor and Baum (2008) and Zhao and Brent Ritchie (2007), academic research has played an important role in the development of the tourism industry. Since the 1960s, tourism researchers have provided multidisciplinary perspectives into the planning and management of tourism at the local, regional, national and international levels, and offered insights into the expectations, impacts, motivations, needs and satisfaction levels of tourists (c.f. Cohen, 1972; Graburn, 1976; MacCannell, 1973). As tourism developed as a field of study throughout the 1970s and 1980s, an increased number of dedicated tourism journals emerged along with specific higher education courses and scholarly conferences (Jafari, 1990; Leiper, 2000). By the early 1990s, a number of academics referred to tourism as 'reaching maturity' as a discipline in its own right (see Goeldner, 1988; Jafari, 1990; Sheldon, 1991), although this claim was either only partially supported (Coles, Hall & Duval, 2009; Echtner & Jamal, 1997; Leiper, 2000; Ryan, 1997), or rejected outright by academics in the field (Cooper et al., 1998; Tribe, 1997).

Given that the number of dedicated tourism journals, scholarly conferences and university degrees offered around the globe cannot be denied (Jafari, 1990; Leiper, 2000), the main contention in the debate centres on the extent to which research being published by leading tourism researchers meets the standard of an 'academic discipline' as defined by Abbott (2001), Hirst (1974) and Kuchinke (2004). Abbott (2001: 30), for example, states that academic disciplines "...define what it is permissible not to know and thereby limit the body of books one must read...they provide common sets of research practices that unify groups with diverse substantive interests", whilst Kuchinke (2004: 292) suggests that "...disciplines are fairly well identifiable, with each carrying sets of assumptions, methodological

approaches, research agendas, professional associations, journals and other institutional characteristics”. Jafari (1990) traced the development of tourism scholarship from economic quick fix (advocacy platform) to the scientific knowledge-based platform. He concluded that the growth of tourism scholarship had been extensive and would continue to develop in the future. Leiper (2000) was one of the first to state that there was sufficient evidence for the field of tourism to be considered a discipline in its own right, given the array of specialised journals, conferences and university degree offerings. Cooper et al., (1998) and Tribe (1997) disagreed, however, citing tourism’s lack of theoretical underpinning and failure to conform to Hirst’s (1974) more rigorous criteria for identifying academic disciplines: firstly, that tourism research does not rely on an interrelated set of concepts that are particular to tourism alone; secondly, that tourism research does not form a distinctive and logical structure; thirdly, that tourism research concepts are not testable according to criteria that are particular to tourism alone; and fourthly, that tourism research concepts are not irreducible (i.e. it is possible to reduce tourism concepts to more basic ‘building blocks’ – e.g. ‘tourist satisfaction’ can be reduced to a study of ‘satisfaction’). Given the ongoing debate, the call for greater quality tourism research has turned its attention on the focus of issues addressed by tourism researchers, and the extent to which tourism research has evolved in relation to Hirst’s (1974) criteria for an academic discipline (Leiper, 2000; Sheldon, 1991; Tribe, 1997).

2. EXPLORATION OF THE RESEARCH PUBLISHED IN THE LEADING TOURISM JOURNALS

Sheldon (1991) was one of the first to claim that tourism had developed as an academic discipline, achieving a level of maturity whose research scope had moved beyond the needs of the industry alone to encompass theoretical issues and conceptual models. In her study, Sheldon (1991) analysed the articles published in what she claimed were the three leading tourism journals of the 1980s (i.e. *Tourism Management*, *Annals of Tourism Research* and the

Journal of Travel Research). Her research concluded that the three leading journals had published a significant number of articles that had advanced beyond empirical investigations into the realm of exploring the conceptual and theoretical aspects of the tourism. Jafari (1990) had also reviewed the emerging field of tourism scholarship and found the field had developed from a focus on economic benefits (advocacy platform) through recognition of the negative impacts of tourism (cautionary platform) with resulting championing of alternative tourism (adaptancy platform) through to a broader more scientific understanding of tourism via the knowledge-based platform. The knowledge-based platform was the last of the four platforms to emerge demonstrating the maturity of the emerging field which was supported by scholarly journals, the International Academy for the Study of Tourism and by tourism university courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Jafari, 1990).

By the end of the 1990s, the debate about whether tourism was to be considered a discipline in its own right was in full swing. Tribe (1997) essentially rejected the argument outright, describing tourism as an “indiscipline” and instead proposed that tourism should be viewed as two fields of study (namely “business” and “non-business” tourism).

Research on the development of the field of tourism has continued through the first decade of the 21st century, with a number of researchers replicating and/or modifying Sheldon's (1991) content analysis approach to the examination of the leading tourism journals. For example, Xiao and Smith's (2006) analysed the subject index of the *Annals of Tourism Research*, and identified eighty-eight tourism topics that changed in emphasis over time (i.e. sociological and anthropological topics dominated research in the 1970s; economics and management topics in dominated in the 1980s; environment and socio-cultural topics came to the forefront in the 1990s). In his review of this debate, Hall (2011: 16) states that many bibliometric

studies of tourism journals have been conducted "...[to reflect] on the growth of tourism studies as an area of knowledge", and have focussed on a variety of issues and have used a variety of data sources (see Benckendorff, 2009; Jogaratnam, Chon, McCleary, Mena & Yoo, 2005; Law & Chon, 2007; McKercher, 2008; Riley & Love, 2000; Zhao & Brent Ritchie, 2007). These have mainly included tourism authorship (i.e. which academics have published in tourism journals, and from what institutions have they done so), and the number of citations that tourism journal papers have received over time. Common to each of these efforts was an attempt to gauge the extent to which tourism had developed towards an academic discipline.

Whilst an array of content analyses focused on leading tourism research for the 1980s, and 1990s is evident, there has been no similar contribution for the leading tourism research themes published in first decade of the 21st century. There is an opportunity, therefore, to contribute to the debate by content analysing the array of themes published in the leading tourism journals across the first decade of the 21st century. As such, the research question to be addressed in this paper is: What research themes (which in this analysis include 'topic/theme area', 'adopted methodologies', and 'research conclusion typology') were published in the three leading tourism journals during the period 1999 to 2008? In order to address this opportunity we follow the recommendation of McKercher (2008) to examine the research themes published in the leading tourism journals. McKercher, (2008: 1226) claims the most influential scholars "shape what we know about tourism, how we think about tourism and how we research tourism". The leading tourism journals represent the pinnacle of tourism research where the most influential scholars publish, and the basis upon which future tourism researchers will likely direct their efforts. Determining the answer to this question is important for two main reasons: Firstly, because it will provide a ten-year quasi-longitudinal

update of the research orientation of leading researchers and journals in the tourism discipline. Secondly, it will provide a trend analysis of the prominent research themes, along with a measure of their stability and/or dynamism over the decade beginning 1999 (thereby enabling an analysis of the tourism themes against the criteria set down by Hirst (1974) and the criticisms posed by Cooper et al., (1998) and Tribe (1997)).

2.1 *Study Methods*

In order to address the research question, this study undertook an analysis of the three leading peer-reviewed tourism journals as rated by the Australian Research Council (2008) and Harzing's (2009) 'Journal Quality List' (namely: the *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Tourism Management*, and *Journal of Travel Research*). All three journals received the highest ranking possible across both rating systems, which indicate that they represent "...the best or leading journal in its field [and] publishes outstanding, original and rigorous research that will shape the field" (Harzing, 2009: 7). According to the journals' own statements concerning their aims and scope:

The *Annals of Tourism Research* a social sciences journal focusing upon the academic perspectives of tourism. While striving for a balance of theory and application, *Annals* is ultimately dedicated to developing theoretical constructs. Its strategies are: to invite and encourage offerings from various disciplines; to serve as a forum through which these may interact; and to expand frontiers of knowledge in and contribute to the literature on tourism social science (*Annals of Tourism Research*, 2010:1);

The *Journal of Travel Research (JTR)* is the premier research journal focusing on travel and tourism behavior, management and development. JTR provides researchers, educators, and professionals with up-to-date, high quality research on behavioral trends and management theory for one of the most influential and dynamic industries (*Journal of Travel Research*, 2010:1); and

Tourism Management is the leading international journal for all those concerned with the planning and management of travel and tourism (*Tourism Management*, 2010:1).

As such, these three journals provide a sound basis upon which to content analyse the most outstanding and rigorous multidisciplinary research to be published in the tourism discipline, and to gauge the major trends in academic and practitioner knowledge development over the

decade beginning in 1999. Neumann (2003: 219) defines content analysis as "...a technique for gathering and analysing the content of text...content refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated", and is generally based on written or visual materials because they have the capacity to provide rich information about a topic of choice (Neuendorf, 2002). According to Duriau, Reger and Pfarrer (2007), content analysis is a particularly appropriate methodology for gauging research trends, as it facilitates a quasi-longitudinal analysis of comparable journal article publications over time.

The content analysis research undertaken in this study followed the five-stage protocol identified by Finn et al. (2000), Hodson (1999) and Neumann (2003). In the first stage, the aims and objectives of the research were identified, and the first round coding rules were developed. Coding refers to the process of converting information into contextual values for the purposes of data storage, management and analysis allowing theme identification (Ticehurst & Veal, 2000). Using the literature review as a guide, we decided to initially organise the journal article content by demographic variables such as 'publication year', 'location of researcher' and 'geographic focus of the research' (see Table 1 for the full list of first round coding categories). Using demographic variables as the basis for the first round coding had three main advantages: firstly, it enabled the researchers to populate the journal article database with a high degree of inter-coder reliability. Secondly, it provided a basis for the researchers to manipulate the data more readily later in the analysis process. Thirdly, it provided a protocol upon which the content analysis could be readily replicated by others in the future.

Please insert Table 1 here

In the second stage of the content analysis, all of the journal article publications from 1999 to 2008 were collected electronically from the ProQuest® database. In total, 140 issues of the respective journals were collected, and from these, 1584 peer-reviewed articles were identified as valid for the purposes of answering the research question. Using the first round coding rules discussed above, the valid peer-reviewed research articles were entered into the database. At regular intervals, inter-coder reliability checks were taken to ensure that the data were coded consistently, and to ensure that no valid articles were accidentally omitted from consideration. Table 2 provides summary information about the journal articles that were collected and analysed.

Please insert Table 2 here

In the third stage of the content analysis, the coded data were further interrogated to determine the research themes of each article published in the leading tourism journals for the decade beginning in 1999. The research themes detected in the analysis formed the basis for establishing the second round of data categories (see Table 3 the full list of second round coding categories). As was the case in Stage One, the second round of coding rules were developed prior to the coding of the data itself (to maintain a consistent approach between researchers), and to provide a protocol for others to follow should they wish to replicate the analysis.

Please insert Table 3 here

In the fourth stage of the content analysis, the second round coding categories were populated with data according to the new coding rules. The interpretation of the data during the second

round of coding, and the verification of the conclusions, was facilitated by the use of the NVIVO software package. In the method literature, it has been emphasised that computer software programs such as NVIVO, are of significant value in qualitative analysis and any subsequent theory building (Kelle, 1995; Richards and Richards, 1995; Weitzman and Miles, 1995). Where it was appropriate, data were allocated to more than one node for analysis. Again using the NVIVO software, the contents of each of the initial index nodes were then reviewed to identify common themes that arose in the data.

In the final stage of the content analysis, the results of the second round coding were refined and the research findings finalised. In order to facilitate the analysis process, memos were maintained about the data, their categories, and the relationships between them as they emerged. Designed to store and organise ideas about the data, they were integrated into the analytic process. Wilson suggests that memos assist in the development of theory in five important ways:

1. They require that you move your thinking about the idea to a conceptual level.
2. They summarise the properties of each category so that you can begin to construct operational definitions.
3. They summarise propositions about relationships between categories and their propositions.
4. They begin to integrate categories with networks of other categories.
5. They relate your analysis to other theories (1985: 420).

NVIVO has a facility for the creation and retention of such memos for later consideration and analysis. Utilising the memo capability within the NVIVO package, memo reports were generated by the software after 'stage two' coding. From these reports, the trends and emergent themes became clearer. The themes emanating from the 'second round' coding form the basis of the results section that follows.

2.2 *Study Findings*

As noted, the total number of peer-reviewed journal articles collected in this study totalled 1584. Table 4 summarises the yearly distribution of the publications, both in terms of actual numbers published as well as a percentage.

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Table 4 reveals a marked increase in the number of peer-reviewed journal articles published across the three journals over the study period. In terms of ‘percentage of the total published’, the data indicates that the four years 2005 to 2008 accounted for nearly half of all articles published (48.6%) – in excess of the ‘expected’ level of 40%. Further to this, and taking 1999 as a base-year, the data indicates that by 2007, the three journals combined increased their number of published articles by 79.5%. Interestingly, in the final year of the study, the combined level of publications decreased to 163 articles (a reduction of 56 articles from the peak output level in 2007), which represented a relatively modest 33.6% increase over the base year level.

As part of the second stage content analysis implemented in this research, all of the peer-reviewed journal articles were coded according to their ‘journal of publication’ as well as the ‘methodology employed by the authors’. Tables 2 and 4 together demonstrate that the number of peer-reviewed journal articles published in the ten-year period of this study grew from a base of 122 in 1999, to a maximum of 219 in 2007. The majority the growth is attributed to the *Tourism Management*, whose average publication rate increased from 51.2 articles per year (between 1999 and 2003) to 92.2 articles per year (between 2004 and 2008) – representing an 80% increase between the two periods. The *Journal of Travel Research* and

Annals of Tourism Research also increased their average yearly publication rate over the same time periods: from 35.2 to 42.6 articles (21%) and 45.8 to 49.8 articles per year (8.7%) respectively.

The third stage of data coding and analysis sought to identify the array of research themes present across the three leading tourism journals. Whilst there were in excess of 50 separate research themes detected in total, the ‘top ten’ themes, as ranked by frequency, accounted for 82.3% of the total articles published. The four most frequently published research themes together accounted for just under 50% of the total: ‘Tourism Business Development’ (222 articles), ‘Tourist Behaviour’ (221 articles), ‘Consumer Behaviour’ (198 articles) and ‘Tourist Attractions’ (139 articles). Table 5 provides a summary of the predominant research themes identified during the third round of coding.

Please insert Table 5 here

Table 5 demonstrates that outside of the ‘top ten’ research theme areas identified, only ‘Sustainable Tourism’, ‘Related and Supporting Industries’ and ‘Tourism Education’ generated a count of ten or more articles throughout the study period. These three themes areas accounted for 93 articles (or 5.8% of the total). The category ‘Other’ represents the array of topic areas that generated 5 or fewer publications, and due to their eclectic nature, were not able to be allocated their own code. Given the demonstrated dominance of the top ten theme areas in terms of their publication frequency, the remainder of this paper will focus on their distribution over the study period, and the methods adopted to research them. Table 6 provides a detailed account of the publication frequency of these dominant research themes across the ten year period of this study.

Please insert Table 6 here

Despite the observed increases in the raw number of peer-reviewed articles published between 1999 and 2008, a Chi-square analysis of the data indicated that there was no significant change in the proportion of articles focused on seven of the leading research themes. Statistical analysis indicated that the proportion of articles focusing on the themes of Tourism Business Development ($\chi^2 (9) = 4.22, p >0.05$), Tourist Behaviour ($\chi^2 (9) = 9.22, p >0.05$), Consumer Behaviour ($\chi^2 (9) = 7.39, p >0.05$), Niche Tourism ($\chi^2 (9) = 11.39, p >0.05$), Cultural Tourism ($\chi^2 (9) = 4.27, p >0.05$), the Impacts of Tourism ($\chi^2 (9) = 7.65, p >0.05$), or Transportation ($\chi^2 (9) = 11.74, p >0.05$) remained 'stable' over the ten-year study period. The analysis did, however, detect a significant increase in the number and proportion of articles focusing on Tourist Attractions ($\chi^2 (9) = 19.65, p <0.05$) and External Influences on Tourism ($\chi^2 (9) = 22.46, p <0.01$), as well as a result that 'tended towards' a significant increase in articles focusing on Hospitality Management ($\chi^2 (9) = 16.34, p=0.06$).

This research also sought to identify the research methodologies adopted by the authors of the published articles. Table 7 summarises the coding of the data, grouped by the four generic methodologies (i.e. quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, and conceptual).

Please insert Table 7 here

Analysis indicated that each of the four generic methodologies gravitated to a handful of research designs. For example, Table 7 indicates that five basic research designs accounted for 91.8% of the articles based on quantitative methods: 'surveys' (34.1%), 'inferential statistical analyses' (30.8%), 'descriptive statistical analyses' (15.3%), 'model building' (6.7%) and 'hypothesis testing' (4.9%). Three research designs accounted for 64.3% of the

articles based on qualitative methods: ‘interviews’ (35.7%), ‘content analysis’ (16.3%), and ‘observational study’ (12.3%). Three research designs accounted for 62.2% of the articles based upon mixed-methodologies: ‘surveys’ (28.1%), ‘interviews’ (18.8%), and ‘descriptive statistics’ (15.3%). Similarly, three research designs account for 78.3% of the conceptual articles: ‘concept definition’ (i.e. no data analysis – 50.9%), ‘model building’ (22.1%), and ‘content analysis’ (5.3%).

Further analysis of the data indicated that quantitative methodologies dominated the research design over the ten year period of this research. Overall, 855 articles were based on quantitative methods (or 54% of the population), followed by 301 articles based on qualitative methods (19%), 252 conceptual papers (15.9%), and 176 articles based on mixed methodologies (11.2%). The frequency of each type of research method published across the three journals (and by year of their publication) is depicted in Figure 1.

Please insert Figure 1 here

Given the observed increases in the raw numbers of peer reviewed articles published over the ten year period, we felt it was important to also gauge the proportional representation that each research method experienced over the ten year period. Gauging the proportional representation of the research methodologies allows the researcher to identify whether there are any statistically significant changes in their relative importance over time. Figure 2 depicts the changes in the proportional representation of each research methodology by the year of their publication.

Please insert Figure 2 here

Figure 2 reiterates the dominance of quantitative methodologies in the published articles over the entire ten year period of this study. Despite the observed increases in the raw number of peer reviewed articles published between 1999 and 2008, a Chi square analysis of the data indicated that there was no significant change in the number or proportion of articles based on quantitative ($\chi^2 (9) = 10.27, p >0.05$), qualitative ($\chi^2 (9) = 8.70, p >0.05$), and mixed methodologies ($\chi^2 (9) = 14.24, p >0.05$) over the ten year period. The analysis did, however, detect a significant decrease in the number and proportion of conceptual articles ($\chi^2 (9) = 19.35, p <0.05$). This indicates that the growth in the numbers and proportion of articles based on quantitative, qualitative and mix methodologies over the ten year period came exclusively at the expense of conceptual papers. It is also interesting to note that during the final year of the study period, the proportion of articles based on quantitative methodologies increased despite the reduction in the overall number of articles published (reducing from 219 in 2007, to 163 in 2008). This indicates that the reduction in the raw numbers of articles published came at the complete expense of articles based on qualitative, conceptual and mixed methodologies.

Lastly, this research sought to detect the number of articles that concluded with either ‘practical implications’ or ‘theoretical implications’ (or a combination) for stakeholders in tourism. Table 8 presents a summary of the raw number of articles coded by their research implications sorted by both ‘year of publication’ and by journal. Table 9 presents a summary of the percentage of articles coded by their research implications by ‘year of publication’.

Please insert Table 8 here.

Please insert Table 9 here.

Tables 8 and 9 demonstrate that articles concluding with practical implications only dominated the leading tourism journals between 1999 and 2008, accounting for 1077 (or 68%) of the total number of articles published. It also demonstrates that articles concluding with theoretical implications only accounted for just 67 (or 4.2%) of the total number of articles published; interestingly, this proportion increased from 0.5% in 2006 to 10% in 2007, before falling back to 3.1% in 2008. The majority of articles that included theoretical implications were found to be in combination with those including practical implications, and accounted for 440 (or 27.8%) of the total number of articles published. The implications of the results section presented here will form the basis for the discussion and conclusion sections that follow.

2.3 *Discussion*

The research question posed in this paper sought to identify the mix of research themes (in terms of ‘topic/theme area’, ‘adopted methodologies’, and ‘research conclusion typology’) published in the three leading tourism journals during the period 1999 to 2008. The quasi-longitudinal method adopted in this study allowed the researchers to gauge the orientation of the leading tourism research published during the decade beginning 1999, and to detect the stability and/or dynamism of these themes over time. The following sections deal with each of these three research areas in turn.

2.3.1 Tourism Themes/Topics

Two previous content analyses of the three leading tourism journals indicated that 646 and 1402 articles were published throughout the 1980s and 1990s respectively; this research finds that the trend for increased numbers of tourism publications has continued in the 2000s, with 1584 articles published in the decade beginning 1999. Further to this, this study finds that the increase in the number of journal articles published year-on-year since 1999 has also been accelerating (ranging from the minimum 122 in the base-year 1999, to a maximum of 219 in 2007 – see Tables 2 and 4) and supports the contention that tourism is a maturing field of study as more authors aim to publish in the leading journals. Despite the increase in the numbers of articles published over the study period, the array of research themes and topics coded in this study remained relatively stable over the same period. According to the second round coding of the data, 10 research theme areas accounted for 82.3% of all articles published. Tables 5 and 6 provide a summary of these research themes, including their relative percentages and raw number of articles published per year. It is difficult to compare our findings as most of the previous content analyses focussed on authorship rather than themes. Xiao and Smith's 2006 study on research themes only examined one of the three journals this study analysed. They found 13 consistent topics plus an additional 14 lesser categories during the study period 1973 to 2003 (Xiao and Smith, 2006). The current study highlighted 10 consistent research themes from 1999 to 2008 which may indicate a consolidation of tourism research topics in more recent years.

A chi-square analysis of the data indicates that there was no significant change in the proportion of eight of the 10 leading research themes over the study period; with the exception of "Tourist Attractions" and "external influences", whose publication statistics indicate a significant increase over the study period. In terms of Hirst's (1974) criteria for an

academic discipline, our coding of the data identifies four research theme categories that could be said to be specific tourism concepts (i.e. Tourist Attractions, hospitality management, niche-tourism, and impacts of tourism), although the majority of these articles were explored using methodologies and criteria found in contributory disciplines (e.g. marketing, economics, sociology and environmental science). The remaining six major research themes represent concepts that have ‘started life elsewhere’ and have been contextualised to give them a ‘tourism dimension’ as per Tribe’s (1997) criticism. As such, this study suggests that tourism research has indeed developed to the point where a small number of tourism-specific research themes has been identified and solidified in the literature. The fragmented nature of the tourism industry, however, necessitates that the theories and concepts of related discipline areas (*inter alia* management, marketing and environmental science) will continue to offer insights into its development over time.

2.3.2 Research methods

Consistent with previous research by Decrop (1999), Jamal and Hollinshead (2001) and Ryan (2009), the majority of the articles analysed in this study were based on quantitative methodologies (54%). Figures 1 and 2 depict the dominance of quantitative methods in the leading tourism journals over the ten year study period, both in terms of raw numbers and relative proportions. Despite the (continued) dominance of quantitative methodologies, however, it was noted that the number of articles based on qualitative and mixed methodologies also increased over the study period. As depicted in Figure 1, the number of articles based on qualitative and mixed methodologies increased each year from 2003 until the peak output year of 2007. According to the chi-square analysis of the data summarised in Figure 2, however, the increase in the number of articles based upon qualitative and mixed methodologies was not statistically significant – i.e., there was no significant change in their proportional representation over the ten year study period. Further to this, when the overall

number of published articles declined in 2008, the raw numbers and relative percentages of qualitative and mixed method articles decreased, whilst the raw number and relative percentages of quantitative articles increased markedly. These figures indicate that the developing tourism discipline remains skewed significantly towards positivism, and a priority to describe and explain how tourism works in the ‘real world’.

In addition to this, coding of the data demonstrates that papers based on the four methodological approaches possible (i.e. quantitative, qualitative, mixed method and conceptual methods) each gravitated to three specific methods that accounted for 80.2%, 67.3%, 81.5%, and 8.2% of the papers respectively. Table 7 indicates these dominant approaches for each methodology type, and demonstrates, for example, that quantitative methods in tourism are based almost exclusively on survey data with descriptive and inferential statistical reporting outcomes. Similarly, papers based on qualitative methodologies rely heavily on interview data and content analysis of secondary data sources. Overall, the coding of the data demonstrates commonality amongst researchers in the field in their conceptualisation of tourism issues and their choice of methods in addressing their research questions. The similarities in the methods adopted by tourism researchers (and published in the leading tourism journals) is consistent with Kuchinke’s (2001) assertion that academic disciplines share common methodological approaches and a common regard for the nascent issues therein.

2.3.3 Research outcomes

Finally, this study sought to investigate the extent to which the articles emphasised practical and/or theoretical implications in their conclusions. According to the data, 73.8% of the articles published in 1999 concluded with practical implications exclusively, with a further 23% providing a mix of practical and theoretical implications and 3.3% focusing on

theoretical implications exclusively. These proportions changed over the study period, with the year of greatest output (2007) having the highest proportion of papers providing theoretical implications exclusively (10%), with practical and mixed implications representing 62.1% and 27.9% respectively. Tables 8 and 9 provide a summary of the relative proportions of research implications over the study period; it indicates the dominance of practical implications over theoretical and mixed implication papers. The overwhelming majority of practical papers align with the leading tourism journals' aims to publish research findings of value to the tourism industries. Botterill (2001: 207) comments on the 'industry prerogative' and "the dominant industry agenda in tourism" that ensures tourism research continues to generate practical findings.

Despite the origins of tourism research being firmly established serving industry objectives, we did observe a marked increase in the number of articles that provided a mix of practical and theoretical implications (Table 9 demonstrates that the proportion of mixed-implications articles has nearly doubled from its 1999 base of 23% to 41.1% in 2008). The increase in the proportion of articles with theoretical implications may not have come at the expense of those with practical implications exclusively, but it may very well be evidence that leading tourism researchers understand the need for the field to develop its own set of concepts and theories if it is to gain the credibility needed for a discipline area.

3. CONCLUSION

Analysing the research published in the three leading tourism journals should not be read as an indication of the state of the field of study or emerging discipline; however it can provide an insight into what is considered to be the leading research from the most influential researchers (McKercher, 2008). A reflection of the research published in the leading tourism

journals from 1999 to 2008 has identified four important trends: firstly, that there are greater numbers of articles being published in the field; secondly, that there is a consistency and stability of research themes being addressed by tourism researchers; thirdly, that there appears commonality in relation to methods adopted by tourism researchers published in the leading journals; and lastly, that tourism researchers are increasing their focus on theoretical implications alongside those for practitioners. In addition, a rise in the number of theoretical findings is discernible although the close connections to practical outcomes to aid industry have not been diminished. Our assessment of what has been published over the last decade may indicate that tourism as a field of study has continued to progress in terms of the criteria laid down for a discipline but some leading researchers claim it is time for the debate to move on and that it is irrelevant whether tourism be considered a discipline or not. For example, Coles, Hall and Duval (2009) discuss the modern problem of climate change and argue that a multi-disciplinary approach is required. The attempt by supporters of tourism's disciplinary status could be responsible for erecting barriers around tourism and diminishing the opportunities for multi-disciplinary endeavours to solve current problems. They draw support from Graburn and Jafari (1991) who state that 'no single discipline alone can accommodate, treat or understand tourism; it can be studied only if disciplinary boundaries are crossed and if multi-disciplinary perspectives are sought and formed' (in Coles, Hall & Duval, 2009: 82-3).

Tourism's lack of status appears obvious in academic as well as economic and political circles. It is possible that the credibility of tourism studies as well as the tourism industries hinges on the lack of resolution of the tourism as a discipline debate as set down by Tribe (1997) and the rigorous criteria put forward by Hirst (1974). The chief criticism it could be argued still lies with Cooper et al., (1998:47) who claim that tourism "lacks the level of theoretical underpinning which would allow it to become a discipline". This analysis of articles

published in the leading journals during the first decade of the 21st century indicates the publication of theoretical findings is expanding. In terms of satisfying Hirst's (1974) discipline criteria, it may be time for leading tourism researchers and publishers to increase their focus on developing the theoretical underpinning required by tourism to achieve a degree of credibility whether it is based on uni, multi, inter or trans-disciplinary approaches.

A limitation of the study reported in this paper concerns the focus on three tourism journals. Inclusion of a wider range of publications would give a more representative account of the way in which tourism as a field of study or emerging discipline is developing. However we set out to test what was occurring at the pinnacle of tourism research therefore we restrict our comments to the top three journals as an indication of developments in leading tourism research. In terms of further research the opportunity to examine related or sub-disciplines exists to evaluate for example sustainable tourism or ecotourism or to assess hospitality management. This paper represents one of the first, if not the first attempt to study themes, methods and outcomes of the publications of the only "A star" ranked journals that exist in tourism. To gauge a longitudinal view of the development of the pinnacle of research in this field a future study of the top three journals should be conducted for 2009 to 2018.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: List of First Round Coding Categories

Journal Name	Title of the Article	Publication Year
Author's Affiliation (workplace)	Faculty/Department	Authors' Location

Table 2: Valid Peer-Reviewed Publication Summary by Journal

Journal Name	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	TOTAL
Annals of Tourism	39	47	45	53	45	49	62	53	51	34	478
Travel Research	33	36	36	35	36	40	41	47	51	34	389
Tourism Management	50	50	53	49	54	64	78	107	117	95	717

Table 3: List of Second Round Coding Categories

Major Tourism Theme(s)	Research Topic	Research Design
Geographic Focus	Practical Conclusions	Theoretical Conclusions

Table 4: Actual and Percentage of Peer-Reviewed Articles Published by Year

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No. of articles published	122	133	134	137	135	153	181	207	219	163
% of the total published	7.7%	8.4%	8.5%	8.6%	8.5%	9.7%	11.4%	13.1%	13.8%	10.3%
% increase over 1999	--%	9.0%	9.8%	12.3%	10.7%	25.4%	48.4%	69.7%	79.5%	33.6%

Table 5: Summary of the Research Themes Published

Research Theme	Count	Percentage	Cum %
Tourism Business Development	222	14.0%	14.0%
Tourist Behaviour	221	13.9%	27.9%
Consumer Behaviour	198	12.5%	40.4%
Tourist Attractions	139	8.8%	49.2%
Hospitality Management	117	7.4%	56.6%
Niche-Tourism	105	6.5%	63.1%
Cultural Tourism	96	6.1%	69.2%
The Impacts of Tourism	75	4.7%	73.9%
External Influences on Tourism	69	4.4%	78.3%
Transportation	62	4.0%	82.3%
Sustainable Tourism	53	3.3%	85.6%
Related and Supporting Industries	26	1.6%	87.5%
Tourism Education	14	0.9%	88.4%

("Other" themes combined)	187	11.6%	100%
TOTAL	1584	100.0%	

**Table 6: The Ten Most Prominent Research Themes
(Articles Published by Year)**

Theme/Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	TOTAL
Tourism Business Development	20	16	20	17	21	15	27	33	32	21	222
Tourist Behaviour	18	20	23	22	14	24	16	24	38	22	221
Consumer Behaviour	16	12	12	17	11	23	23	27	32	25	198
Tourist Attractions	9	9	7	16	21	21	13	20	12	11	139
Hospitality Management	4	14	2	8	8	16	18	14	20	13	117
Niche-Tourism	4	8	17	9	10	8	14	14	11	10	105
Cultural Tourism	6	11	7	9	10	5	12	14	13	9	96
Impacts of Tourism	6	10	5	9	5	3	7	13	10	7	75
External Influences	12	1	4	5	7	3	15	7	8	7	69
Transportation	5	10	8	3	7	2	6	5	10	6	62

Table 7: Summary of the Research Methods Employed

Research Design	Conceptual		Mixed Method		Quantitative		Qualitative	
Content Analysis	15	5.3%	32	6.9%	31	1.8%	87	16.3%
Descriptive Statistics	14	5.0%	71	15.3%	256	15.3%	41	7.7%
Focus Groups	-	-	13	2.8%	2	0.1%	29	5.4%
Hypothesis Testing	2	0.7%	37	8.0%	82	4.9%	-	-
Inferential Statistics	3	1.1%	51	11.0%	516	30.8%	20	3.7%
Interviews	-	-	87	18.8%	14	0.8%	191	35.7%
Meta Analysis	1	0.4%	6	1.3%	7	0.4%	1	0.2%
Model Building	62	22.1%	13	2.2%	113	6.7%	23	4.3%
Observational Study	2	0.7%	16	3.5%	11	0.7%	66	12.3%
Surveys	1	0.4%	130	28.1%	572	34.1%	48	9.0%
Theory Testing	4	8.5%	4	0.9%	29	1.7%	5	0.9%
Other.....	14	5.0%	3	0.6%	17	1.0%	4	0.7%
Concept Definition Only	143	50.9%	-	-	-	-	-	-

* The three most common research designs for each method are highlighted in bold text.

Figure 1: Frequency of Research Method by Year of Publication

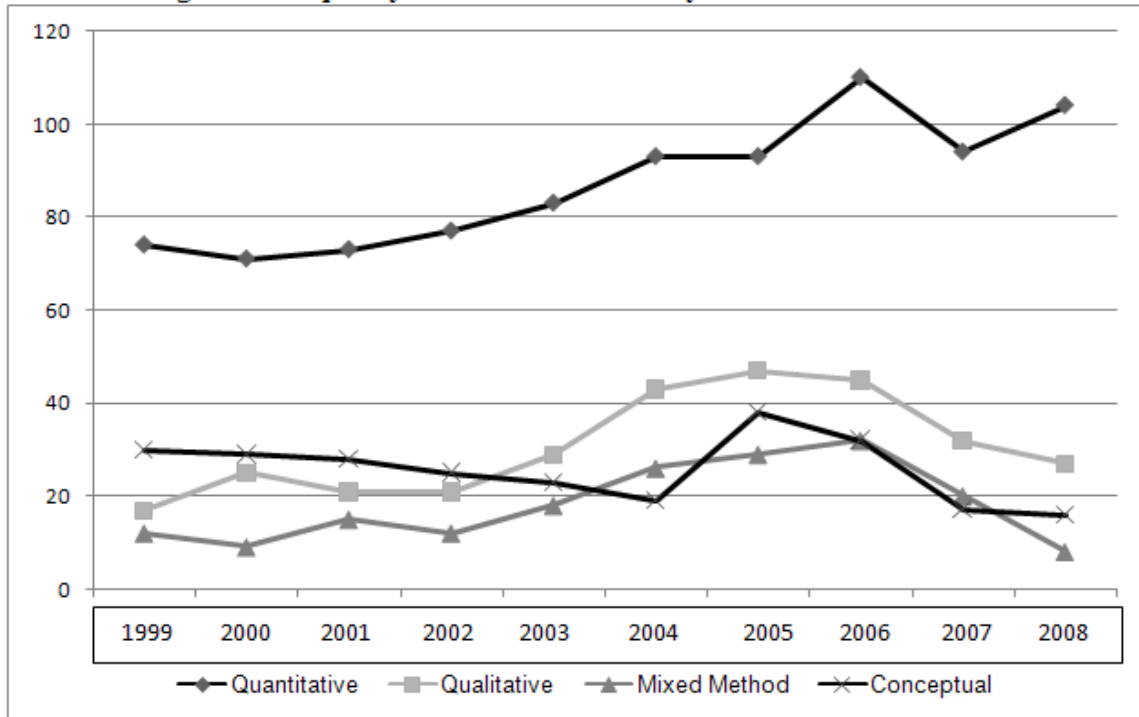


Figure 2: Proportional Representation of the Research Methods Published 1999-2008

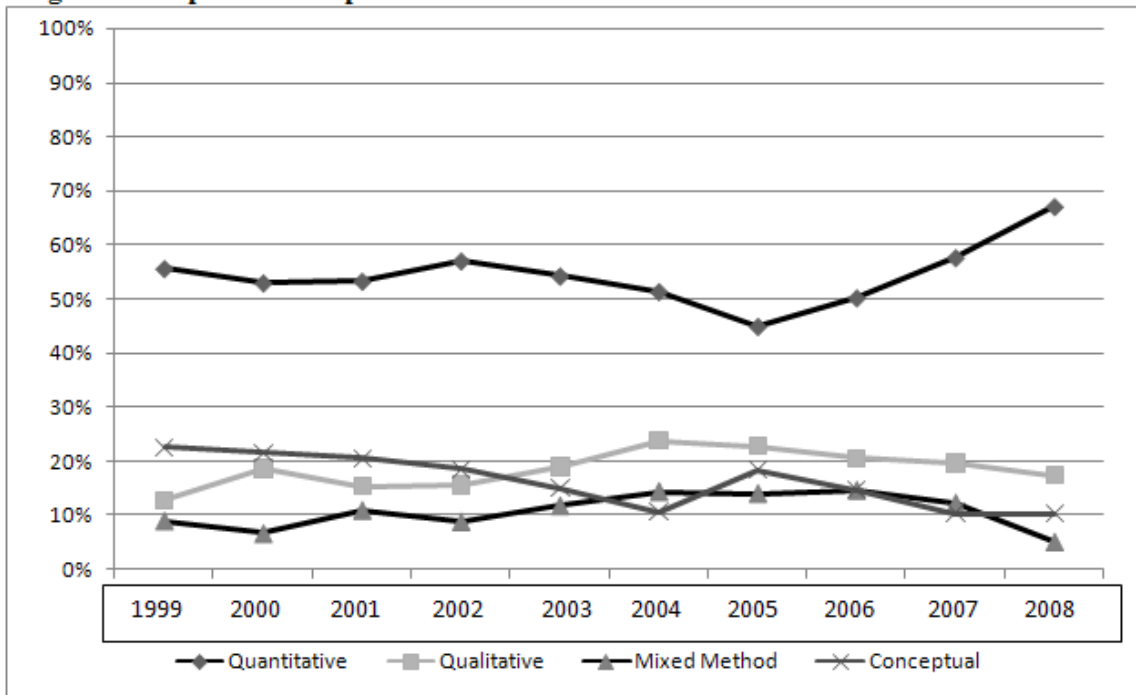


Table 8: Summary of Practical/Theoretical/Combined Research Implications

	Outcomes	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
TOTAL	Practical	90	87	105	93	100	101	131	143	136	91
	Theoretical	4	5	2	4	8	8	8	1	22	5
	Combined	28	41	27	40	27	44	42	63	61	67

Table 9: Percentage Representation of the Research Implications by Year

Outcomes	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	TOTAL
Practical	73.8%	65.4%	78.4%	67.9%	74.1%	66.0%	72.4%	69.1%	62.1%	55.8%	68.0%
Theoretical	3.3%	3.8%	1.5%	2.9%	5.9%	5.2%	4.4%	0.5%	10.0%	3.1%	4.2%
Combined	23.0%	30.8%	20.1%	29.2%	20.0%	28.8%	23.2%	30.4%	27.9%	41.1%	27.8%