

"The mix of research methods in the leading tourism journals: 2000-2009"

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SECTION 1. Macroeconomic processes and regional economies management

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The mix of research methods in the leading tourism journals: 2000-2009

Abstract

The issue of method is central to tourism research. Over the past two decades, the call for greater quality tourism research has turned its focus on to the methods adopted by researchers – and the need to redress a perceived imbalance between the amount of quantitative research published and that based on qualitative, mixed method and theoretical approaches. The purpose of this article is to determine the mix of research methods published in the three leading tourism journals. This study involved a content analysis of 1617 articles published between 2000 and 2009 in three most prominent tourism journals (i.e. *Tourism Management*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, and *Journal of Travel Research*). It was found that 53.9 per cent of articles employed purely quantitative methods, 19 per cent of articles used purely qualitative methods, 11.2 per cent employed a mixed qualitative/quantitative method, and 15.9 per cent were conceptual in nature. An increase was observed in the amount of qualitative research published over this period; however there was a continued dominance of quantitative research. This paper offers guidance to both tourism researchers and leading tourism journals about their role in answering the call for more, and better quality articles based on qualitative and mixed method research.

Keywords: tourism research, research methods, content analysis.

JEL Classification: L83, C42, C80.

Introduction

According to Zhao and Ritchie (2007), O'Connor and Baum (2008) and Jennings (2010), academic research has played (and will continue to play) an important role in the development of the tourism industry. Over the past three decades, tourism researchers have provided data concerning planning and management at the local, regional, national and international levels, and offered insights into the expectations, impacts, motivations, needs and satisfaction levels of tourism customers. It has also highlighted the educational needs of commercial operators and service providers, and has generated temporal views of tourism's past, present and future. Jennings (2010) perpetuates the call for continued advancements in both the quality and innovation of tourism research, owing to the industry's importance and growth potential in the global economy.

Over the past two decades, this call has turned its focus on to the methods adopted by tourism researchers – and the need to redress a perceived imbalance between the amount of quantitative research published and that based on qualitative, mixed method and theoretical approaches (Sheldon, 1991; Jogaaratnam, Chon, McCleary, Mena and Yoo, 2005; Zhao and Brent Ritchie, 2007). The call for a greater emphasis on these methods has resulted for two main reasons: firstly, recognition that tourism re-

search was developed as an academic discipline in its own right, in effect augmenting its role as a source of information for practising tourism professionals (Sheldon, 1991; Leiper, 2000; Davies, 2003); and secondly, because the intricate nature of many tourism issues require qualitative research approaches "...to ascribe meaning, understanding and explanation to complex human phenomena" (Jamal and Hollinshead, 2001, p. 69) which is beyond the capacity of quantitative methods alone to investigate effectively.

1. Literature review

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) analyzed 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 industry. By the end of the 1990s, the debate about whether tourism was considered a discipline in its own right was in full swing; Tribe (1997), for example, rejecting the argument outright, describing it as an 'indiscipline' and instead proposed that tourism should be viewed as two

fields of study (namely ‘business’ and ‘non business’ tourism). In contrast, Leiper (2000) viewed the increasing number of dedicated tourism journals and regular scholarly conferences, and the establishment of tertiary level courses in the subject as evidence that tourism was, at the very least, an emerging discipline.

The debate continued unabated 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. Hall (2011, p. 1) 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 Riley and Love, 2000; Jogaaratnam, Chon, McCleary, Mena and Yoo, 2005; Xiao and Smith, 2006; Zhao and Ritchie, 2007; Law and Chon, 2007; McKercher, 2008; Benckendorff, 2009). The array of content analyses conducted has drawn considerable attention to an apparent disproportional reliance on quantitative research methods by leading tourism researchers (see Sheldon, 1991; Jogaaratnam, Chon, McCleary, Mena and Yoo, 2005; Zhao and Brent Ritchie, 2007). A number of researchers have claimed that the dominance of quantitative methodologies in leading tourism journals undermines the emergent discipline’s capacity to explore the complexity of human interactions that are at the core of tourism activities (Jamal and Hollinshead, 2001). Jamal and Hollinshead (2001, p. 69) summarized the issue when they stated “...the methodological fit of qualitative research approaches...lies in their ability to ascribe meaning, understanding and explanation to human phenomena”; whilst quantitative methodologies continue to dominate tourism research, the discipline will lack the capacity to advance in terms of its ability to explore complex issues in the depth required.

Given the calls throughout the 1990s and early 2000s to advance the tourism discipline through more qualitative and mixed method research, the research question to be addressed in this paper is: What was the mix of research methodologies published in the three leading tourism journals during the period from 2000 to 2009? In order to address this opportunity we follow the recommendation of McKercher (2008) to examine the mix of research methodologies published in the leading tourism journals. McKercher (2008, p. 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 analysis of the orientation of the leading tourism researchers and journals (and therefore aid tourism researchers strategically plan their ongoing endeavours) (see McKercher, 2008). Secondly, because it will provide a basis for determining the extent to which the leading tourism journals have ‘answered the call’ (see Walle, 1997; Jamal and Hollinshead, 2001; Davies, 2003) to increase the array of research methodologies published, thereby aiding the development of tourism as an academic discipline in its own right.

2. Method

In order to address the research question, this study undertook a content analysis of the three leading peer reviewed tourism journals (namely the *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Tourism Management*, and *Journal of Travel Research*) as rated by the Australian Research Council (2010) and Harzing’s (2010) ‘Journal Quality List’. All three journals received an A* or A+ ranking 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, 2010, p. 7). According to the journals’ own statements concerning their aims and scope:

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

The Annals of Tourism Research, a social sciences journal focuses 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 thus to expand frontiers of knowledge in and contribute to the literature on tourism social science (Annals of Tourism Research, 2010, p. 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, p. 1).

As such, these three journals provide a sound basis upon which to analyze 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 past decade. Neumann (2003, p. 219) defines content analysis as “...*a technique for gathering and analyzing 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 a four stage protocol identified by Hodson (1999), Finn et al. (2000), 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 and Veal, 2000). Using the method literature as a base, we initially coded all of the journal articles’ according to the broad method categories of

‘quantitative’, ‘qualitative’, ‘mixed method’ (i.e. using both qualitative and quantitative method), or ‘conceptual’. Using the basic method typologies 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.

In the second stage of the content analysis, all of the journal article publications from 2000 to 2009 were downloaded electronically from their official websites. In total, 140 issues of the respective journals were collected, and from these, 1617 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 1 provides summary information concerning the number of valid peer reviewed journal articles collected during the second stage of this research method.

Table 1. Valid peer-reviewed publication summary by journal

Journal name	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
<i>Annals of Tourism</i>	47	45	53	45	49	62	53	51	34	29	468
<i>Journal of Travel Research</i>	36	36	35	36	40	41	47	51	34	38	394
<i>Tourism Management</i>	50	53	49	54	64	78	107	117	95	88	755

In the third stage of the content analysis, the coded data were further interrogated to detect the specific research design adopted in the leading tourism research publications for the ten year period beginning in 2000. The specific research design methods detected in the analysis formed the basis for establishing the second round of data categories (see

Table 2 for examples 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.

Table 2. Examples of second round coding categories

Quantitative method	Qualitative method	Conceptual method
Meta analysis Hypothesis testing Surveys Econometric modelling Structural equation modeling	Content analysis Delphi technique Focus groups Surveys Interviews	Model building Theory building

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 pack-

age. In the method literature, it has been emphasized 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 allo-

cated 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. Utilizing 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 methodological themes became clearer. An analysis of the methodological themes eman-

nating from the 'second round' coding form the basis of the discussion section that follows.

3. Results

As noted, the total number of peer-reviewed journal articles collected in this study totalled 1617. Table 3 summarises the yearly distribution of the publications, both in terms of actual numbers published as well as a percentage.

Table 3. Actual and percentage of peer-reviewed articles published by year

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of articles published	133	134	137	135	153	181	207	219	163	155
% of the total published	8.2%	8.3%	8.5%	8.3%	9.5%	11.2%	12.8%	13.5%	10.1%	9.6%
% increase over 2000	–	0.8%	3.0%	1.5%	15.0%	36.1%	55.6%	64.7%	22.6%	16.5%

Table 3 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 2006 to 2009 accounted for nearly half of all articles published (46 per cent) – well above the 'expected' level of 40 per cent. Further to this, and taking 2000 as a base year, the data indicates that by 2007, the three journals combined increased their number of published articles by 64.7 per cent. Interestingly, in the final year of the ten year period under review, the combined level of publications decreased to 155 articles (a reduction of 64 articles from the peak output level in 2007),

which represented a relatively modest 16.5 per cent increase over the base year level.

This research also sought to explore the contribution of each individual journal to the total number of articles published, as well the research methods represented therein. 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'. Table 4 provides a summary of the peer reviewed journal articles collected and coded during the second stage of this research method.

Table 4. First round coding summary by journal

Journal name	1 st round code	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<i>Annals of Tourism Research</i>	Quantitative	23	21	18	21	20	23	13	14	10	11
	Qualitative	7	13	12	4	10	17	18	18	18	12
	Mixed	7	3	9	7	2	13	6	6	3	0
	Conceptual	10	8	14	13	17	9	16	13	3	6
<i>Journal of Travel Research</i>	Quantitative	20	27	29	30	32	26	31	28	25	29
	Qualitative	6	5	4	3	2	5	8	9	3	5
	Mixed	2	1	1	1	5	7	3	7	4	3
	Conceptual	8	3	1	2	1	3	5	7	2	1
<i>Tourism Management</i>	Quantitative	31	23	26	26	31	44	49	68	59	64
	Qualitative	4	7	5	14	17	21	21	18	11	10
	Mixed	3	5	5	4	11	6	20	19	13	5
	Conceptual	12	18	13	10	5	7	17	12	12	9

Tables 3 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 133 in 2000, to a maximum of 219 in 2007. The majority the growth is attributed to the *Journal of Tourism Management*, whose average publication rate increased from 54 articles per year (between 2000 and 2004) to 97 articles per year (between 2005 and 2009) – representing an 80 per cent increase between the two periods. The *Journal of Travel Research* also increased its average publication

rate in the same time periods from 36.6 articles per year to 42.2 articles per year (representing an increase of 15.3 per cent). Interestingly, over the same time periods, the *Annals of Tourism Research* actually decreased its publication rate from 47.8 articles per year to 45.8 per year (representing a decrease of 4.2 per cent).

Analysis of the raw data contained in Table 4 indicated that quantitative methodologies dominated the research design over the ten year period of this research. Overall, 872 articles were based on quan-

titative methods (or 53.9 per cent of the population), followed by 307 articles based on qualitative methods (19 per cent), 257 conceptual papers (15.9 per cent), and 181 articles based on mixed meth-

dologies (11.2 per cent). The frequency of each type of research method published across the three journals (and by year of their publication) is depicted in Figure 1.

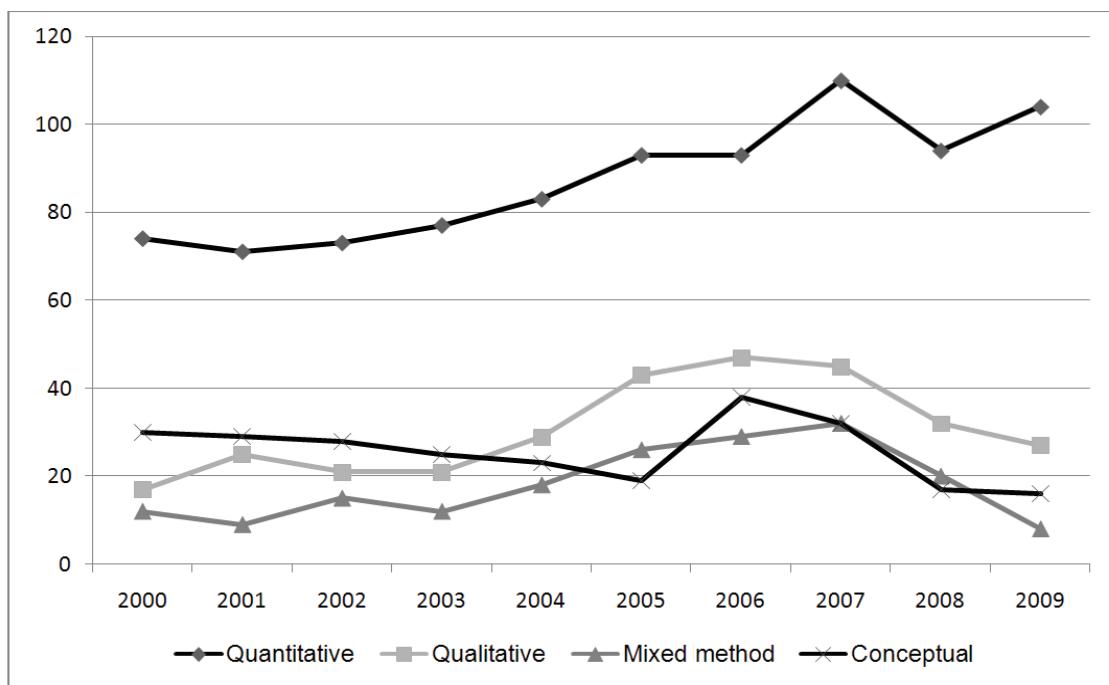


Fig. 1. Frequency of research method by year of publication

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 me-

thodologies 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.

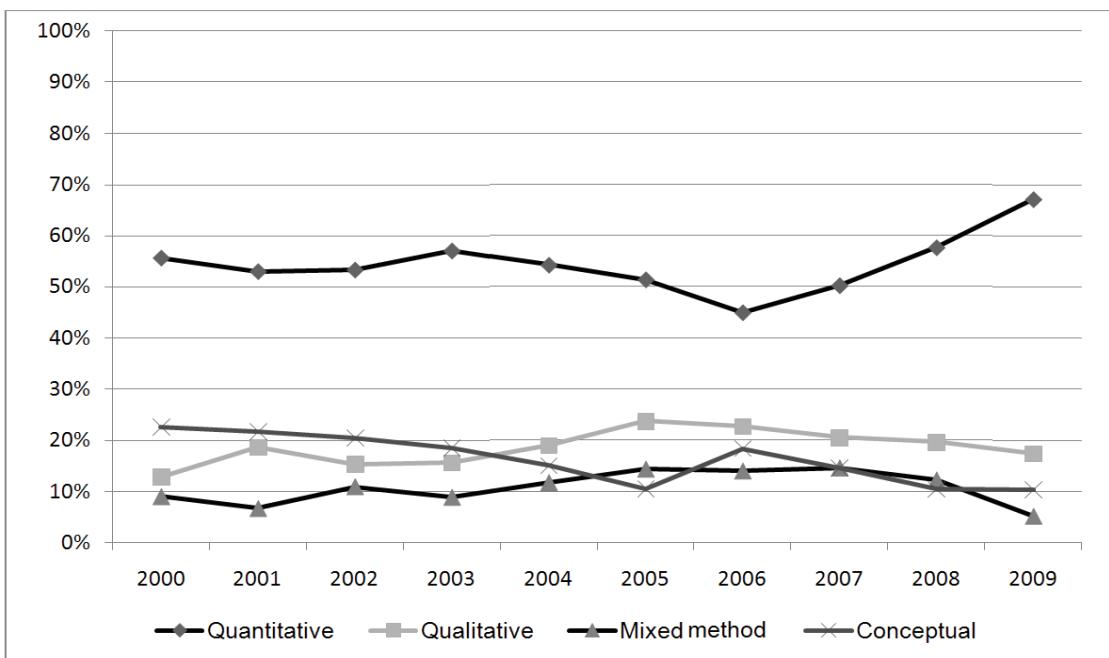


Fig. 2. Proportional representation of the research methods published 2000-2009

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 2000 and 2009, 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, detected 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 (2009), 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 155 in 2009). 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 coded the data according to the specific research designs implemented by the authors of the published articles. Table 5 summarizes the second round coding of the data (i.e. the specific research designs reported in each article), grouped by the four generic methodologies under review.

Table 5. Summary of the second round data coding

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%						

Note: * The top three research designs by method are highlighted in bold text.

Analysis of the second round coding indicated that each of the generic methodologies gravitated to a handful of research designs. For example, Table 5 indicates that five basic research designs accounted for 91.8 per cent of the articles based on quantitative methods: ‘surveys’ (34.1 per cent), ‘inferential statistical analyses’ (30.8 per cent), ‘descriptive statistical analyses’ (15.3 per cent), ‘model building’ (6.7 per cent) and ‘hypothesis testing’ (4.9 per cent). Three research designs accounted for 64.3 per cent of the articles based on qualitative methods: ‘interviews’ (35.7 per cent), ‘content analysis’ (16.3 per cent), and ‘observational study’ (12.3 per cent). Three research designs accounted for 62.2 percent of the articles based upon mixed methodologies: ‘surveys’ (28.1 per cent), ‘interviews’ (18.8 per cent), and ‘descriptive statistics’ (15.3 per cent). Similarly, three research designs account for 78.3 per cent of the conceptual articles: ‘concept definition’ (i.e. no data analysis – 50.9 per cent), ‘model building’ (22.1 per cent), and ‘content analysis’ (5.3 per cent). The implications of the results section

discussed here will form the basis for the discussion and conclusions section that follows.

4. Discussion

The research question posed in this paper sought to identify the mix of research methodologies published in the three leading tourism journals during the period from 2000 to 2009. The quasi longitudinal method adopted in this study allowed the researchers to gauge the orientation of the leading tourism research published during the first decade of the 21st century, and to determine the extent to which the leading tourism journals have ‘answered the call’ to increase the array of research methodologies published. Evidently, the total number of articles published in the three leading tourism journals did increase markedly during the study period. From a base of 133 articles published in 2000, the output over the ten year period rose to 219 articles in 2007 (representing a 64.7 per cent increase), before realising a decline to 163 and 155 articles in the last two years of this study.

Consistent with previous research by Decrop (1999), Jamal and Hollinshead (2001) and Ryan (2009), the majority of the articles analyzed in this study were based on quantitative methodologies (53.9 per cent). Figure 2 depicts the dominance of quantitative methods in the leading tourism journals over the ten year study period, and indicates that quantitative methodologies represented between 45 and 67 per cent of the articles published in any given year. This research also indicated that in excess of 90 per cent of quantitative articles gravitated to the use of survey instruments (and to the inferential and descriptive statistical analysis of the data gathered), suggesting that a common approach to quantitative data gathering and analysis has been established in the discipline. Also consistent with the expectations of Kim (1998 – cited in Xiao and Smith, 2006), this study found a statistically significant decrease in the proportion of conceptual papers published over the ten year period. Kim (1998 – cited in Xiao and Smith, 2006) stated that as tourism emerges as a discipline in its own right, we should expect a decrease in articles focused on concepts and definitions in favor of those focused on gathering empirical evidence to confirm or disconfirm them.

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 (21 and 12 articles respectively) until the peak output year of 2007 (32 and 45 articles respectively). According to the Chi-square analysis of the data summarized 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 and 2009, both the raw numbers and relative proportions of qualitative and mixed method articles decreased, whilst the raw number and relative proportion of quantitative articles increased markedly (see Table 4 and Figures 1 and 2 for the details). These figures suggest that the emerging tourism discipline remains skewed significantly towards positivism, and a priority to describe and explain how tourism works in the “real world”. It also suggests that despite the call for more qualitative and mixed methodological research, qualitative research methodologies may still labor under handicaps no longer perceived to exist in quantitative research.

Traditionally an underrepresented track tourism for researchers to follow in the first place (see Decrop, 1999), there remain ‘perceived issues’ in selecting an appropriate qualitative research design amongst a very broad constellation of qualitative techniques (Jamal and Hollinshead, 2001; Xiao and Smith, 2006). The difficulty of establishing a research question based on the literature, explaining and justifying the qualitative method (to the extent required by leading journals), and then discussing the results meaningfully within a restrictive word limit may just be ‘too hard’ for social science/tourism researchers to deal with (Page, 2005). Unlike qualitative methodology, it is relatively easy to cover all the research tasks noted above in a quantitative project satisfactorily in a 7000 word article. This may partially explain the dominance of interviews in qualitative research (accounting for over one third of all qualitative articles in this study) the more quantitative in orientation their design, the more readily they can be reported on satisfactorily within the constraints set by a journal article word limit. The dominance of quantitative methodologies in the leading tourism journals, therefore, is likely not representative of an active policy against qualitative research *per se*, or a discipline bias, but rather an artefact of the journal genre. Leading academic journals are no doubt influenced by the ardent need for academics to publish more articles in highly ranked quality journals, as well as the ever increasing numbers of ambitious tourism academics needing to get their name and ideas heard.

Conclusion

This paper suggests that the call for an ‘increase in the prominence of qualitative and mixed methodologies in tourism’ may only been partially answered by the three leading tourism journals; the recent downward trend a worrying sign of a possible relegation of qualitative and mixed method articles to relatively minor roles in the literature. We argue that the dominance of quantitative methodologies over all others will continue unless qualitative and mixed method research is actively encouraged in the tourism discipline. We believe that such encouragement can be driven by leading journals in two main ways: (a) by relaxing the word constraints for high quality qualitative research that offer significant contribution to the field; and/or (b) that qualitative researchers are given the same dispensation as quantitative researchers to omit explaining methods that are established in the qualitative method literature (e.g. coding practices, thematic analysis techniques, case study protocols, etc.).

Given the evidence present in this study, and the realities of producing quality journals in a cost effective manner, we feel the calls for more tourism articles based on qualitative and mixed methodologies can only be achieved through the increase in the total number of journal articles published. To this end, we believe that the leading tourism journals consider returning and their title published output to those levels observed between 2005 and 2007 either through an increase in the number of

articles published per regular issue, or through the publication of an additional ‘special issue’ dedicated to top quality qualitative research. Such measures would undoubtedly aid tourism researchers in their endeavors to pursue complex tourism issues and phenomena that are important to the continued development of the tourism discipline, yet cannot be addressed satisfactorily by the quantitative methodology which currently dominate tourism journal publications.

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