



Progress in Tourism Management

Performance measurement in tourism firms: A content analytical meta-approach

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H I G H L I G H T S

- We perform a nineteen-year review (1996–2014) of the tourism performance literature.
- A tourism performance measurement framework is proposed.
- A computer-aided text analysis approach is deployed to review 978 articles.
- Findings reveal that prior research has concentrated on traditional methods.
- Conclusion suggests that future research agendas should be more innovative.

A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

This paper performs a meta-analysis of tourism performance measurement by synthesising tourism and hospitality research. A framework for understanding and advancing knowledge about tourism performance measurement is presented to overview three important dimensions of the tourism performance measurement literature (unit of analysis, approaches and disciplines). Computer-Aided Text Analysis of 978 articles covering a nineteen-year period, 1996 to 2014, is used to analyse approaches and disciplinary contexts. Specifically, we aim to advance a concrete understanding of tourism firms' performance measurement literature and to assess whether the temporal trends in performance measurement literature will help position tourism firms for the emerging tourism context. We propose some key research areas to guide a future tourism performance measurement research agenda.

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1. Introduction

The past three decades have seen an increasing scholarly interest in tourism performance measurement. Despite, being a well-accepted field of scholarly research together with the many articles that have appeared during this period of time, the concept of tourism performance is not fully articulated. The generic performance measurement literature struggles too. The quest for the “right” measure of business performance has been cited in methodological discussions in strategic management (Boyd, Bergh, Ireland, & Ketchen, 2013; Chakravarthy, 1986; Hamann, Schiemann, Bellora, & Guenther, 2013; Powell, 2003; Simmerman, 2001). Although, firm performance remains one of the most popular concepts in organisational research (Miller, Washburn, & Glick, 2013), Rowe and Morrow (1999) comment that “firm performance remains a messy issue at best” remain apt.

Likewise, the literature regarding tourism performance is emerging and riddled with measurement issues. The so-called alternative approaches have looked at performance measurement in terms of qualitative rather than solely financial (Sainaghi, 2010; Sainaghi, Phillips, & Corti, 2013). Yet, more than two decades after Kaplan and Norton's (1992) balanced scorecard article, we argue that a pervasive tendency exists in the tourism performance literature. This shortcoming relates to the underdeveloped conceptualisation of the notion of performance measurement together with the lack of preparedness for salient emerging business trends. In addition to the literature gap, research is required to assist tourism practitioners in their conceptualisation and to provide assistance in the development of performance measurement initiatives.

This will advance knowledge in those critical areas of practitioner relevance. However, the idiosyncratic nature of tourism can make it dangerous to advocate the need for common business performance practices. It is very difficult (if not impossible) to favour generalisation without at the same time sacrificing relevancy. But, as performance measures provide the mechanism for

tourism firms to demonstrate their success (or lack of) through numbers, the selected measures need to be aligned with the internal competencies of the firm and the external environment. Such, multidimensional approaches to performance measurement do offer some assistance but cultural and societal issues remain troublesome. Phillips and Louvieris (2005) provide support for carefully designed holistic performance measurement systems for hospitality, tourism and leisure firms. Tribe (2010) draws attention to ideology and cultural reproduction within a tourism context. Traditional financially myopic approaches such as financial and management accounting need to evolve to cope with social and environment activities. Ultimately, this necessitates more comprehensive measurement. Concepts such as the triple bottom line, with its economic, social and global focus, reinforce this notion (Elkington, 2004). Similarly, Tyrrell, Paris, and Biaett (2013) note the preoccupation of tourism measuring value to the host community by jobs, wages and tax revenues, rather than incorporating a conceptual approach for measuring the relative importance of the quality of life.

Performance measurement brings a number of behavioural and outcome benefits to practitioners. Performance measurement can assist management to arrange work and establish decision-making processes together with the communication of renewal strategies. When accepted by employees this can lead to motivational benefits that can be missed by formal incentive schemes (Cheng & Coyte, 2014). The relationship between strategy and performance is pivotal (Phillips & Moutinho, 2014), as the use of performance measurement can enhance performance (Speklé & Verbeeten, 2014). Ideally, performance measurement should be integrated with overall business strategy and include a comprehensive array of measures, which should include financial and non-financial metrics. Thus, performance measurement remains one of the most critical activities for those concerned with the strategic planning and management of tourism.

Nevertheless, making performance measurement research both rigorous and relevant, and helping decision-makers implement

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