



Bibliometric studies in tourism

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates bibliometric studies in tourism, depicts emerging themes, and offers critical discussions for theory development and future research. To achieve this aim, 190 papers with bibliometric analyses from leading hospitality and tourism journals were selected and critically analyzed. The research findings reveal that bibliometric articles published in these journals significantly increased after 2008. However, systematic review studies emerged as the major group, and relatively few studies utilized evaluative bibliometric and relational bibliometric studies. Study results suggest that paucity still exists, particularly in relational bibliometric studies in tourism. This is one of the first studies in this area that offers critical discussions and suggestions related to theory development and future research in this research vein.

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Introduction

Scholars have been vetting the epistemology, knowledge domain, and/or intellectual structure of disciplines to elucidate how they have evolved over time. Since many disciplines have reached a level of maturity (Koseoglu, 2016), there has been a significant interest in evaluating and monitoring the evolution of disciplines based on given topics with the assistance of advanced software programs (Koseoglu, Sehitoglu, & Craft, 2015; Zupic and Čater, 2015). Hence, bibliometry or bibliometric analysis is being increasingly used to map the structure and development of scientific fields or disciplines to assess the evolution of specific disciplines (Boyack, Klavans, & Börner, 2005; Zupic and Čater, 2015).

Bibliometric is defined as an approach to evaluate and monitor the progress of given disciplines by sorting data, including citations, author affiliations, keywords, themes discussed, and methods employed for published studies in the disciplines via basic/advanced statistical techniques (Diodato, 1994; McBurney and Novak, 2002). Numerous studies have been conducted by utilizing bibliometric methods to illuminate methods, prolific and influential scholars and/or institutions, intellectual structure, the knowledge domain by year, the geographic area of different disciplines, specific research themes within disciplines, and the level of maturity of topics (e.g., Barrios, Borrego, Vilagínés, Ollé, & Somoza, 2008; Benckendorff, 2009; Chan and Hsu, 2016; Fagerberg, Fosaas, & Sapprasert, 2012; Fong, Law, Tang, & Yap, 2016; Gomezeli, 2016; Gregory and Weinland, 2016; Howey, Savage, Verbeeten, & Van Hoof, 1999; Landström et al., 2012; Meyer-Arendt and Justice, 2002; Page, 2003; Palmer, Sese, & Montano, 2005; Park et al., 2011; Ye, Li, & Law, 2013).

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As seen in other disciplines, in tourism there have been ongoing attempts to discuss whether tourism is a scientific discipline, or field of study, or specialism since tourism studies have been accepted fragmented, scattered, and/or eclectic (Belhassen and Caton, 2009; Benckendorff and Zehrer, 2013; Xiao and Smith, 2006a). Hence, to illustrate the maturity level of tourism, bibliometric studies have been conducted in the tourism field to identify intellectual structure, academic foundation, knowledge domain, or social structure of the field (Benckendorff, 2009; Benckendorff and Zehrer, 2013; Hu and Racherla, 2008; Koseoglu, Sehitoğlu, & Graft, 2015; Ye et al., 2013) and to rank the most productive scholars, institutions, and publications (McKercher, Law, & Lam, 2006; Page, 2005; Park, Phillips, Canter, & Abbott, 2011; Pearce, 1982; Pechlaner, Zehrer, & Abfalter, 2002; Pechlaner, Zehrer, Matzler, & Abfalter, 2004; Ryan, 2005; Schmidgall et al., 2007; Sheldon, 1991; Zhao and Ritchie, 2007). However, no study has yet been conducted on how bibliometric studies have evolved in the tourism field to discuss the following questions:

- What are the research implications of bibliometric structures?
- What are the potential challenges and barriers to bibliometric studies?
- Who benefits the most by new sorts of bibliometric studies?
- How can bibliometric studies impact theory development?
- How can bibliometric studies change the politics and future research in the field?

In this article, we aim to investigate these issues in the tourism field. The paper is structured as follows. First, an in-depth literature review is provided on bibliometric and bibliometric methods, establishing an overview of studies conducted via bibliometric methods. Second, the research method employed for this study is explained. Next, the research findings are presented and discussed. Finally, the study conclusions and suggestions for future studies are provided.

Literature review

What is bibliometric analysis?

Broadus (1987, p. 376) defines *bibliometric* as “the quantitative study of physical published units, or of bibliographic units, or of the surrogates for either.” Sen Gupta (1988) refers to bibliometric as the organization, classification, and quantitative evaluation of publication patterns of all macro and micro communication along with their authorships by mathematical and statistical calculus. Bibliometric is a tool to analyze how disciplines evolve based on intellectual structure, social structure, and conceptual structure (Zupic and Čater, 2015). It looks at research outputs, including themes sought, methods employed, and samples used (Ye, Song, & Li, 2012), via applying basic or advanced statistical techniques to the data obtained from previously published studies, such as books, proceedings, and journals (Cobo, López-Herrera, Herrera-Viedma, & Herrera, 2011; Diodato, 1994; McBurney and Novak, 2002).

Bibliometric impacts and uses

Bibliometric is “one of the rare truly interdisciplinary research fields to extend to almost all scientific fields” (Glanzel, 2003, p. 3). Zupic and Čater (2015) suggest that bibliometric methods are complementary to traditional methods of review and structured literature reviews, and when compared with these bibliometric methods, they increase the objectivity of these types of studies. Bibliometric is used to assess the performance of the research and publication of individuals and/or institutions, and/or map the structure and dynamics of science (Cobo et al., 2011). Hence, bibliometric studies can help researchers answer the following questions (Nerur, Rasheed, & Natarajan, 2008; Ye et al., 2012; Zupic and Čater, 2015): (a) What is the intellectual structure of the discipline and how does it evolve? (b) What is the social structure of the discipline? (c) What are the conceptual structures of the discipline? (d) What is the best way to evaluate research output? (e) How should the impacts of researchers and institutions be assessed? (f) How is the given discipline progressing on themes sought, methods employed, and samples used? By answering these questions, potential subjective biases are minimized and expert inferences are validated, leading to schools of thought and the interrelated connections among them being delineated.

There are three groups of scholars who use bibliometric and undertake bibliometric studies. The first group consists of bibliometricians, and scholars in this group engage in the methodology of bibliometric and conduct, mainly methodological research on this topic. The second group of scholars is made up of researchers from different disciplines that use bibliometric in their specialty, scientific information. This is the most diverse interest group in bibliometric. These researchers expand science information by using metrics and conducting quantitative research in information retrieval. Researchers in the third group use bibliometric for science and policy making. They evaluate the foundation of science by illustrating the national, regional, and institutional structures of disciplines (Glanzel, 2003).

Bibliometric methods

Bibliometric methods vary from basic mathematic rules to advanced statistical applications. There are different categories for bibliometric methods. For instance, according to Koseoglu, Sehitoğlu, and Craft (2015), there are two bibliometric methods. The first is the basic bibliometric technique, in which the researcher reviews studies via content analysis and metrics to

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