



Short communication

Trends in tourism research on Qatar: A review of journal publications



Dan Musinguzi

Tourism Management, Stenden University Qatar, Al-Jeleit Street, Bin Omran, P.O. Box 36037, Doha, Qatar

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ABSTRACT

Research is important for tourism development in many countries. In Qatar, some tourism research has been published in scholarly journals. However, no studies have identified or examined the thematic, methodological, and authorship trends of Qatar tourism research. This study bridges this knowledge gap by reviewing tourism research on Qatar published in journals. Seven databases such as ScienceDirect, Hospitality and Tourism Complete, Emerald Insights, Scopus, ProQuest, Taylor & Francis Online, and Sage Journals Online were used to search and identify articles on Qatar tourism. Twenty-eight articles were identified for content analysis. The main results show that the dominant research themes/foci are sports tourism (35.7%), tourism planning and development (17.9%), and heritage (10.7%). From the methodological perspective, 68% of the data type was secondary. Furthermore, data analysis techniques, validity, trustworthiness, and research limitations were neglected by most authors. This paper also states the implications of these findings.

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1. Background

Qatar is endowed with natural gas and oil. It has the third largest natural gas reserves in the world (Ginesta & de San Eugenio, 2014; Peterson, 2006; U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2015). In addition to being the “largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in the world,” Qatar’s exports in “LNG, crude oil, and petroleum products provide a significant portion of government revenues” (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2015, p. 1). For instance, Qatar earned US\$38 billion from oil exports in 2014 (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2015). Although Qatar’s economic development and business progress have largely depended on natural gas and oil revenues, there is concern that these fossil fuel resources will be depleted in the future (Ginesta & de San Eugenio, 2014; Khodr, 2012; Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2012). Morakabati, Beavis, and Fletcher (2014) indicate that “Qatar currently produces 1.4 million barrels of oil per day...At current rates of production, Qatar will exhaust its proven oil reserves half way through the twenty-first century, a daunting picture for Qatar’s future generations, and a major factor associated with the decision to diversify its economy to non-energy sectors” (p. 419). As such, the government targets tourism as one of its non-energy sectors in order to diversify the economy and to reduce reliance on natural gas and oil (Khodr, 2012; Morakabati et al., 2014; Musinguzi, Tukamushaba, & El Khatib, 2015; Qatar Tourism Authority, 2014). Similarly, tourism development is in line with the central objectives of Qatar’s National Vision 2030 of developing a competitive and

diversified economy for the present and future generations (Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2012; Qatar Tourism Authority, 2014). The launch of the Qatar National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030 in 2014 and the investments in tourism demonstrate how Qatar is determined to develop a vibrant tourism industry that capitalizes on areas wherein the country has a competitive advantage. Qatar Tourism Authority (2014) believes that Qatar already possesses some unique success factors in the tourism sector. For example, Giampiccoli and Mtapuri (2015, p. 1) indicate that “Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions, Festivals, History, Heritage, Desert, Sea, Nature reserves and safari” are some of the country’s tourism resources.

A number of studies confirm that Qatar has become a hub for international sporting events (Amara, 2005; Foley, McGillivray, & McPherson, 2012; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015; Hazime, 2011; Henderson, 2015; Khodr, 2012; Peterson, 2006; Reiche, 2014; Scharfenort, 2012). The country won the bid for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, which has enhanced Qatar’s (national and regional) image (Khodr, 2012). Some researchers argue that Qatar is using events/sports to boost the nation’s image and tourism (sport event tourism) (Khodr, 2012), ensure security (Amara, 2005), encourage women’s participation in sport, sustain visitors, attract media coverage and sponsors (Foley et al., 2012), and develop local talent and global competitiveness (Dun, 2014).

Overall, tourism has been Qatar’s focus for the past ten years (Wiedmann, Salama, & Mirincheva, 2014). Similarly, certain aspects of tourism (e.g., cultural and sporting events) have become the country’s most important developmental and investment strategies (Wiedmann et al., 2014). Qatar’s focus on tourism development as a diversification strategy has attracted the attention of researchers, and some scholarly

E-mail address: DMusinguzi@stenden.edu.qa.

research on tourism has been conducted and published in various journals.

1.1. Reviewing research

Researchers utilize literature reviews to examine the current state of knowledge. Tribe (2010) argues that research reviews play a significant role in facilitating an understanding of the evolution of tourism research themes. Furthermore, there is an increasing number of reviews on the state of tourism and hospitality research in some countries. For example, Huang and Chen (2016); Huang and Hsu (2008); Leung, Li, Fong, Law, and Lo (2014); and Tsang and Hsu (2011) reviewed tourism/hospitality research on China. Recently, Singh (2016) conducted a comprehensive review of India's tourism and hospitality literature. A review of past research is useful in identifying future trends and possible challenges (Tsang & Hsu, 2011). Similarly, "evaluation of research literature is helpful in identifying the trends and gaps in the field" (Singh, 2016, p. 92). A number of reviews on the state of tourism and hospitality research (with no reference to a given country) have also been conducted by numerous researchers (e.g., Ballantyne, Packer, & Axelsen, 2009; Baloglu & Assante, 1999; Baum, Kralj, Robinson, & Solnet, 2016; Chon, Evans, & Sutherlin, 1989; Lu & Nepal, 2009; Phillips & Moutinho, 2014, among others). It is believed that "progress in tourism knowledge should be examined in accord with characteristics of tourism studies as an interdisciplinary discourse sustained by scholars across academic venues (e.g., in publications, at conferences, through personal communications)" (Belhassen & Caton, 2009, p. 342). Furthermore, reviewing existing research on a topic is necessary to facilitate an understanding of research trajectories (Baloglu & Assante, 1999) and can provide useful and up-to-date information to scholars and industry practitioners (Leung et al., 2014).

1.2. Research gap

Although numerous studies and reviews have been conducted in the field of tourism, no study has explored the thematic, methodological, and authorship trends of the Qatar tourism literature. Consequently, these trends have remained largely unknown to the academic community and industry practitioners in Qatar and beyond.

1.3. Purpose and significance of the study

The purpose of this study is to bridge the research gap by addressing the following research question: what are the thematic, methodological, and authorship trends in tourism research on Qatar in academic journals? In the context of Qatar, this study is the first to undertake a comprehensive content analysis of the last ten years' published research on tourism. The study provides up-to-date information on the current trends in Qatar tourism research. This information is useful for tourism academics and industry practitioners, who may use tourism research for theoretical and methodological development. Some marginal themes and methodological issues that need further attention have also been identified.

2. Method

Seven databases including ScienceDirect, Hospitality and Tourism Complete, Emerald Insights, Scopus, ProQuest, Taylor & Francis Online, and Sage Journals Online were used to identify research articles on Qatar tourism for analysis. The keywords used to search for these articles in the databases included "Qatar, tourism"; "tourism, Qatar"; "sport tourism, Qatar"; "cultural/heritage, Qatar"; "Tourism, Middle East"; and "GCC tourism." The search yielded a total of 28 research articles published in 24 journals (see Appendix 1). Every article was carefully read and the information on the research theme/focus, methods, and author/s was recorded on an Excel sheet. The thematic,

methodological, and authorship trends explored in this study are elaborated next.

2.1. Thematic trends

The list of research themes used in this study was based on Cheng, Li, Petrick, and O'Leary (2011) and Goeldner and Ritchie (2003). According to these authors, the common tourism research foci include the sociology of tourism, economics of tourism, tourism motivations, host-guest relationship, policy issues, geography of tourism, new venture development, heritage, landscape design, rural tourism, recreation management, tourism planning and development, tourism marketing, history of tourism, tourism laws, sports tourism, management of tourism organizations, casino management, transportation studies, hospitality studies, and tourism education.

2.2. Methodological trends

Methodological trends refer to data type (secondary and primary); the nature of the data (qualitative and quantitative) (Law, Leung, & Lee, 2012); data collection methods; data analysis techniques; validity and trustworthiness; research limitations; and future areas for research.

2.3. Authorship trends

Authorship trends refer to authorship (single or multiple) and the author's country of affiliation. Multiple authorship indicated collaboration between authors inside and outside Qatar, as well as between academic authors (university-affiliated authors) and industry authors (non-university affiliated).

2.4. Additional information

As per Law et al.'s (2012) recommendation, this study first compiled the research foci before conducting the analysis. The Excel sheet was used to record the following information on every article: 1) title, 2) author's names, 3) author's country of affiliation, 4) year of publication, and 5) name of the journal.

2.5. Data analysis

The data on tourism research in Qatar were analyzed using the content analysis method. Holsti (1969, p. 14) describes content analysis as a "technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages." Similarly, Stepchenkova, Kirilenko, and Morrison (2009, p. 467) indicate that "content analysis is widely used in many disciplines to analyse various forms of communications, above all, those that utilize textual data." Content analysis enabled the identification of themes and patterns in the analyzed texts (Berg, 2009).

3. Results and discussion

This section presents and discusses the thematic, methodological, and authorship trends of the 28 published academic articles about Qatar tourism from 2005 to 2015. This ten-year period is divided into 3 segments: 2005–2008, 2009–2012, and 2013–2015; the number of articles published per period is 11%, 32%, and 57%, respectively. Tourism research on Qatar in academic journals is rapidly growing, and is expected to continue on this trajectory, given that the government is developing the tourism industry to diversify the economy. This is evidenced by the launch of the Qatar National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030 and the current investments in tourism and hospitality.

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