

# A bibliometric analysis of strategic management articles in healthcare management literature: Past, present, and future

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## Abstract

This study aims to research the pattern of strategic management literature in healthcare management research using articles published in academic health management journals. To that end, 97 articles were retrieved based on a search undertaken using the keywords, 'strategy' and 'strategic' in health management journals available in ProQuest, Emerald, Scencedirect/Elsevier, Ebscohost, Jstore, Medline/Pubmed, Taylor & Francis Online, Sagepub, and Wiley databases. The findings were reached by evaluating these articles based on their journal years, authors, authors' institutions, research methodology, and strategic management topics. Finally, future potential study areas were identified while also presenting this study's constraints.

**Keywords:** Hospital, Health, Strategy, Strategic management, Bibliometrics, Literature

## Introduction

This study attempts to investigate the attention and progress that the topic of strategic management has had in the healthcare management literature.

It is getting increasingly harder to manage the intrinsic uncertainties of the healthcare services industry due to constant change<sup>1</sup>. Such uncertainties and difficulties naturally bring about both opportunities and threats; therefore, healthcare services professionals utilize strategic management tools to differentiate their organization's performance within the industry and within their respective market<sup>2</sup>. Healthcare management enhances its presence in the environment by turning attention to contributions to the literature.<sup>3-7</sup> Topping and

Hernandez<sup>8</sup> researched the content of this contribution between 1985 and 1990 with their articles in general management and health management journals. However, the pattern and growth of the strategic management topic in the healthcare services management literature has yet to be discussed. As evaluation of trends in the literature for a specific scientific discipline helps define the advancements and gaps in that discipline, a more effective and efficient agenda can be created to support contributions in that field.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, this study was undertaken with the aim of investigating such a gap.

In order to advance a scientific discipline, the identity of it needs be shared.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, scientific disciplines can be described as socially constructed entities.<sup>11</sup> From this point of view, strategic management is a field which benefits from and contributes to different scientific disciplines. Although the field of strategic management is relatively new, it also demonstrates the characteristics of a maturing scientific discipline.<sup>12</sup> In recent years, the pattern of the field has been discussed from different perspectives.<sup>12-18</sup> There have also been studies on how this field progresses in conjunction with other disciplines. For example, evaluations of the studies focusing on work ethic and strategic management together have been reviewed with different methods and approaches.<sup>19-22</sup> Additionally, there have also been a few studies on the progress and effect of strategic management on specific industries. For example, Topping and Hernandez<sup>8</sup> reviewed the studies focusing on strategy in the healthcare industry and presented an approach on the quality of the research in this industry. Harrington and Ottenbacher<sup>23</sup> studied the development of strategic management in journals which

have significant influence on tourism and hotel management worldwide. We see that strategic management should be the subject of additional studies to determine the contribution and potential contribution of strategic management within specific applications. Within the frame of strategic management trends in the healthcare services literature, the objectives of this study can be defined more clearly as follows:

- Identifying the distribution of journal articles by years,
- Uncovering the topics researched,
- Identifying who and which institutions have contributed,
- Identifying the co-authorship situation,
- Identifying the research methods used.

The remainder of the study is devised as follows. Firstly, in the methodology section, the methodology and data acquisition are discussed. Secondly, the results of the researches conducted in line with the objective of the study are presented and discussed. Lastly, the results attained in the study are presented, and the study constraints and future potential studies are evaluated.

## Methodology

Two stages were followed to achieve the objective of the study. Firstly, the database and selection of journals were undertaken, and secondly the data collection and analysis took place. The following stages were completed during the study.

### *Database/journals selection*

The authors used articles in scientific journals searched in SCCI instead of books, graduate and doctoral dissertations, and scientific congress records. The main reason for this is because the information published in such journals is regarded as 'certified knowledge'.<sup>15</sup> Thus, it was decided to conduct our research on journal databases. The researched databases included journals focusing on health management published prior to 31 December 2012 were searched and identified in ProQuest, Emerald, Scencedirect/Elsevier, Ebscohost, Jstore, Medline/Pubmed, Taylor & Francis Online, Sagepub, and Wiley databases.

### *Data collection and analysis*

The titles, abstracts, keywords, and texts of these journals were searched based on the terms 'strategy' and 'strategic management'. Later, the course followed by Harrington and Ottenbacher<sup>23</sup> was

followed to identify whether or not these articles were related to strategic management in healthcare services management. Accordingly, articles identified about strategic management topics as described by Harrington and Ottenbacher<sup>23</sup> were evaluated by asking the following questions.

- Does the topic area relate to concepts of strategic ends or strategic means of an organization?
- Is the topic and its implications related to keywords or subtopics of strategic management?

These questions were asked separately by authors for each article. If the authors concurred, then that article was included in the study. If the authors replied differently, a consensus was reached by discussion on these articles, and where affirmative agreement could be reached, those articles were included in this study. This way, the credibility and accuracy of the findings attained were increased. Data acquired were analysed using Microsoft EXCEL and SPSS.

## Results and discussion

### *Distribution of the articles by journals and years*

As a result of the evaluation, the journal which has published the strategic management relationship the most is Health Care Management Review. As seen in Table 1, while in general more articles were published before 2000, Health Services Management journal has made a significant contribution to the field after 2000.

### *Research themes of the papers reviewed*

The distribution of strategic management topics on which the articles focused were identified (Table 2). This analysis revealed that studies focusing on strategic management were those which rather tried to explain the association between hospital management and management strategies. Competitive strategies, innovation, strategic planning, strategic decision making are also among the subjects of strategic management.

### *Authorship information*

The co-authorship situation of the papers was evaluated. Accordingly, 31 were written by one author, 29 by two authors, 13 by three authors, and 132 by four authors (Table 3).

It was revealed that 242 authors had contributed to the field, and that 8 authors had contributed with two published articles (Ceri Butler, Cristina Madorrán García, Eric G. Kirby, Eric W. Ford,

Table 1: Distribution of the articles by journals and years

Journals	Years														Total
	Before 2000	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	
Health Care Management Review	8	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	12
Health Services Management	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	2	-	2	1	1	2	-	10
Medical Care Research and Review	1	-	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	9
Health Care Management Forum	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Health Marketing Quarterly	4	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Health Policy	1	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	6
Journal of Health Organization and Management	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	1	1	1	-	6
Health Care Manage Science	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	4
Journal of Health Management	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	4
Journal of Management in Medicine	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Health Services Research	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	3
International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	3
International Journal of Health Planning and Management	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	3
Global Journal of Health Science	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Health Economics, Policy and Law	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	2
Hospital Topics	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
Journal of Health & Social Policy	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Journal of Management & Marketing in Healthcare	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	2
Journal of Management & Marketing in Healthcare	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	2
Social Work in Health Care	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Health & Place	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Health Affairs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Hospital & Health Services Administration	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
International Journal of Health Care Finance and Economics	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Journal of Management & Marketing in Healthcare	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Social Science and Medicine	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
The European Journal of Health Economics	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Total	27	2	9	3	3	6	1	7	5	5	8	9	8	4	97

Table 2: Research themes of the papers reviewed

Themes	<i>n</i>
Hospital Management & Management Strategies	22
Health Care Strategy & Organizations	17
Strategic Management and Health Services	12
Strategic Planning & Analysis	10
Change Strategies & Implementation	8
Marketing Strategy	8
HRM & Leadership	5
Competition Strategies	4
Strategic Decision Making	4
Performance Management	4
Organizational Innovation	2
Risk and Cost Management in Hospitals	1
Total	97

Table 3: Single author versus co-authorship

Author	<i>n</i>	%
Sole author	31	31.96
2 Authors	29	29.90
3 Authors	13	13.40
4 Authors	13	13.40
5 Authors	7	7.22
6 Authors	2	2.06
7 Authors	1	1.03
8 Authors	1	1.03
Total	97	100

Isabel de Val Pardo, James Begun, Marie Carney, Patrick A. Rivers). The names of the remaining 234 authors were identified with only on one published article.

#### *Institutional contribution*

When the institutions of the authors were evaluated, a total of 148 different institutions were observed to have contributed to the literature. The institution which contributed the most is, as seen on Table 4, the University of Warwick.

Table 4: Institutional contribution

Institution	<i>n</i>
University of Warwick	7
University of Aberdeen	6
Washington University	6
Centre for Health Informatics, Australian Institute of Health Innovation, Univer	5
University College London	5
Louisiana State University	4
Public University of Navarra	4
University of Leeds	4
University of New Orleans	4
Other	188
Total	233

Table 5: Research by region

Country	<i>n</i>
USA	122
UK	53
Canada	15
Italy	9
Australia	7
Spain	5
The Netherlands	4
Ireland	3
Norway	3
Alberta	3
Austria	2
Belgium	2
Berlin	2
Cuba	2
New Zealand	2
Switzerland	2
Cyprus	1
India	1
Scotland	1
Singapore	1
Taiwan	1
Thailand	1
Total	242

Table 5 shows the country where the institutions of the authors are located. According to Table 5, the country which contributed the most is the USA while the contribution of other countries is observed to be very low.

#### *Research method and nature of study*

The initial analyses conducted in this section of our paper reveals that 91 publications were prepared as 'research', 1 as a 'theoretical study', and 5 as a 'review' (Table 6).

Table 7 evaluates the articles according to their empirical research technique. Accordingly, the

Table 6: Empirical and conceptual nature of articles

Empirical and conceptual nature of articles	Articles
Empirical	91
Conceptual	1
Review	5
Total	97

Table 7: Qualitative versus quantitative approach

Qualitative versus quantitative approach	Total
Quantitative	65
Qualitative	25
Hybrid	1
Total	91

Table 8: Methodological procedures

Methodological procedures	Total
Survey	21
Interview	13
Sample case	20
Observation	35
Secondary data	0
Total	91

quantitative method was preferred in most of the studies.

The distribution of the methodological procedures used in the articles which were prepared using an empirical study method was identified (Table 8). According to this study, it was seen that the observation method was used the most in research and that secondary data were never used.

## Conclusion

We sought to research the pattern of the topic of strategic management in the healthcare services management literature. In their study of strategic management research in hospitality journals, Harrington and Ottenbacher<sup>23</sup> state that there has been a significant increase in recent years in the number of journals regarding strategic management and that the popularity of the field is trending upward. When the data acquired as a result of the search and evaluation conducted in this study were compared with the findings in Harrington and Ottenbacher's<sup>23</sup> study, it was found out that the strategic management topics were less popular in health management journals. It is possible that a reason why strategic management is not popular in the health management field can be attributed to the intrinsic characteristics of the healthcare services management industry. For example, health policies in many countries are determined by governments which may diminish the interest in strategic management which deals with competition.<sup>5,24</sup> However, lack of competition does not necessarily mean that strategic management could not be implemented or strategic management implementations could not be researched. Strategic management, whether profit oriented or not, possesses an accumulation of knowledge from which all establishments involved in central administration or local administration implementations can benefit. Particularly, when considered on the basis of the healthcare services industry, strategic thinking skills will likely be necessary. For example, within the industry there are many uncertainties compared to other industries due to (i) the implications on

human health; (ii) high costs; (iii) emphasis on innovation; and (iv) significant competition in some countries and radical changes in other countries.<sup>24,25</sup>

On the other hand, when we review health management journals, there is no comprehensive journal peculiar to this field, but rather those which address health management implementations in general. Today, while many management congresses or research journals in general management cover the studies in health management as they perceive the significance and popularity of the health management, it may be asserted that the health management journals do not adequately introduce such awareness.<sup>26,27</sup> In this context, it is understood by this study that there is a need for a journal which would give a more particular focus on strategic management theories and applications; perhaps specific to certain industries such as healthcare services.

According to the results of this research, the strategic management studies in health management literature evaluate generally management applications and some strategy topics (management strategies, strategic planning, strategic implementation, competitive strategies, etc.). The strategic management studies covered here can be regarded as the tip of the iceberg. However, as stated by Furrer *et al.*,<sup>18</sup> strategic management is a comprehensive field ranging from the top management to the lowest level personnel in an establishment. Therefore, with the contribution of significant knowledge of strategic management literature to the field, the strategic management literature shall also gain invaluable knowledge due to its peculiarities in various industries. In order to fill this gap, it will be of great use for future potential studies to define the agenda which is defined by Harrington and Ottenbacher<sup>23</sup> applied to other industries. Harrington and Ottenbacher<sup>23</sup> collect their strategic management researches under 10 headings. These are strategy and uncertainty, strategy and the internal organization, competitive strategy, corporate strategy and governance, global strategy, strategy process, strategy implementation, knowledge and innovation, the practice of strategy, entrepreneurship and strategy. It is essential for the development and advancement of the field that researchers address the topics in depth and make significant contributions to the field.

Cooperation between researchers from the same or different disciplines shall contribute to the advancement of the field.<sup>8,28</sup> According the findings of this study, we observed that researchers are currently cooperating. We also observed that researchers working in the same universities are

demonstrating more cooperation. Cooperation of researchers working in different universities shall play an important role in recognition and development of the field.

Other analyses conducted in this study showed that several different researchers had contributed to the field. This suggests that there is no particular researcher focusing on strategic management in the field of healthcare services management. For development and advancement of the field, there should be a few leading researchers in the field who also would provide new insights for future research.

When we review the institutions of the researchers who contributed to the field, it was observed that the universities in the USA had made the most significant contributions. On the other hand, it is also a remarkable result that the contribution is generally from developed countries. Generally, developing countries are ignored in these studies where developed countries are discussed instead. In order to stimulate the research potential of the field, strategies encouraging research in developing countries need to be established, and activities enabling these researchers to cooperate with those in developed countries need to be increased.

When we evaluate which method was used in the articles we reviewed, it was found out that almost all of them had been conducted as empirical studies and that they had used survey or observation as their primary method. The lack of research using secondary data and the scarcity of theoretical studies can also be counted among other deficiencies in the field. Accordingly, it may be asserted that there is a lack of information regarding research techniques peculiar to the strategic management field. If such deficiency and insufficient awareness are in question, necessary steps need to be taken to eliminate them. It will enable keeping the field up to date by focusing such strategies on developing countries. Also, it may be helpful to further exert the existence of the field if the leading researchers in the field focus more on varying research techniques.

The popularity of the health management field as a discipline has been significantly increased in developed and developing countries especially in recent years.<sup>29</sup> There are graduate programs being opened under these programs. It may be assumed that researchers studying for a doctorate under general management are researching strategic management approaches particularly in health management, which is a significant factor in increasing research in this field.

There are some important constraints in this study. The first of them is that this study focused only on the articles in health management journals.

Therefore, articles in general management journals focusing on strategic management in health management were not included in our evaluation. Moreover, only journal articles were evaluated in this study and graduate and doctorate dissertations and congress announcements were ignored. Another constraint is that the study was conducted without discriminating between countries. However, a review of the literature on the basis of developing countries would also add new information to the field. Another constraint is that only the terms 'strategy' and 'strategic management' were used as keywords while searching the articles. Retrieving more articles through a search on subtopics of strategic management and making general evaluations would give a clearer picture of the advancement in the field. Lastly, a limited number of databases were used to find the articles. New studies in this field may be conducted by increasing the number of databases. Another significant constraint may also be the time limitation, i.e. the lack of review of the periodic progress periodically. All of these constraints present opportunities for potential future studies. Studies in the disciplines which support the field are an important step for future advancements.

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