

The role of research in the hospitality industry: A content analysis of the IJHM between 2000 and 2005

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Abstract

This article analyzes academic research from the International Journal of Hospitality Management (IJHM), as it applies to the dimensions of the management process related to the Research Methodologies proposed by Ritchie [1987. Roles of Research in Tourism Management. In: Ritchie, J.R.B, Goeldner, C. (Eds.), *Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality Research*. Wiley, New York, pp. 13–22]. This analysis provides insight on the evolution of research published in the IJHM from 2000 to 2005 and compares the results with previous studies. The IJHM has evolved in to an empirical journal with highly sophisticated methodologies and procedures. Therefore, the intention of this article is to provide a vision of the current research efforts in hospitality while providing a better contextual understanding of the directions and trends in qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

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1. Introduction

Over the years, research in hospitality and tourism has provided insights into many areas, such as management, human behavior, finance, planning, marketing and many more. Some have defined it as a field of multidisciplinary study which brings the perspectives of many disciplines, suggesting that the research community should take the opportunity to reconsider the core role of research by critically evaluating itself as a serious field of scientific inquiry (Cassie, 1984; Riegel, 1995). Academic research is typically driven by various and often conflicting motives, which may confuse core with consequential roles. It has been proposed that the core of research activity should be the pursuit and development of knowledge by academics within an intellectual space that celebrates scientific inquiry, integrity, rigor, critique, and autonomy (Bourdieu, 1990; Delanty, 1997). At the same time, Airey and Tribe (2000) believe that at a certain point in time, research should break away from its traditional vocational and

action orientation and begin to explore new territory, that would reflect a more liberal and reflective orientation. In 1996, Ingram posed that the academic community had come to terms with qualitative methodologies as valid techniques with which to map the inherent richness of hospitality and tourism activities. For that reason, more experimentation and interchange is needed to develop methodologies through which research may become more accessible and credible for the world at large. For some time now, the purpose of research in this field has also been a concern for hospitality journal editors and academics. Consequently, academics should conduct more causal research, using correlational or experimental designs that study the hospitality industry, rather than topics that have little practical implications. (Lynn, 2002; Pizam, 2003).

Over the years, tourism education has expanded rapidly, making tourism and hospitality education a major field of study in most countries. In the United States alone, the number of post-secondary institutions offering hospitality, travel and tourism programs has grown from 40 four-year degree programs to over 170 programs with baccalaureate degrees and more than 800 programs with associate degrees

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and certificates (ICHRIE, 1999). An outcome of this growth is that research is likely to influence, not only the body of knowledge in tourism and hospitality, but also the personal development and career paths of those undertaking research.

Along with this growth in hospitality programs, there has been a continued emphasis upon educating undergraduates on the mechanics of operating hospitality organizations, as well as focusing on graduate degrees that emphasize research. This applied focus of research serves as a foundation to investigate hospitality research within a balanced framework that provides practitioners and academics with a way to scrutinize information. For many academic institutions, research is considered an important assessment tool to evaluate their faculty members. Although it is argued that such practice should be abandoned, previous studies have used frequency of publication to determine the research contribution from authors and institutions, by using content and citation analysis (Losekoot et al., 2001). In academic institutions, research is used as a venue to generate funding, which can then create some kind of confusion or misunderstanding regarding what the purpose of research should be. For example, public universities often conduct more research and produce more doctoral students, receiving more State and public funding than those that only have few or no doctoral programs. Research is important not only from the viewpoint of an individual faculty member but also from that of the university, as a whole (Chacko, 1999).

By no means are these practices criticized in this study. Instead they will be used to reinforce the idea that research also provides constructive and noteworthy information. For example, Chacko (1999) advocates that research is the basis for developing and testing new theories that provide valuable information to hospitality organizations. Therefore, these observations draw attention to the process of analyzing research, using a structure that readily captures the essence of the existing body of knowledge.

In line with Chacko's claim, the current study of hospitality research published in the *International Journal of Hospitality Management* (IJHM) between the years 2000 and 2005 was evaluated via a content analysis. As a result, hospitality research is further analyzed as it applies to decision-making, by using the model of research methodologies proposed by Ritchie (1987). This study provides a rational basis for classifying and describing research along the following dimensions: level of management activity, stage of management process, and the functional areas of management activities. The motivation to use these dimensions stems from understanding the varying needs of such a diverse industry in times of globalization and fast-paced growth. The rest of this paper is organized as follows: review of current literature, methodology and analytical framework, results and their interpretation, and concluding remarks.

2. Content analysis overview

Content analysis can be defined in two ways: as a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of manifest contents of communication (Berelson, 1952); and as the process of making replicable and valid inferences from the data to their contexts (Krippendorff, 1980). During the implementation of this evaluation process, a set of procedures must be developed, in order to make valid inferences from the text that is being analyzed. For many years researchers in the hospitality industry have conducted this type of analysis as a tool to determine the presence of concepts within sets of texts, and at the same time make inferences about previous research.

For quite some time, hospitality journals have been evaluated by researchers, for a variety of reasons. For example, various studies have focused on identifying the authors or institutions that produced the greatest number of research articles, the primary purpose of this being to rank institutions and authors (Jogaratham et al., 2005; Losekoot et al., 2001; Samenfink and Rutherford, 2002; Schmidgall and Woods, 1997; Woods and Schmidgall, 1995). Another method used to analyze research involves the proportion of citations associated with an author's work. According to Xiao and Smith (2007), this could be an indicator of the maturity of research and scholarship. Their research points out that the split between citing tourism-related versus other journals indicates that tourism research is a maturing multi/inter-disciplinary field with a substantial growing body of literature and knowledge. Other researchers, such as Taylor and Edgar (1996), have pointed out the importance of deciding what the scope of hospitality research should be, by proposing a "two dichotomies model". This model was derived from the field of marketing, and the authors posit that it could help delineate the focus of research, by focusing on the way firms are behaving or should behave. A study by Littlejohn (1990) presents the role of hospitality research as providing insight on areas within the discipline, on the contents and direction of academic courses, and on best practices, and to inspire research by dissemination and experimentation. In contrast, Slattery (2002) addresses the role of research by focusing on a social scientific methodology, while others asserted that by using rigorous and systematic methods of research, a common ground between practitioners and academics could provide value to the industry (Van Scotter and Culligan, 2003).

Another method used to analyze research within the discipline is by looking at the statistical methods used. For instance, previous studies include a bibliometric study of tourism and statistics (Palmer et al., 2005) and of research methods used in hospitality management journals (Baloglu and Assante, 1999). In general, these studies attempted to use statistical methods as a measure of the discipline's degree of maturity, as it demonstrates non-speculative knowledge.

3. Methodology

This study analyzed 156 articles from IJHM over a 5-year period, from 2000 to 2005. The IJHM was selected because it is considered a first-tier hospitality journal—it was ranked as one of the top hospitality journals by directors of hospitality graduate programs (Ferreira et al., 1998). Furthermore, previous content analysis studies have included the IJHM as a benchmark of excellence when evaluating hospitality journals for their content (Baloglu and Assante, 1999; Crawford-Welch and McCleary, 1992; Frechtling, 2004; Losekoot et al., 2001). For the purposes of the present study only refereed manuscripts and research notes were analyzed, while other items such as book reviews, editorials and discussion papers were not considered.

For the analysis, all articles were evaluated by using a customized database. The framework for the database included various categories that were used to cluster the articles. In addition, copies of the abstract, manuscript content and keywords were gathered for every article. Then, to assure consistency, two procedures were implemented: first of all, a set of manageable categories was developed; and secondly, every article was read in its entirety.

The framework used for the classification of research was adopted from the classification of research methodologies proposed by Ritchie (1987). The main categories in the framework are the stages of management process as defined by Anthony (1965) and are termed strategic, managerial, and tactical. Each of these main categories reflects the nature of different management issues. Another category used was the stage of management process, which includes: analysis, planning, execution and control. A more detailed description of the categories is provided in Fig. 1.

Other categories used include the area of management activity (personnel, control, production, marketing, finance, and coordination), research design (conceptual or empirical), data source, statistical methods used, and the segment of the industry (see Table 1). Previous studies have also analyzed the nature of the articles as either quantitative or qualitative (Crawford-Welch and McCleary, 1992; Dann et al., 1988). However, for this study, conceptual or empirical methodologies are used—conceptual methodology includes research focused on the discussion of concepts and does not use statistics, while the empirical methodology includes the use of statistical procedures (Baloglu and Assante, 1999). Once the article is themed as empirical

		Level of Management Activities*		
		Strategic ▼	Managerial/Tactical ▼	Operational ▼
Analysis (understanding the nature and scope of the problem)	Planning (setting objectives & evaluation/choice alternatives)	Policy Research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How policy formulation occurs and how to improve • Analyze situations to formulate policy • Evaluate priorities • Provide broad guidelines to establish priorities that direct organization activities • Macro data related to present values or trends • Time Series • Econometric Models • Predicts the future • Priorities to provide policies or actions 	Managerial Research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific problem of limited scope related to a specific functional area • Seeks solutions to what should be done • Measures awareness, attitudes and alternative actions • Background to recommend precise action to overcome a problem or take advantage of a situation • Is future and present oriented 	Operational Research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase operational efficiency and reduce management involvement • Reliable data related to the performance of a very limited, well defined task • Construction of analytical/quantitative models • Decisions & rules prescribing requires operational actions • Identify when management is required to take corrective action
		Evaluation Research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor objectives, strategies and programs • See to what extent programs are performing • User satisfaction levels • Measure performance of criteria over time • Identify program weakness and strengths to provide recommendations 	Action Research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous gathering and analyzing of research data. • Task oriented • Understand operations and monitor performance level to upgrade performance • Behavioral data for interpersonal and intergroup relationships • Quantitative and qualitative • Identify organizational problems from performance measures • Change the work environment and modify rewards systems 	
Execution (transition of ideas into reality)	Control (measuring if an activity has accomplished the objectives)			

* Adopted from Ritchie, J. R. B. (1987)

Fig. 1. Level of management activities (adapted from Ritchie, 1987).

Table 1
Categories for classification

Statistical method used		
Ancova	Descriptive statistics	Reliability analysis
Anova	Survival analysis	Structural equation modeling
Chi-square	Econometric models	Discriminant analysis
Cluster analysis	Factor analysis	Time series analysis
Conjoint analysis	Logit models	Probit and Tobit models
Correlations	Log-linear models	Multidimensional scaling
t-Test	Manova	Regression models
Industry sector		
Food service	Tourism	Lodging
Education	Other hospitality businesses	
Functional areas		
Coordination	Production	Finance
Control	Marketing	Personnel
Nature of the study		
Empirical	Conceptual	
Data source		
Primary data	Secondary data	

or conceptual, it is then classified by the data source, which can be primary or secondary.

To categorize each article by statistical method used, the study uses a list of statistical techniques used by Palmer et al. (2005) in a bibliometric study of tourism and statistics. This particular category can be an indicator of the degree of scientific progress in the field of hospitality, without disregarding the fact that scientific knowledge can also be generated through other methods. In order to provide some insight on the progress of research, all the techniques used were considered during the analysis of each article.

The functional areas of management were divided into six categories (Fayol, 1987):

- (a) *Coordination*: harmonize all the activities of a concern so as to facilitate its successful functioning;
- (b) *Finance*: search for an optimum use of capital;
- (c) *Marketing*: concerned with the selling of goods and products;
- (d) *Production*: operation efficiency where output is maximized in relation to input;
- (e) *Control*: verifying that everything occurs in accordance with the plans;
- (f) *Personnel*: process of obtaining and maintaining employees in order to build up an organization.

The last category includes the industry sector in which the research took place, which includes lodging (hotels, vacation ownership and any other lodging facility), food service (commercial and non-commercial), education, tourism (transportation, cruise lines, travel agents), and

others (recreation and leisure and multidisciplinary studies).

4. Results

The following section presents the results with reference to the roles and characteristics of the research process, as it applies to decision-making (level of management activity, research dimensions, stage of management process, and functional area of management activity). This is then followed by a discussion of other areas, such as research design, data collection, statistical procedure, and industry segments. The frequency of articles, according to the proposed main categories in this study, is presented in Fig. 2.

4.1. Level of management activity: strategic

When analyzing articles according to the level of management activity, 51% ($n = 79$) of the articles were considered strategic. The research during this 5-year span was more oriented towards providing broad guidelines, than towards establishing priorities, formulating policies, or monitoring objectives, strategies and programs to determine to what extent they are performing. The majority of the research under this category was evaluation research (62%, $n = 49$). The focus of most articles was towards measuring performance over time, by identifying strengths and weaknesses, in order to provide recommendations. Within the evaluation-type of research, the total number of articles ($n = 49$) are almost equally divided between evaluating execution ($n = 26$) and control ($n = 23$), the former centering on the translation of ideas into reality, and the latter on measuring whether an activity has achieved its original objective. These methods provide a mechanism for systematically exploring the causes or reasons for success or failure within an organization.

4.2. Level of management activity: managerial/tactical

Under the managerial/tactical category (35%, $n = 55$), most of the articles are managerial research ($n = 32$) followed by action research ($n = 23$). It is considered necessary to understand operations and monitor performance levels, because the focus of managerial research is to seek solutions to what should be done in relation to a specific functional area. Under this category all articles were almost equally divided between analysis ($n = 18$) and planning ($n = 14$). These findings highlight the important role research plays in understanding the scope of managerial problems.

4.3. Level of management activity: operational

The articles in this category (14%, $n = 22$) provide insight through the construction of analytical models that increase operational efficiency and reduce management involvement. Under operation research, the articles were

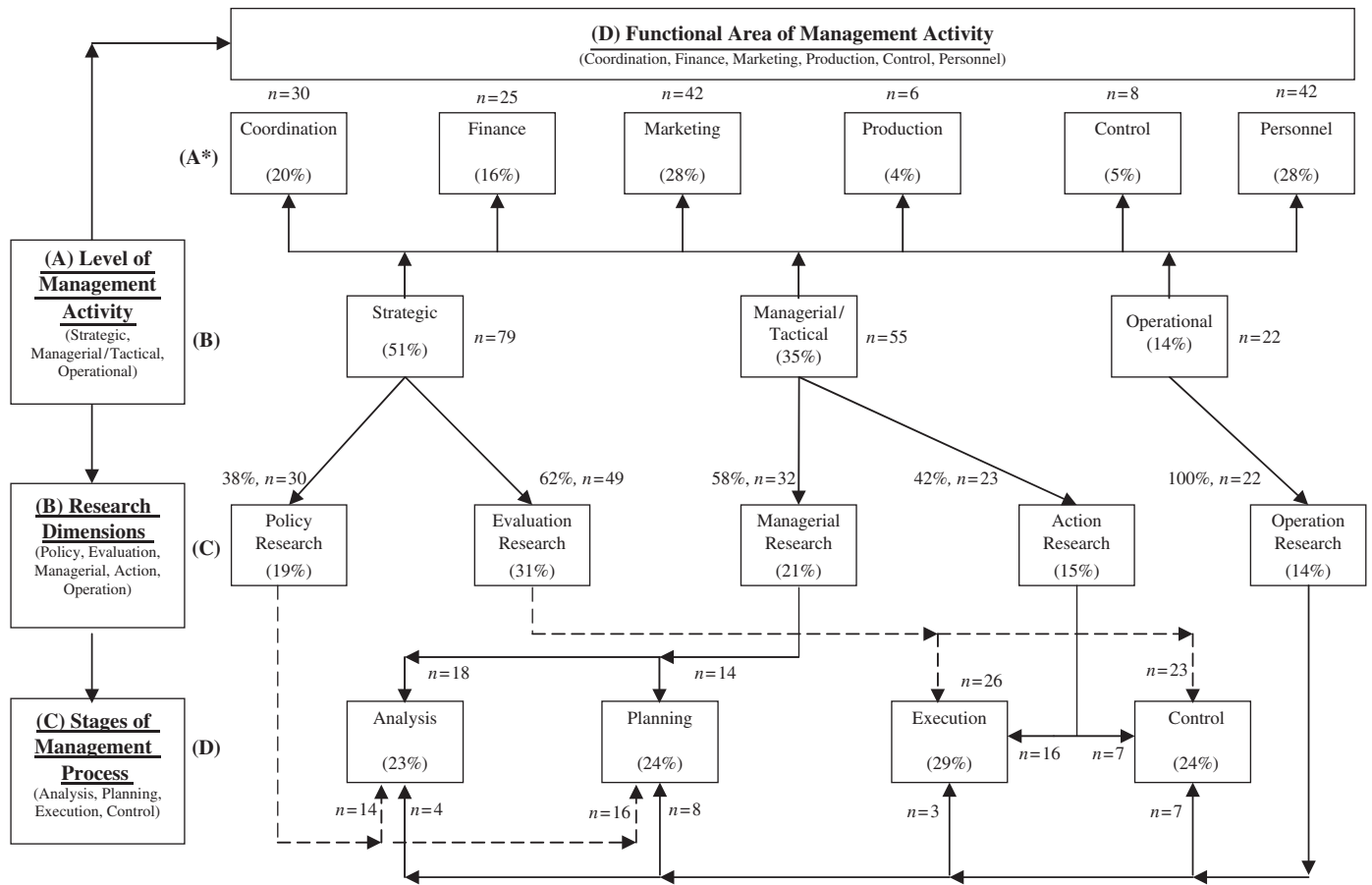


Fig. 2. Classification of research methodologies, according to the dimensions of the management process.

Table 2
Functional areas, according to the level of management activity

Level of management activity		Functional areas						
		NA	Coordination	Finance	Marketing	Production	Control	Personnel
Strategic	<i>n</i>	1	23	18	21	0	4	12
Managerial	<i>n</i>	2	7	6	17	2	2	19
Operational	<i>n</i>	0	0	1	4	4	2	11
Total	<i>n</i>	3	30	25	42	6	8	42
	Percentage (%)	2	19	16	27	4	5	27

distributed throughout the spectrum of the stage of management process. Planning ($n = 8$) and control ($n = 7$) covered the majority of the articles, due to the fact that management needs to establish rules to reduce the required level of management involvement and increase operational efficiency. The rest of the articles under operational research were considered either analysis ($n = 4$) or execution ($n = 3$).

4.4. Level of management activity and functional areas

Table 2 shows the functional areas of management activity according to the level of management process.

The functional areas that got the highest level of attention from researchers were personnel and marketing, with both areas receiving equal attention with 27% ($n = 42$) of the articles, respectively. The amount of articles in this area was 3% higher than was reported by Crawford-Welch and McCleary (1992), and almost 9% less than was reported by Baloglu and Assante (1999). A total of 19 articles were considered managerial research and the rest as strategic ($n = 4$) and operational ($n = 11$).

The second area with the most research activity was marketing. However, there was more focus on marketing during the past 5 years than was reported by Baloglu and Assante (1999) (17.2%) and by Crawford-Welch and

McCleary (1992) (13.4%). Most of the articles within marketing were classified as strategic or managerial ($n = 21, 17$). The third area that received more attention from authors in the IJHM, when compared to the previous studies, was finance, with a total of 25 articles in the 5-year span.

5. Statistical methods

As noted earlier, the level of progress and credibility of a field is highly related to the statistical and methodological sophistication gained and practiced. Table 3 presents a cross-tabulation of the different statistical methods used, as well as of the research dimensions. The use of correlations, regression models, factor analysis, descriptive statistics, and t -test in the empirical research published in the IJHM was 39%, 30%, 23%, 36%, and 20% respectively. These findings are somewhat similar to those of Baloglu and Assante (1999) and the respective frequencies increased from those reported by Crawford-Welch and McCleary (1992). The increase in sophistication of the methods used is an indicator of the presence of more research explaining

or predicting the relationship among variables. It is also worth noting that during the time span of this analysis 44% of the statistical methods used were multivariate, 22% bivariate, 18% descriptive and 16% are univariate. Therefore, these frequencies demonstrate an increasing emphasis on the deployment of advanced statistical methods as reported in the IJHM thus implying advancements in the hospitality knowledgebase.

6. Conceptual or empirical

For the purpose of this study, an article was considered empirical if it used any statistical technique. Contrary to the studies of Baloglu and Assante (1999) and Crawford-Welch and McCleary (1992), empirical research has dominated the research published in the IJHM, in the last 5 years. A total of 128 articles (82%) published in the IJHM from 2000 to 2005 are empirical. In comparison to the previous studies, the IJHM has experienced a significant change towards more empirical research, growing from 36.8% (Baloglu and Assante, 1999), 24% (Crawford-Welch and McCleary, 1992), and 37% (Palmer et al., 2005) to 82% in 2005.

Table 3
Statistical methods used, according to research dimension

Statistical method used	Policy research	Evaluation research	Managerial research	Action research	Operation research	Total	Percentage of empirical articles (%)
Correlations	13	16	11	3	7	50	39
Descriptive statistics	5	14	8	11	8	46	36
Regression models	9	14	10	1	4	38	30
Factor analysis	4	8	12	2	3	29	23
t -Test	5	8	6	2	4	25	20
Reliability analysis	3	3	9	2	3	20	16
Anova	2	5	4	2	3	16	13
Chi-square	–	1	2	2	2	7	5
Manova	1	4	2	–	–	7	5
Structural equation modeling	–	2	1	–	–	3	2
Time series analysis	3	–	–	–	–	3	2
Ancova	–	2	–	–	–	2	2
Cost analysis	–	–	1	–	1	2	2
Econometric models	2	–	–	–	–	2	2
Gap analysis	–	–	1	1	–	2	2
Mancova	–	–	2	–	–	2	2
Analytic hierarchy process	–	1	–	–	–	1	1
Correlation	–	1	–	–	–	1	1
Cost accounting	–	–	–	1	–	1	1
Data envelopment analysis	–	1	–	–	–	1	1
Discourse analysis	–	–	–	1	–	1	1
Log-linear models	1	–	–	–	–	1	1
Menu engineering	–	–	–	–	1	1	1
Multi-attribute decision-making	–	1	–	–	–	1	1
Multicriteria optimization	–	1	–	–	–	1	1
Multiple discriminant analysis	1	–	–	–	–	1	1
Probit and Tobit models	1	–	–	–	–	1	1

Table 4
Empirical and conceptual articles, according to research dimension

Research dimensions	Empirical		Conceptual	Total
	Primary	Secondary		
Policy research (%)	6	7	6	19
Evaluation research (%)	13	12	6	31
Managerial research (%)	16	3	1	21
Action research (%)	8	5	2	15
Operational research (%)	11	1	2	14
Total (%)	53 (<i>n</i> = 83)	29 (<i>n</i> = 45)	18 (<i>n</i> = 28)	100 (<i>n</i> = 156)

Table 5
Number of statistical methods by article

	Number of statistical methods used				
	1	2	3	4	
Empirical articles (%)	36	23	24	17	100

It is not the intent of this discussion to claim that conceptual research is less important than empirical research. The relevance is due to the facts that empirical research enables the testing of theories in the field of hospitality. From the 128 empirical articles, a total of 45 used secondary data while 83 used primary data. Conducting primary research is a useful skill to acquire, as it can greatly supplement research in secondary sources. In the case of the *IJHM*, it was used as the focus of the research project. Subsequently, this will contribute to the credibility of the research and support the findings. The findings also show that empirical research dominated the different research dimensions, especially the evaluation research, which numbered 39 empirical articles. A more detailed list is presented in [Table 4](#).

As empirical research has boomed during the past 5 years, so has the number of statistical methods used per research project. [Table 5](#) presents a cross-tabulation of the number of statistical methods. A total of 41% of the empirical articles reported three to four methods. Overall, approximately two-thirds of the article employed at least two statistical methods. According to [Brinberg and McGrath \(1985\)](#), this increase in multiple methodologies can be related to the advancement and maturity of a discipline. In other words, the *IJHM* has contributed to this by publishing this type of research.

7. Industry segment

[Table 6](#) shows the results of a cross-tabulation of the industry segments, according to the various research dimensions. The main focuses of the articles published in the *IJHM* were lodging and foodservices, with 47% (*n* = 74) and 24% (*n* = 47), respectively. The majority of the articles in lodging (55%, *n* = 41) and foodservices

Table 6
Industry segment, according to research dimension

Sector	Research dimension			Total	
	Strategic	Managerial	Operational		
Lodging	(<i>n</i>) Percentage (%)	(41) 55	(27) 36	(6) 8	(74) 100
Food service	(<i>n</i>) Percentage (%)	(14) 38	(12) 32	(11) 30	(37) 100
Tourism	(<i>n</i>) Percentage (%)	(6) 35	(8) 47	(3) 18	(17) 100
Other	(<i>n</i>) Percentage (%)	(4) 40	(5) 50	(1) 10	(10) 100
Education	(<i>n</i>) Percentage (%)	(14) 78	(3) 17	(1) 6	(18) 100

(38%, *n* = 14) were categorized as strategic. A particular area that exhibited more interest in research was education, with a total of 18 articles (12%). This is significantly higher than those reported in previous studies and could be attributed to the specialization of academic programs in the field.

8. Conclusions

The results of this analysis are solely exploratory, therefore intended as a tool for debate about the future directions of analysis in the discipline, while providing an insight into the published research in the *IJHM* and in other journals. As a consequence, this study follows an innovative approach to the analysis of hospitality research. By using the research methodologies developed by [Ritchie \(1987\)](#), a new perspective on the purpose of research is presented. At the start of the new millennium, tourism has been established as the number one industry in many countries, and as the fastest-growing economic sector in terms of foreign exchange earnings and job creation. Tourism is considered the world's largest export earner and an important factor in the balance of payments of most nations ([WTO, 2006](#)). As a result, in an era of globalization, it is demonstrated that the majority of the published research in the *IJHM* in the past 5 years has been mostly of the strategic dimension. This could be related to what [Ingram \(1996\)](#) identified as a widely perceived need for a clearer understanding of the nature of hospitality, and for increased level of professionalism in the future, therefore seeking to map emerging trends and study global strategies rather than addressing the problems of individual hospitality. This way, hospitality businesses will not only contribute to the economic development but also to better practices and services within the market they serve.

Certainly, there has been more focus on organizational analysis, to establish priorities and set objective measurements for evaluating performance. The complexity of research methodologies and of the statistical analysis used,

demonstrate that the hospitality research in the *IJHM* is aimed at providing better knowledge and information for academic and practitioners. These findings can be compared to other analyses of hospitality research, in terms of the direction of future research.

The study indicates that the research published in the *IJHM* from 2000 to 2005 reflected increased researcher sophistication in regards to statistical methods used and in the frequency of advanced statistical tools deployment as compared to previous content analysis studies. In comparison to these previous studies, the *IJHM* has shifted towards publishing more empirical research, which grew from 36.8% (Baloglu and Assante, 1999) and 24% (Crawford-Welch and McCleary, 1992) to 82% in 2005. When comparing the *IJHM* to the ranking of hospitality journals presented by Palmer et al. (2005), the number of articles published that use statistics surpasses other journals such as *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, *Tourism Analysis*, *Annals of Tourism and Tourism Management* to mention a few. In the previous study the *IJHM* was ranked 8th and as of 2005 the *IJHM* has increased the number of articles with statistics from 37% to 82%.

It is recommended that further research be conducted to establish a guide for practitioners and academics, in the search for answers or solutions to future developments. Researchers in the field of tourism have often overlooked the key events (and individuals) that are ultimately responsible for triggering major shifts in the configuration of tourist behavior and development, and our understanding of the dynamics of change in tourism has suffered as a consequence (Faulkner and Goeldner, 1998, p. 78).

This study was able to capture how the growing sophistication of the methods used, can serve as an indicator of more research geared towards explaining or predicting the relationship among variables, is making significant contributions to the development of the field. According to Brew and Boud (1995) this emerges from the multifaceted relationship between teaching and research. This most likely will enhance the teacher's knowledge, interest and enthusiasm for the specific subject. Consequently, as Thomas and Harris (2001) suggested, research activity will then provide the direction for new courses and expertise for its delivery.

Therefore, this study suggests that multiple journals be analyzed in order to provide a more substantial interpretation of the research direction, according to the dimensions of the management process. As a result, practitioners and academics could benefit by getting a better understanding of the direction hospitality research will be taking in the coming years.

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