

Editorial

From the Editor: Bibliographic and systematic reviews in tourism and hospitality

Konstantinos Andriotis*

Professor in Tourism, Department of Marketing, Enterprise and Tourism, Middlesex University London, UK

1 INTRODUCTION

Since nearly 40 years ago, when Glass (1976) introduced systematic and meta-analysis reviews, these types of reviews have been widely used by scholars of several scientific disciplines as important tools for writing their literature review and providing a summary of the existing knowledge. Traditionally, bibliographic or systematic reviews have been widely used by postgraduate students for the writing of their literature review. They have been also used in a wide range of scientific contexts (particularly in health sciences). Nevertheless, in social sciences, including tourism, such types of reviews are often stigmatised, and instead traditional critical literature reviews or narrative literature reviews are preferred. While systematic reviews and bibliometric studies mainly summarise what has happened in the past, narrated literature reviews also review past research but in a more insightful and less descriptive way and by adopting a strong conceptual, theoretical and/or practitioner focus.

The application of systematic and bibliometric literature reviews in tourism and hospitality research has expanded after 2010, when several tourism and hospitality scholars started to adopt different protocols to perform systematic literature reviews, although not always established for the social sciences (Sharifi-Tehrani, 2023). A very good example of a bibliometric tourism study was the study of Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2015), which went beyond the metrics by performing a gender-aware bibliometric analysis of 466 articles published between 1985 and 2012 and found that bibliometric studies are ‘an established method of assessing research production in a specific field over a given time period and despite its flaws, give a useful indication of the development of tourism research as a knowledge-generating system’ (p. 88). In a similar vein, Sharif, Mura and Wijesinghe (2019) explored all systematic tourism and hospitality review studies published across 34 tourism journals until 2017 and found that these reviews ‘have emerged as one of the main strategies to assess the status of tourism knowledge’ (p. 162) and they ‘present an important avenue for scholars and practitioners to apply existing knowledge for further action (i.e. policy) and research’ (p. 164).

As an editor of two tourism journals, reviewer for several journals and diligent reader of academic papers over the past several years, I have read a great number of systematic and bibliographic review papers. By reading all these papers, I have realised that even when scholars do not specifically describe systematic or bibliographic reviews as their methodological approach, they often adopt a comprehensive

* Email: K.Andriotis@mdx.ac.uk.

systematic review approach to enhance the methodological quality of their evidence base. Despite the wide use of bibliometric and systematic analytical approaches, in the broader context, the publication of bibliographic and systematic reviews is being considered problematic by several tourism and hospitality journals' editors and their significance has not been explored yet.

For this reason, this editorial seeks to explore whether bibliographic and systematic reviews can contribute to map pathways and to suggest routes about where the literature is now and how it might develop theoretically, practically and/or methodologically for future tourism and hospitality research and inquiry. Although this editorial expresses the author's opinion from his capacity as an editor of the *Journal of Qualitative Research in Tourism*, arguments presented can be also applied to several other scientific domains.

2 BIBLIOGRAPHIC AND SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

Papers published in academic journals need to map out the literature and evaluate the existing gaps, as well as to make theoretical sense of the literature. In doing so, some authors (e.g. Fan et al., 2022; Mukherjee et al., 2022; Ulrich et al., 2022) support that a bibliographic or systematic metadata review can be a powerful tool for identifying, describing and processing secondary sources. However, this is not always enough. Bibliographic or systematic studies have been criticised for simply presenting the metadata characteristics of published manuscripts (e.g. author, year of publication, keywords, main themes), which are downloaded quite easily from databases without providing any new ideas. As a result, they may be written without even reading any of the papers under review and therefore they might not say anything new about the content of the reviewed papers. Thus, systematic/bibliometric reviews might be written by persons lacking extensive knowledge and expertise in a specific field or subfield, and who are just experts in the data analytic techniques.

While systematic and bibliographic studies enable a researcher to understand how to collect a reliable and valid group of articles, for some scholars (e.g. Garousi, Felderer and Mantyla, 2019; Richards, 2007), this is not always enough. Instead, critical or narrative literature reviews in empirical papers that seek to contribute to the existing literature by citing papers and identifying research problems from that stream may be preferred. Although some authors (see, e.g., Fan et al., 2022; Mukherjee et al., 2022; Teixeira and Ferreira, 2018) support that purely bibliometric analyses may advance theory and that co-occurrence analysis of keywords can lead to nomological clarity of a field in an objective way, several bibliometric/systematic studies have been published in tourism and hospitality journals (see, e.g., Alam and Nayak, 2021; Bashir, Singh and Mishra, 2022; da Cunha and Louro, 2023; Payin et al., 2024); editors of several top-tier tourism journals, such as *Tourism Management*, *Annals of Tourism Research* and *Current Issues in Tourism*, do not publish pure bibliometric studies or systematic literature reviews.

This is because such studies are considered primarily scoping studies driven by a search for narrow gaps in the literature and merely describe (count categories) without having any focus on a true understanding of the field which they describe. By doing so, it is believed that they do not contribute to knowledge. Just to name an example, the PRISMA approach developed by Liberati et al. (2009) is just considered a way to collect papers and report reviews in a reproducible way, and it only produces pretty, but often meaningless diagrams with limited (if any) intellectual effort. As an alternative, several editors prefer scholarly articles that outline where the subject has been developed from

and having a strong conceptual, theoretical or practitioner focus. This is in line with Rowley and Slack (2004) who more than 20 years ago supported that ‘a literature review needs to draw on and evaluate a range of different types of sources including academic and professional journal articles, books, and web-based resources’ (p. 31).

In practice, most tourism and hospitality journals require authors to perform an extensive literature review that establishes the current state of knowledge on the topic under study and ensures the originality of the research. The reason for this is that it is believed that a substantive and thorough literature review describes the foundation of the study being conducted in the context of other works, and at the same time, it evaluates their methodologies and findings as well as discusses how a study will differ. In doing so, a critical literature review that looks at other authors’ findings and arguments in a deeper and critical context may be considered of vital importance. Only when researchers state their opinion in their literature review, it is believed they will be able to adopt a holistic approach to relevant literature and it will become possible to evaluate the arguments presented by others against their research questions.

3 CONCLUSION

According to several tourism scholars (see, e.g., Andriotis, 2023, 2024; Monterrubio, Andriotis and Rodríguez-Muñoz, 2020), qualitative studies do not aim to obtain data with solid statistical basis in the form of diagrams and figures. For this reason, systematic and bibliographic reviews presenting quantitative data alone do not constitute a significant asset for them. Instead, systematic and bibliographic reviews, which evaluate and discuss the methodologies and findings of past research, may aid to advance theoretical and practical knowledge. Thus, the problem is not with the tools or techniques being used, but with how scholars make use of these techniques to address their research objectives and questions. Therefore, scholars need to be careful when criticizing the available data analytic tools.

Qualitative Research in Tourism Journal publishes literature reviews, bibliometric analysis and meta-analysis papers if our editorial team believes that the paper makes a significant contribution to the knowledge in the field and pushes the boundaries. To this end, the current issue includes two bibliometric reviews, one by Azizi, Ghaderi and Shekari (2024), which explores the evolution of qualitative research in tourism and hospitality over the past 45 years, and a second by Singh and Khan (2024), which analyses scholarly publications in an attempt to capture the latest trends and developments in the field of sharing economy from the perspective of sustainable tourism practices.

To sum up, using the words of Richards (2007): ‘as with all scientific writing, the methodological quality, conduct of the systematic review and interpretation of the findings should be subject to appropriate appraisal’ (p. 34). Speaking in my role as an Editor in Chief of *Qualitative Research in Tourism*, I believe that bibliometric literature reviews should be rejected only when they do not identify a meaningful problem in the reviewed literature and they are driven by narrow gaps by remaining at the level of descriptive analysis without having any focus on a true understanding of the field which they describe.

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