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What makes an article citable?
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RESEARCH NOTE

What makes an article citable?

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To date, no research has been undertaken to examine what constitutes high citation counts. This study examined the quantifiable characteristics in publications and investigated their associations with citation per year. That is, this study empirically examined the relationships with length, authorship, and collaboration and citation counts in the 300 most cited publications in tourism and hospitality journals. The results reveal a negative relationship between the length of a title and citation per year.

Keywords: citation; structure; influential; articles; quantitative analysis

1. Introduction

There is little doubt that the publication of peer-reviewed journal articles is increasingly a basic requirement for academics in different disciplines. Publications are often seen as a route to promotion and job security for academic staff as more universities use publications as an indicator of the performance or achievement of individual researchers (Park, Philips, Canter, & Abbott, 2011; Severt, Tesone, Bottorff, & Carpenter, 2009). This is especially the case for staff in tenure track positions whose further contracts depend on the number and quality of their journal outputs. Indeed, publication activities are seen as a significant element in career success (Weber & Ladkin, 2008). This ever increasing pressure to publish in quality peer-reviewed journals has given rise to different articles that have tried to shed light on what makes an article successful or not. For example, McKercher, Law, Weber, Song, and Hsu (2007) delineated the common characteristics of rejected manuscripts in order to help prepare a manuscript for successful publication. Rejected manuscripts tend to have multiple shortcomings commonly in methodology, significance or contribution, problems with writing style, and a weak literature review. Similarly, Perdue, Meng, and Courtney (2009) investigated rejected manuscripts submitted to Journal of Travel Research and found that knowing audience of the journal, as well as methodological and theoretical contributions play critical roles in manuscript acceptance. These articles convey an important message that in addition to style and fit for purpose issues, academic rigour is ultimately what counts.

Given the countable nature of publications, a plethora of research studies have used a bibliometric or a citation-based method to investigate the influence of academic journals (Jamal, Smith, & Watson, 2008; McKercher, 2012) or individual articles (Law, Ye,
Chen, & Leung, 2009; McKercher, 2008). The impact factor from Thomson Reuters’ Journal Citation Report is one of the primary citation-based methods to assess the influence of an academic journal used across disciplines (Murphy & Law, 2008; Torres-Salinas, Lopez-Cózar, & Jiménez-Contreras, 2009). While articles with higher citation counts are considered as more important, useful, and influential than their counterparts (Law et al., 2009; Severt et al., 2009), careful application and interpretation of citation analysis have been suggested (Jamal et al., 2008). For example, self-citation tends to inflate citation counts, but its effect on citation counts is smoothed out over a longer period of time (Aksnes, 2003).

In spite of the existence of prior research with citation analysis, to date no attention has been paid to examine the relationship between citation counts and the structural aspects of articles. While it is feasible to analyse a publication with its quantifiable natures such as word counts, number of authors, and number of references, such a quantitative approach has not been taken. This gap has given rise to the present research that aims to explore the structural elements of journal publications. In order to answer the question of ‘Are there any common quantifiable factors among highly cited articles in tourism and hospitality journals?’, this study examined the structural characteristics of 300 influential articles and their associations with citation counts.

It is important to state at the outset that as it is exploratory in nature, this study is not based on a firm theoretical background. However, the current study addresses the gap by presenting findings that should enable us to better understand the influential articles with a set of objective characteristics. In other words, the research seeks to explore if there are any structural characteristics common to highly cited journal articles. If any patterns exist, the findings could guide researchers to prepare their manuscripts in a way to attract citations. If no such patterns exist, then it is the contextual elements that ultimately are the key to quality publications.

2. Citation analysis tool: Google scholar

One of the mostly accepted tools for citation analysis is Web of Science (WoS) by Thomson Reuters, which retrieves information from Science Citation Index Expanded, Social Science Citation Index, Arts & Humanities Citation Index, Conference Proceedings Citation Index, Index Chemicus, and Current Chemical Reactions (Thomson Reuters, 2012). Another popular tool is SciVerse Scopus by Elsevier, which covers over 19,000 titles and 47 million records (SciVerse, 2012). Although these two tools retrieve information from different databases, Torres-Salinas et al. (2009) found that WoS and Scopus show similar results in the rankings of citations.

While WoS and Scopus carry their own advantages, Google Scholar has increased its popularity as an alternative tool for citation analysis mainly due to its vast database and ease of use (Law et al., 2009; McKercher, 2012). Google Scholar is a free web search engine specialising in scholarly literature by Google (Google, 2012). Google Scholar uses automated software called robots or crawlers to fetch information not only from most major academic publishers, free and subscribed repositories, but also individual user websites. Due to the wide coverage and secrecy about the coverage, Google Scholar is criticized by its inflation of citation counts (Tober, 2011). However, Murphy and Law (2008) empirically examined the validity of Google Scholar and concluded that Google Scholar has a strong convergent validity. Similarly, Hall (2006) compared Google Scholar with Thomson Scientific (TS), the obsolete service after WoS, and found that Google Scholar covers a wider tourism literature than TS.
3. Quantifiable elements of a publication

In the submission of articles, authors are guided by the requirements of journals. Different journals provide different guidelines on structural aspects of a manuscript. For example, some leading tourism and hospitality journals have strict guidelines while others have loose ones. *Annals of Tourism Research (ATR)* has a limit of 52 characters in a title including spaces while journals like *Tourism Management (TM)* and *Journal of Travel Research (JTR)* have no such limits. Regarding the number of keywords, *ATR, International Journal of Hospitality Management (IJHM), and Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research (JHTR)* allow no more than six keywords, whereas *TM* allows up to eight and *JTR* allows up to five. No guideline, however, on the number of keywords is made by *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly (CQ)*. Regarding the limit on the number of tables and figures in most journals, *ATR* recommends less than five, whereas other journals have no specifications. The structural anatomy in this study includes quantifiable components of a publication such as the number of words in a title, number of authors, number of keywords, number of tables and figures, number of references, word counts, and level of collaboration. Due to the exploratory nature and lack of existing research on this topic, it is less useful to provide a theoretical background overarching the relationships between the structural elements and citation. However, relevant literature dispersed across different disciplines provides some indications and is presented as follows.

The principle of Occam’s razor, which is commonly discussed in modelling and analytical research, advocates simplicity over complexity when selecting a model (Mazanec, Ring, Stangl, & Teichmann, 2010; Myung & Pitt, 1997). Regarding the number of word counts, the principle of Occam’s razor can provide support for reasoning a negative association between the length of a paper and its citation. Also, Stange, Crabtree, and Miller (2006) suggested that readers like parsimonious papers.

Regarding the number of references, a positive association with citation is expected. Based on McKercher et al. (2007), it is important for a manuscript not to exclude the critical pieces of work as around half of the manuscripts reviewed were rejected because of weak and insufficient literature review. As the length of a reference list may indicate the width of literature that the manuscript covers, a publication with a lengthy reference list may attract fellow researchers to cite it due to its sound, more specifically wide, coverage on the literature.

Existing research posits that research collaboration would increase the potential visibility of the work (Katz & Martin, 1997) and knowledge dissemination (Marwick, 2001), and influential or well-known authors are more likely to be cited than unknown authors (Jamal et al., 2008; McKercher, Law, & Lam, 2006). Thus, it is feasible to see a positive association between citation and collaboration with a prolific author or authors. Discussion about how prolific authors were defined is made in the following section.

4. Data collection and analysis

The population of this study was the articles published in the tourism and hospitality journals listed in McKercher’s (2012) study, which provides the most recent and comprehensive list of the tourism and hospitality journals. Using Publish or Perish software, we identified 14,694 articles published in the 52 journals. Publish or Perish is a free software program that retrieves raw data from Google Scholar, analyses them, and presents various statistics along with basic information about publications such as authors, publication title, publication year, and journal title (Harzing, 2007).
To reduce the dataset to a meaningful and manageable size, we used a Scree plot-type graph and found the point of separation at the 300th most cited article. Then, in mid 2012, we collected information for the 300 articles. Average number of citations per year (hereafter, citation per year) was directly copied from Publish or Perish, while other information (i.e. number of authors, word counts, number of tables/figures/exhibits, number of words in title, number of keywords, number of references, involvement of prolific authors, and level of collaboration) were manually entered into a spreadsheet after examining each individual article.

For word counts, we utilised the Word Count function in MS Word after copying the contents of an article from a soft copy format and pasting them in an MS Word file. Word counts in this study included all words from the title to right before references. For number of words in a title, all words including articles like ‘a’, ‘and’, and ‘the’ and prepositions such as ‘of’, ‘for’, ‘at’, ‘in’, and other prepositions were counted. Prolific authors in this study refer to the authors identified as the 100 most prolific authors in tourism and hospitality research by Park et al. (2011). When any authors of an article were from the list, we coded them zero for the involvement of prolific authors for the article; one for non-involvement. Based on the geographical relationship among authors, the level of collaboration was categorised into two categories. An article was coded as zero for international collaboration when the authors were from different countries; otherwise, an article was coded as one indicating other types of collaboration. We did not record when affiliation information was unavailable from the article. For accuracy of the data, the manually entered data were triangulated by three individual investigators.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics about the sample of this study after excluding outliers from the analysis. ATR (35.3%) and TM (formerly, International Journal of Tourism Management; 35.3%) are the journals where the majority of our sample appeared, followed by JTR (15.4%), CQ (formerly, Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly; 2.1%), IJHM (2.1%), and Journal of Sustainable Tourism [JST] (2.1%).

One of the two publications with the shortest title was Farrell and Twining-Ward’s (2004) ‘Reconceptualising tourism’, receiving 20.11 citations per year and one of the two publications with the longest title was Crompton’s (1979) ‘An assessment of the image of Mexico as a vacation destination and the influence of geographical location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continuous variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citation per year</td>
<td>19.33</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td>13.20</td>
<td>53.77</td>
</tr>
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<td>Number of authors</td>
<td>1.85</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
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<td>1846.00</td>
<td>15090.00</td>
</tr>
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<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of words in title</td>
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<td>3.77</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of keywords</td>
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<td>2.25</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>28.09</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>159.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<th>Categorical variables</th>
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<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With prolific authors (code = 0)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without prolific authors (code = 1)</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>69.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International (code = 0)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (code = 1)</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>87.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
upon that image’, receiving 15.82 citations per year. The article with 10 keywords was Edensor’s (2001) study, receiving 20.67 citations per year. The publication by Beerli and Martin (2004) has 17 tables and 1 figure and received 26.89 citations per year. The publication with the shortest reference list received 14.79 citations per year (Ritchie, 1984), whereas the publication with the longest reference list received 19.33 citations per year (Weaver & Lawton, 2007). The longest publication by Dwyer and Kim (2003) received 26.50 citations per year and the shortest publication by Blanchard and Johnson (1983) received 31.23 citations per year.

The top 10 articles that are the most frequently cited per year in tourism and hospitality are listed in Table 2. Although the top three most cited papers identified from Publish or Perish were from Buhalis’ (2000), Baloglu and McCleary’s (1999), and Yoon and Uysal’s (2005) studies with 67.92, 66.21, and 62.13 citations per year, respectively, they were excluded from analysis as they were identified as outliers.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine which structural elements (i.e. number of authors, word counts, number of tables/figures/exhibits, number of words in title, number of keywords, number of references, involvement of prolific authors, and level of collaboration) predict citation per year of a publication. After excluding outliers and assumption check, regression results indicate that the overall model marginally predicts citation per year, $R^2 = .048, R^2_{\text{adj}} = .021, F(8, 278) = 1.749$, and $p = .087$. A summary of regression coefficient is presented in Table 3. The coefficient of the significant variable needs to be understood in terms of inversely transformed citation per year. That is, while the coefficient of the number of words in a title is positive, the number of words in a title negatively influences citation per year. In summary, the results from the regression analysis generally imply that the shorter a title is, the more likely the publication is to be cited.

Table 2. Top 10 articles frequently cited in hospitality and tourism in analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CPY</th>
<th>Author(s) and Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Journal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>53.77</td>
<td>Baker and Crompton (2000)</td>
<td>Quality, satisfaction and behavioural intentions</td>
<td>ATR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53.00</td>
<td>Gallarza, Saura, and Garcia (2002)</td>
<td>Destination image: Towards a conceptual framework</td>
<td>ATR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>Beerli and Martin (2004)</td>
<td>Factors influencing destination image</td>
<td>ATR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.93</td>
<td>Wang (1999)</td>
<td>Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience</td>
<td>ATR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.33</td>
<td>Bigné, Sánchez, and Sánchez (2001)</td>
<td>Tourism image, evaluation variables and after purchase behaviour: Inter-relationship</td>
<td>TM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.16a</td>
<td>Gartner (1994)</td>
<td>Image formation process</td>
<td>JTTM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.92</td>
<td>Cohen (1988)</td>
<td>Authenticity and commoditization in tourism</td>
<td>ATR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.80</td>
<td>Chi and Qu (2008)</td>
<td>Examining the structural relationships of destination image, tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty: An integrated approach</td>
<td>TM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: CPY refers to citation per year. ATR, Annals of Tourism Research; JTR, Journal of Travel Research; JTTM, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing; and TM, Tourism Management.

*It is based on Publish or Perish (1994) while the publication year on the published article is stated as 1993.
5. Discussion

Results from the statistical analysis show that none of the structural elements proposed in the model, except for number of words in a title, predicts citation per year. These findings are surprising as we assumed that certain elements would have some bearing effects. For example, given the findings of existing research in other disciplines (Jamal et al., 2008; Katz & Martin, 1997), we expected that working with prolific authors would be a key factor in making a publication influential, but found no such association in this study. This study cannot prove or disprove that ‘what it is written about’ is more important than ‘whom it is written with/by’, but can prove that ‘whom it is written with/by’ is not important in being influential. Given that prolific authors in this study were the ones based on the number of publications in selective journals and a fixed period of time, this finding reveals that ‘being prolific’ does not necessarily mean ‘being influential’.

While the existing literature suggests that international collaboration increases the exposure of a research study (Katz & Martin, 1997), this study found that such an exposure does not lead to citation. In other words, international collaboration may lead exposure to wide audience, which this study is unable to prove or disprove, but it does not necessarily lead to high citation counts. Therefore, international collaboration has many important assets for research in general terms, but it does not directly translate to influential articles.

Operationalising the length of a publication with word counts, number of tables and figures, and number of references, the study found that the length of a publication is not related to its citation. This finding provides support for the principle of parsimony in research. That is, there is no need for researchers to stretch (or shorten) a manuscript than what is necessary (Mazanec et al., 2010).

It is interesting to find that the number of words in a title has a negative relationship with citation. While this study cannot explain why a shorter title attracts citation, we can deductively reason that the publication would be prepared in a parsimonious way when a title is named in such a succinct way. Another reason for the negative association is cognitive effort. Given the fact that a search begins from browsing titles, fellow researchers may be attracted to publications with a shorter title as a shorter title would require less cognitive effort to process its meaning than its counterparts. This finding suggests that researchers should practice in naming their study in a parsimonious way. Indeed, short titles are often requested by major research funding councils.

In summary, findings from this study suggest that no magic formula exist to make a manuscript attractive and influential, except that a shorter title would help. This study complements the qualitative approaches that the existing literature has taken to publication

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Table 3. Summary of multiple regression analysis for structural elements variables predicting citation per year ($N = 292$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>Tolerance</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of authors</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.083</td>
<td>.820</td>
<td>1.219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word counts</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.608</td>
<td>1.644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of tables/figures/exhibits</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.024</td>
<td>.823</td>
<td>1.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of words in title</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.202**</td>
<td>.852</td>
<td>1.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of keywords</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.027</td>
<td>.863</td>
<td>1.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of references</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.090</td>
<td>.654</td>
<td>1.529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement of prolific authors</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.897</td>
<td>1.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of collaboration</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.962</td>
<td>1.040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Citation per year was inversely transformed citation per year. $R^2 = .048$ ($p = .087$). **$p < .01$. 

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research. However, generalisation of the findings from this study may be challenging as this study focused on only the 300 most cited papers. For authors seeking a broad picture of influential publications in tourism and hospitality, the findings can offer some implications. First, the closest we have come to revealing a ‘magic formula’ is that it would be an advantageous start if two authors who are geographically close to prepare a 6400 words manuscript with 4 keywords, 3 tables, and 56 references and title it with no more than 4 words. However, the overarching and perhaps reassuring conclusion this research makes is that ‘quality’ publications are the ones that meet qualitative criteria (e.g. contribution to the body of knowledge and answering the so-what question), rather than ones that follow the structural elements. In short, academic rigorous research is what counts.

References


