

# Academic Scholars, Practicing Professionals, and Engaged Scholarship: A Content Analysis of Collaborative and Informed Research in Tourism Journals

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**Academic Scholars, Practicing Professionals, and Engaged Scholarship:  
A Content Analysis of Collaborative and Informed Research in Tourism Journals**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the existence of engaged scholarship through a content analysis of 442 articles published in tourism journals. The importance of the analysis is based on arguments from the literature that research quality improves when academic scholars and practicing professionals collaborate. However, confirmation that engaged scholarship is taking place is a necessary first step before one can evaluate and compare the quality of the research. The results of the analysis reveal that engaged scholarship is modestly practiced. Collaborative research represents approximately 10 percent of the total while informed research represents about 22 percent (for external funding) and 9 percent (for access to data and other support). Now that the presence of engaged scholarship has been confirmed, future investigations should examine whether or not such engagement results in higher quality research. If so, it will have potentially important implications for both scholarship and practice.*

keywords: engaged scholarship, content analysis, collaborative research, informed research

**INTRODUCTION**

Engaged scholarship has been proposed as a way to bridge the so-called rigor/relevance gap between academic scholars and practicing professionals (Van de Ven and Johnson 2006). Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) have described it as “a collaborative form of inquiry in which academics and practitioners leverage their different perspectives and competencies to co-produce knowledge about a complex problem or phenomenon that exists under conditions of uncertainty found in the world” (80). In doing so, the resulting research is thought to advance both theory *and* practice within a given domain because it enhances both the rigor and the relevance of research.

Why is this important to tourism research? Because some have argued that a better research agenda is needed to meet the needs of both academics and practitioners (Williams, Stewart, and Larsen 2012). Others have echoed similar sentiment. For example, Moscardo and Norris (2004) discussed the importance of collaboration from the perspective of meetings and convention research and opined: “For the academics, practitioners can provide feedback to enhance teaching practice and support and opportunities for research. For practitioners, academics can improve the practice and professionalism of conference and event management through their teaching of potential new recruits to the sector and through the dissemination of research results.” (P. 48)

Frechtling (2004) studied TTRA member readership of journals and concluded: “The results herein strongly suggest that relatively little knowledge transfer... is taking place between the knowledge generators in the academic community on one side, and managers and operators in the private and public sectors responsible for tourism and hospitality development on the other.” (P. 107)

Collectively, these articles articulate a position that research might benefit from more engagement between practitioners and academics. Since the concept of engaged scholarship was specifically developed to address this issue, an investigation in the area of the tourism literature appears warranted.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have already examined the existence of engaged scholarship in the business literature, but none could be identified in the area of tourism. Bartkus and Holland (2010) content analyzed authorships in three types of business journals: (1) primarily scholarly journals, (2) primarily practitioner journals, and (3) journals that are both practitioner and scholarly oriented. Collaboration in the form of co-authorships averaged a little under 10 percent of the articles, indicating a modest level of engagement. Additionally, as hypothesized, collaboration was lower in journals that had a scholarly orientation (9 percent) versus those that had primarily a practitioner orientation (23 percent).

Landon, Holland, and Bartkus (2012) extended the earlier study by examining collaborative and *informed* research in the *Harvard Business Review*. *Informed research* is defined by Van de Ven (2007) as: “...a traditional form of social science where the academic researcher...solicits advice and feedback from key stakeholders and insider informants...” (p. 261) Financial support and/or access to data sources would seem to reflect this definition.

Landon, Holland, and Bartkus found 16 percent of the articles in their study involved collaborations between academic scholars and practicing professionals and almost 40 percent of the articles acknowledged that an organization (or other entity) provided access to data.

The question the current study addresses is: Is there evidence of engaged scholarship in the tourism literature; that is, are practicing professionals and academic scholars working collaboratively (and/or through informed engagement)? Answering this question should provide

the foundation for further research that seeks to determine if engaged scholarship is producing better quality research. In essence, this study is the first step in that process.

## METHOD

This study examined articles published in three journals: *Journal of Travel Research*, *Tourism Management*, and *Journal of Vacation Marketing* during the period 2008-2011. Full articles were evaluated for evidence of collaborative and informed research. Collaborative engagement was evidenced through co-authorships including both academic and practicing professionals. Informed engagement was operationalized as either access to information and/or financial support. Such evidence is often presented in footnotes, embedded in the text, or in the acknowledgements. The data collection process is, therefore, a counting exercise where the articles are content-analyzed by one researcher, and further validated by another. Any potential discrepancies were discussed and further evaluated by the research team to ensure consistency.

## RESULTS

The results of the analysis provide information on the existence of engaged scholarship in the tourism literature. Altogether, 442 articles were reviewed (n-sizes are: *Tourism Management* (387); *Journal of Travel Research* (172); *Journal of Vacation Marketing* (99)). Collaborative research (i.e., joint authorship between academics and practitioners) comprises approximately 10 percent of the sample with a range of 4.1 percent for the *Journal of Travel Research* to 17.2 percent for the *Journal of Vacation Marketing* (*Tourism Management* was 4.9 percent). These numbers are relatively consistent with prior research from business journals where the lowest level of collaboration was 5.4 percent and the highest was 20.7 percent.

With regard to informed engagement, we report separately for ‘funding support’ and ‘access to data’ (or other input/feedback/suggestions from practitioners). The overall results indicate nearly 22 percent of the articles reported receiving external funding support for the research (with another 7.7 percent receiving internal funding from the university). *Tourism Management* reported the highest level of funding support at 24.4 percent, followed by the *Journal of Travel Research* at 18.6 percent and the *Journal of Vacation Marketing* at 17.2 percent. With regard to access to data and other types of informed engagement, the results indicate approximately 9 percent of the sample reported some type of external assistance with a low of 2.3 percent for the *Journal of Travel Research* and a high of 13.1 percent for the *Journal of Vacation Marketing* (with *Tourism Management* at 10.9 percent).

## DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken to develop a better understanding of the role of engaged scholarship in tourism research. Although the results should be considered preliminary, they suggest that many academics and practitioners are participating in one or more forms of engaged scholarship. As such, the question that needs to be addressed in future investigations is how engaged research differs from that which is solely authored by academics and/or is unfunded (or lacks other involvement by practitioners). Does engaged scholarship result in better quality research? Van de Ven (2005) asked this question himself: ‘Don’t you think *if* we ground our

research questions in practice, involve practitioners in problem generation, theory building, research design, and problem solving that management scholarship will flourish and the management profession will benefit?' (65, italics added for emphasis). Now that we have evidence of engaged scholarship in tourism research, isn't it time we address Van de Ven's question? Although a challenging task, determining the extent to which engagement might enhance the quality of tourism research appears warranted.

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