University of Massachusetts Amherst

ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst

Making Tourism Research Relevant for the Future: A Conceptual Framework for Dissemination and Implementation

Norma P. Nickerson
University of Montana - Missoula

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/ttra

Making Tourism Research Relevant for the Future: A Conceptual Framework for Dissemination and Implementation

Introduction

Ten years ago, researchers in the health fields came together and started a new journal, *Implementation science* to promote research findings into routine practice (Eccles and Mitton, 2006). Taking their words and changing it to tourism, "Implementation research is the scientific study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice, and hence, to improve the quality and effectiveness of the tourism and hospitality industry." Arguably, research on medical treatments and implementation of those treatments could be a life or death condition while tourism is more of an economic, societal, and environmental situation which can be enhanced by tourism research. But, do we really enhance society? Do we improve the economics of an area? Is the environment better off because we research tourism impacts on the landscape?

In this paper it is argued that the substantial findings and implications found by academic researchers in the tourism field have done little to change the way tourism and hospitality businesses, DMO's, or policy makers make their decisions. Or at best, it is unclear if we have had an influence on decisions. It is time to reconcile this gap. This reconciliation comes with a proposed framework, which if adopted by tourism researchers can significantly change the way we think and act upon our research process.

Literature Review

Dissemination and implementation of research in the health field became a topic of inquiry in and of itself when researchers realized the difficulty in getting their information out to the people who needed it. Statements like: "Many discoveries never reach the point of becoming standards of care," (Glasgow and Emmons, 2007) and "Despite the demonstrable benefits of many new medical discoveries, we have done a surprisingly poor job of putting research findings into practice. The ultimate goal of new discoveries is to enhance human health, yet most discoveries are slow to or never fulfill this promise. The challenge of moving health research innovations from discovery to practice is complex and multifaceted," (Collins, 2010).

In the tourism field we use our last few paragraphs in an academic journal article indicating how or what could change followed by suggestions for future research. Yet, it stops there as far as the reader is aware. The following examples are from articles in a recent *Journal of Travel Research*.

In a study of social media effects on destinations, Shakeela and Weaver (2016), wrote, "For industry stakeholders, social media has to be accepted as a crucial and valuable marketing tool but also an uncontrollable and potent tool for sabotaging those same official marketing efforts. Do they therefore need to participate in these online discourses to disseminate effective counter-narratives, or are they best ignored?" The question remains, did the researchers send their findings to the people who could have benefited from them?

In another article, Wang, Xiang, and Fessenmaier (2016) wrote, "Finally, an important lesson tourism practitioners can take away from this study is the interconnectedness of different locales,

contexts, and channels of information and communication for today's smartphone-equipped tourists. Because mobility-specific services (e.g., location-based services) are becoming even more important and more powerful, tourism marketers need to understand those tools and channels tourists use on a daily basis in their everyday living context." Have these results been shown to the marketers of tourism?

One final example in the article about quality of life (QoL) and tourism development (TD), Ridderstaat, Croes, and Nijkamp, (2016), say, "The results also have important managerial implications. Policy makers and other key decision makers need to recognize the importance of QoL of citizens for TD and economic growth. Improving health and education would be a first step toward increasing the QoL of people, but more is needed." Who are these key decision makers and policy makers and did the authors send their results to these people? Did the above set of authors in these three examples stop their research process at the recommendation or did they forward their results to the key stakeholders and follow through with additional dissemination?

Dissemination and implementation (D&I) are complex social and organizational processes by which new scientific discoveries and advances can be translated and transferred to people, settings, and communities (Luke, 2012). The interdisciplinary complexity of the tourism industry creates the added urgency to be able to reach out to a variety of audiences who could benefit from the research findings. Unlike the health field where the objective of research is to come up with a cure or a new therapy that needs experimentation on people to determine its effectiveness, tourism research is more likely to be the advancement of knowledge. Within that advancement of knowledge, many in academia appear to be satisfied with a refereed journal article publication and moving on to more theoretical advancement or case study specific explorations. Franklin and Crang have described tourism research as "stale, tired, repetitive and lifeless" (2001). Arguing against certain methods, Oppermann urged tourism researchers to take on new challenges of adding knowledge to field rather than case studies of limited scientific value (2000), however, Xiao and Smith argue that critiquing and improving the methodological approaches to case studies are more useful and needed in the field of tourism (2006).

Looking at publications as a method of dissemination, Xaio and Smith, (2006) wrote, "From an author's perspective, there are factors such as her/his willingness to publish within versus outside a discipline, her/his perceptions of a journal as a preferred outlet, as well as concerns about the extent to which her/his research could reach an intended peer reader group." The big question, however, is "Who is that intended peer reader group?" It is argued here that for tourism to be more relevant, our research needs to be more than an academic journal citing.

Interestingly, in 2014, the Higher Education Funding Council for England revised and renamed their Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) to include a form of research evaluation based on the "impact" of the research. This six-yearly assessment that includes both an assessment of "quality" and "impacts" of UK research is all about accountability for use and allocation of research funding. The impact or relevancy of the research consists of 20 percent of the evaluation score (REF2014) and encompasses impact upon the economy, society, public policy, culture and the quality of life.

Of course criticism has been rampant. Much of the criticism relates to academic freedom where it is seen that research for 'discovery' and 'big sky/theoretical' research which many times do not have an immediate impact on society will be downgraded (Oswald, 2009; Shepard, 2009;

Fernadez-Amesto, 2009). Many declare that proving "impact" is actually costing institutions more money (Dunleavy, 2011). Quite a few university researchers in the UK believe this structure of evaluating research impact has been imposed upon them.

The thrust of this paper is to begin a new line of thinking for tourism researchers. Rather than having relevancy imposed upon us as seen in the UK example, we could become the leaders in showing how and by whom research is being used, and how research assists with environmental, economic, and other societal issues. It is time to take these theories, case studies, methodological issues one step further…to the public who can benefit from these research findings. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to provide a research dissemination and implementation framework for researchers to use as a guide for helping make their findings relevant.

Methodology

A conceptual paper such as this one does not necessarily have a methods section, but this paper is actually about adding a section to every tourism research proposal and research design: a tourism research dissemination and implementation (D&I) framework. The proposed tourism D&I framework is an adaptation of the Carpenter and Nieva (2016) plan, the four-step process developed by Atkins et.al (2015), Rogers' work on theory of diffusion (1995), and the framework for enhancing the value of research for dissemination and implementation (Neta et.al., 2014). The above frameworks, plans, processes were developed from literature reviews in health care, sociology, organizational development, psychology and social sciences.

The key to success in D&I is to put the plan together before any research has been conducted but to be ready to update and change as needed. The framework is stable, but the inputs, i.e. findings of the research, create a dynamic model. The researcher has to think in advance through the various potential stakeholders, communication outlets, and end users while being prepared to make adjustments based on inputs during the process. As proposed, the framework has six components all surrounding the main goal (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Tourism Research Dissemination and Implementation (D&I) Framework

Following this D&I framework will facilitate the translation of your research into practice.

Goals: What will be improved? What are the possible outcomes?

    I.   **Research question** – What are you ultimately trying to discover with this research? Who needs to know or is interested? How can they help you now?
    II.   **End users** – Who might be all the end users who can apply the results to practice?
    III.   **Dissemination reach** – What are the formal and informal channels you can use?
    IV.   **Implementation** – Who implements the results and how is that formulated?
    V.   **Resources** – What are the human and financial resources that will realistically make it happen?
    VI.   **Evaluation** – What did and did not work?

Results: An example

This D&I framework for tourism research emerged after a bicycle tourism project was conducted. The application of the results of that bicycle tourism study went way beyond the researchers' expectations suggesting the need for an a priori D&I plan. The following description uses the bicycle tourism study as an example of how the framework can be used.

        Research question – Is bicycle tourism a viable tourism niche for the state?   The governor's Tourism advisory Council and the Office of Tourism wanted to know if this was a niche to pursue. Adventure Cycling, a national membership organization of bicyclist, could help with the population identification for an on-line survey of people who had bicycled in the state.

        End users – this list of possible end users is specific to each individual study but general categories are provided so the researcher thinks through the possible users. In all instances, the D&I plan should list the individuals within each organization who should receive the research results (not just an organization as shown here) 1). Marketing: State/provincial Office of Tourism, CVB's, regional marketing organizations. 2). Planning & Development: state Department of Transportation, federal and state public land agencies, city councils, county commissions, state legislators; state, regional and local economic development organizations. 3). Advocacy groups: Bike Walk associations, bike shop owners, Adventure Cycling, community bike/ped advocates. 4). Other researchers: academic journals, research institutes who study similar topics. 5). General public.

        Dissemination reach – *Formal channels* include a press release to media outlets, conference presentations, journal articles (both refereed and popular journals), uploaded results on the researchers' website, research links such as ResearchGate, Linkedin, blogs, Twitter, and Facebook. *Informal channels* include sending summarized results to all the end users via email with a link to the full results including advocacy groups, community service groups (e.g. Lions Club, Rotary club) and politicians. Inform all groups you are willing to speak in person to individuals or to the entire group if they are interested. At a minimum, offer a phone conversation as this usually leads to further exposure of the results.

        Implementation – Depending on the results of the research, implementation could include one or numerous entities. The bicycle tourism results showed that over half a million visitors to the state bicycle on all or some portion of their trip to the state, stayed longer and spent more money than the average visitor, had troubles with some roadways being too narrow and with rumble strips wrongly placed on the shoulders, motorists who were a bit unfriendly and

not versed in how to drive past bicyclists safely, voiced a lack of camping places available when needed, loved the local breweries and friendly people, and especially loved the scenic views. With those results, it was clear that numerous groups would be involved in implementation. First and foremost at some level, a group must decide that the results indicate pursuing bicycle tourism is something they would like to do. From that point, it is generally out of the hands of the researchers except to be available for clarification of research results.

   Resources – For the researcher, resources consist of time to disseminate information and costs of travel for speaking engagements to share the study results. For the end user, the financial resources for the Department of Transportation to upgrade roadways could get into millions of dollars, but the entrepreneur who wants to cater to bicyclists may take out a bank loan to create a bike shop, more camping spaces, or open a local brewery. In this particular study many stakeholders were involved with different time and money challenges and opportunities.

   Evaluation - This is a continual process as more uses of the research surface over time. The bicycle study results were sent out to the media outlets in early January 2014. In two years the end users had done the following: The state **Office of Tourism and Business Development** added bicycle tourism maps and tips on bicycling to the official state tourism website (Things to do, 2016). They became a large sponsor to an emerging bicycle race in the state and have provided grant monies for some of the state parks to create bike/hike camping spots. The state tourism conference focused on bicycle tourism and had workshops on catering to bicyclist. The **Bike Walk advocacy group** worked with **Adventure Cycling** and other advocacy groups to lobby legislators on changes needed in bicycling laws (MT Legislature, 2015). Many laws were passed in 2015 to increase bicyclists' safety. A legislative committee supported further research into maintenance of bike paths and the need for bicycle safety education. Advocacy groups also worked with the State **Department of Transportation** (DOT) in persuading them to change some regulations related to roadway safety design for shoulder width and rumble strip placement. DOT has published a state map showing shoulder widths on all highways so bicyclist can re-route themselves to safer highways (Bicycling, 2015). Two rural **communities** have decided to add bicycle camping spots to their city parks and more are showing interest in doing the same. **State Parks** will add bike-specific camp spots to four of their state parks in 2016 and more each year following (Draft 2015; State Parks 2016).. Finally, two CVB's, a regional tourism office, the state office of tourism, and a non-profit friends group for a national park helped fund an additional study to look further into bicycling in the national park and their impact on the state due to bicycling in the park.

Conclusion and Discussion

In most tourism research journals, the last paragraph or two will briefly indicate what the results of the study could be used for, such as specific marketing ideas, development ideas, and suggestions for future research. Rarely, however does the researcher carry beyond that paragraph. A D&I plan written at the beginning stages of a research proposal or outline allows the researcher to think through and identify the stakeholders who might be interested in the findings including how to reach out to these groups through various communication mediums. As Meslin et. al. (2013) have said about health care research, the attempt to bridge science and practice has been described as a ''valley of death'' reflecting the few successful enduring outcomes. Yet two years later, Atkins et. al (2015) said that D&I is contributing significantly toward moving science into practice but its relevance and impact still needs work.

It's time to follow with our own tourism research D&I framework to become relevant for the future. This conceptual framework is the beginning. Like the health sciences, the next generation of scientists is now being trained, but not in methods relevant to dissemination and implementation science (Glasgow et. al, 2012). Let's change that for the future and get our research results out beyond the academic journal dissemination by training ourselves and our Ph.D. students to adopt the D&I framework before approving research proposals and moving forward with data collection. While we await the decision and numerous re-submittals of our research to a refereed journal we can pursue relevancy by communicating our results to the people in the field who could benefit from the findings.

References

Atkins, M.S., Rusch, D., Mehta, T.G., and Lakind, D.   (2015). Future Directions for Dissemination and Implementation Science: Aligning Ecological Theory and Public Health to Close the Research to Practice Gap. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, DOI: 10.1080/15374416.2015.1050724.

Bicycling the Big Sky (2015). Accessed from https://mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/docs/bike_map.pdf, March 20, 2016.

Carpenter, D. and Nieva, V. (2016). Development of a planning tool to guide research dissemination. In *Advances in Patient Safety*, Vol. 3: Implementation Issues. U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Publication No.   05-0021-3.http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/patient-safety-resources/resources/advances-in-patient-safety/index.html#vol3

Collins FS. (2010). Opportunities for research and NIH. *Science.* 327(5961):36-37.

Draft Environmental Assessment (EA). (2015). Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Accessed file:///C:/Users/norma.nickerson/Downloads/Bicycle%20Campsites%20Draft%20EA%20V2.pdf , March 20, 2016.

Dunleavy, P. (2011). The Research Excellence Framework is lumbering and expensive. *London School of Economics*, June 10, 2011, London.

Eccles, M.P. and Mittman, B.S. (2006). Welcome to Implementation Science. *Implementation Science.* doi: 10.1186/1748-5908-1-1.

Fernandez-Armesto, F. (2009). Poisonous Impact. *Times Higher Education,* December 3, 2009, London.

Franklin, A., and Crang, M. (2001). The trouble with tourism and travel theory. *Tourists Studies,* 1 (1), 5-22.

Glasgow R.E., Emmons, K.M. (2007). How can we increase translation of research into practice? Types of evidence needed. *Annual Review of Public Health*. 2007;28:413-433.

Glasgow, R.E., Vinson, C., Chambers, D. Khoury, M.J., Kaplan, R. M., Hunter, C. (2012). National Institutes of health approaches to dissemination and implementation science: Current and future directions. *American Journal of Public Health*. 102(7), 1274-1281.

Luke, D.A. (2012). Viewing dissemination and implementation research through a network lens. In Dissemination and implementation Research in health: Translating Science to Practice, Brownson, Colditz, and Proctor, eds. Oxford Scholarship Online.

Meslin, E. M., Blasimme, A., & Cambon-Thomsen, A. (2013). Mapping the translational science policy 'valley of death'. Clinical and Translational Medicine, 2, 14. doi:10.1186=2001-1326-2-14.

MT Legislature (2015). Clarification of bicycling laws. Accessed March 201, 2016; http://leg.mt.gov/bills/2015/hb0299/HB0280_2.pdf

Neta, G., Glasgow, R.E., Carpenter, C.R., Grimshaw, J.M., Rabin, B.A., Fernandez, M.E., Brownson, R.C. (2014). A framework for enhancing the value of research for dissemination and Implementation. American Journal of Public Health, DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2014.30220Rogers, E.M. (1995). *Diffusion of Innovation* (4th Ed.). New York: Free Press.

Oppermann, M. (2000). Triangulation: A methodological discussion. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 2, 141-146.

Oswald, A. (2009). REF should stay out to the game. *The Independent*, November 26, 2009, London.

REF2014. (2014). REF2014 research Excellence Framework. Accessed 3/30/16 from http://www.ref.ac.uk/

Ridderstaat, J., Croes, R., and Nijkamp, P. (2016). The tourism development-quality of life nexus in a small island destination. *Journal of Travel Research*, 55(1), 79-94.

Shakeela, A., and Weaver, D. (2016). The exploratory social-mediatized gaze: Reactions of virtual tourist to inflammatory YouTube incident. *Journal of Travel Research*, 2016, Vol. 55(1) 113–124.

Shepherd, J. (2009). Humanities research threatened by demands for 'economic impact. *The Guardian*, October 13, 2009. London.

State Parks, (2016). Four Montana State Parks getting new bicycle campsites. Accessed from: http://mtpr.org/post/four-montana-state-parks-getting-new-bicycle-campsites#stream/0, March 20, 2016.

Things to do. (2016). Montana Office of Tourism, accessed March 20, 2016: http://www.visitmt.com/things-to-do/outdoor-and-adventure/bicycling.html

Wang, D., Xiang, Z., Fesenmaier, D. R, (2016). Smartphone use in everyday life and travel. *Journal of Travel Research*, 2016, Vol. 55(1) 52–63.

Xiao, H., and Smith, S. L.J. (2006). The making of tourism research: Insights from a social sciences journal. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33(2), 490-507.