Competitive Positioning of Tourism Academic Knowledge

Introduction

Over the last two decades the commercialisation of academics, academic work and academic knowledge has become an increasing focus of scholarly attention (Gibbs, 2008; Jacob, 2009; Kauppinen, 2014; Page, 2020). The growth of the knowledge economy, intellectual property rights and the recognised importance of knowledge to organisational and destination competitiveness (Ruhanen & Cooper, 2004) is leading to a situation where:

> Universities are not just servants of or suppliers to the marketplace. They are active players in the marketplace', for instance, by selling packaged goods such as patents as well as educational products (e.g. degrees). In other words, universities treat knowledge increasingly as 'raw material' to be produced, protected, and then sold in markets (Kauppinen, 2014, p. 394)

It is in this context that tourism academics are under increasing pressure to justify the utilitarian value of the scholarship they produce (Ruhanen & Cooper, 2004; Thomas, 2012; Xiao & Smith, 2007). COVID-19 has amplified such concerns with a variety of papers recently published that have sought to influence academic research trajectories to the development of more transformative and sustainable futures for the sector (Casado-Aranda, Sánchez-Fernández, & Bastidas-Manzano, 2021; Gretzel et al., 2020; Rogerson & Baum, 2020; Zenker & Kock, 2020). While the more traditional production of mode-1 or research informed/disciplinary based knowledge (Gibbons et al., 1994; Tribe & Liburd, 2016) and associated theory building (Mazanec, 2020) will remain important into the future, academics have also had to increasingly consider the merits of mode-2 knowledge; that is, knowledge, which is 'applied, and relates to specific contexts and problems' (Thomas, 2012, p. 554).

Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) demonstrated that when academics have sought to offer expertise to address specific problems related to COVID-19 recovery, such advice can sometimes be viewed with scepticism by knowledge consumers. Schweinsberg (In press) has recently discussed the issue of epistemic knowledge creation in tourism academia, noting that when an 'expert' sees fit to move outside of the cloistered confines of academia and to produce knowledge designed to impact on lay action, there is an implicit obligation for those affected in society to determine if they see merit in the expert advice being presented or not. The idea that academics may not be privy to all the answers for the issues facing humanity was the impetus for Schweinsberg (in-press) to argue that academics must consider whether there is an intellectual virtue in epistemic humility, as much as in epistemic authority? The presence of scepticism amongst some in the community regarding the value in academic knowledge was used by Higgin-Desbiolles to ask whether 'tourism academics [are] responsible for fulfilling a public good role in their work, especially those working for institutions that are incorporated under state legislation and/or receive public funding' (p. 559)? Kauppinen (2014) have argued that while it is true that academic knowledge includes many characteristics of public goods including being non-rivalrous and non-excludable; 'tacit knowledge, such as 'expertise', is a different matter since it is not accessible to all who would like to have it' (p. 403).

The idea that at least some forms of academic knowledge might be influenced by market based forces was the impetus for the present paper. In the pages that follow we will use Porter's (2008) Five Forces Model as a conceptual framework to explore the competitive forces influencing the production of academic knowledge. Porter developed his Five Forces Model to 'holistically … [examine] the forces that shape the nature of competition in for-profit industries … 1) the nature of rivalry; 2) the power of buyers (channels and customers); 3) the power of suppliers; 4) the threat of substitutes; and 5) the threat of new entrants' (Gehl & Porter, 2020, p. 20). In relation to tourism, the five forces model has previously been employed to examine: the strategic context of the industry in different tourism destinations (Andriotis, 2004; Dobrivojević, 2013); the effect of the internet on the tourism industry (Buhalis & Zoge, 2007); airline pricing strategies (Moreno-Izquierdo, Ramón-Rodríguez, & Perles-Ribes, 2016); and the strategic positioning of volunteer tourism organisations (Benson & Henderson, 2011). To date, however, it has not been employed to examine the process of academic knowledge creation. We will use the Five Forces model to ask, which are the dominant competitive forces with respect to knowledge creation? We will also consider the merits in scholars wanting to compete against other players as envisaged in Porter's original model. Is it in our collective interests to scare off new entrants into the tourism knowledge domain? Similarly, do we have anything to fear from the consumers of knowledge choosing to engage with other substitute products and services at the expense of our own?

The Five Forces of Tourism Knowledge

Michael Porter developed his well-known Five Forces Model of Competitive Strategy as an all-encompassing way for an incumbent industrial player to conceptualise their own unique competitive position (Argyres & McGahan, 2002). For at least the last thirty years, societal demand for tertiary tourism degrees has ebbed and flowed in different tertiary settings (Craig-Smith, Davidson, & French, 1995; Goh & King, 2020; Lugosi & Jameson, 2017; Stuart, 2002). In that time, the sector has been subject to the effects of a range of internal and external forces, including changes to the employment landscape in the tourism and hospitality sector, which have influenced the job prospects of graduates, and the absorption of tourism departments into business faculties, which has often led to a loss of program visibility. More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has presented tertiary tourism departments with an opportunity to re-orientate offerings to appeal to previously unforeseen industry requirements over the next decade (EHL Insights, 2021). On the other hand, however, simultaneous to this has been the discontinuation or planned discontinuation of a number of tertiary tourism degrees in response to wider institutional COVID-19 austerity measures and associated drops in student enrolment numbers. For those tourism degrees that survive, there will be a requirement to adapt delivery modes and to partner with industry (Tiwari, Séraphin, & Chowdhary, 2020) whilst also critically considering the nature of academia's relationship to industry, 'criticised [as we often are] for being too enmeshed in neo-liberal values, which weakens … [our] ability to productively equip students with capacities to transform the society they are entering' (Edelheim, 2020, p. 547). Such criticisms align with the alternative paradigm espoused by Dwyer (2018) and the work of critical tourism theorists (e.g. Boluk, Cavaliere, & Duffy, 2019)

Tribe and Liburd (2016) argue that tourism knowledge is socially framed; it is an extra-disciplinary construct where traditional business, social science and humanity disciplines coalesce with values-based, indigenous and other perspectives. While individual tourism scholars e.g. Bramwell and Lane (2007) are on the record as recognising the importance of considering the way that their philosophies intersect with their research subjects, a principal challenge for achieving such outcomes is the inherent disconnect that exists between the expectations of the producers and consumers of knowledge; that is, between academic tourism knowledge and the world of tourism. Later in this paper we suggest that theoretical debate over the disciplinary framing of tourism scholarship will remain important for understanding the temporal evolution of the tourism academy. At the same time, however, if we focus too much on what is happening within the Academy we potentially miss the opportunity to critically consider what tourism scholarship can offer a world that is undergoing massive change with respect to ethical issues including whether there is a fundamental right of human beings to travel during periods of Overtourism (Perkumienė & Pranskūnienė, 2019) and during a global health pandemic (see Korstanje, 2021).

Porter argued that 'the job of a strategist is to understand and cope with competition. Often, however, managers define competition too narrowly, as if it occurred only among today's direct competitors' (2008, p. 25). Historically, tourism academics have been very adept at competing with other scholarly tribes within the academy (see Schweinsberg, Fennell, & Hassanli, 2021; Tribe, 2010) and developing strategies for engagement with theory (Bramwell, 2015). However, what of competitive forces emanating from outside the Academy? Recent scholarship from Higgins-Desbiolles (2021) demonstrated that during COVID-19, many tourism stakeholders have not been hesitant to call the tourism academy to task for what they view as warped academic priorities at a time of industry upheaval. For example, '[The] TRINET network can no longer afford to stand apart from (even act as if it is superior to) the millions of advocates for travel and tourism …' and 'If TRINET members are to truly assist in both recovery and reform, they must demonstrate a willingness to listen and really understand …' (p. 559). The notion that tourism academia has a responsibility to change to suit the whims of other tourism stakeholders is perhaps not an argument that would find favor with many readers of this paper. However, as tourism academics face increasing threats to job security and many have left the sector owing to departmental restructuring, being in step with industry concerns can become both essential for justifying one's continued employment in the tertiary sector through external grant attainment, as well as potentially making it easier for academics who do leave the university sector to find stable jobs as consultants.

With this in mind, in the following sections we consider the application of Porter's 5 Forces Model to knowledge generation in tourism academia (summarised in Figure 1). We then conclude by considering the merits of the 5 Forces framework for some of the issues facing the industry.

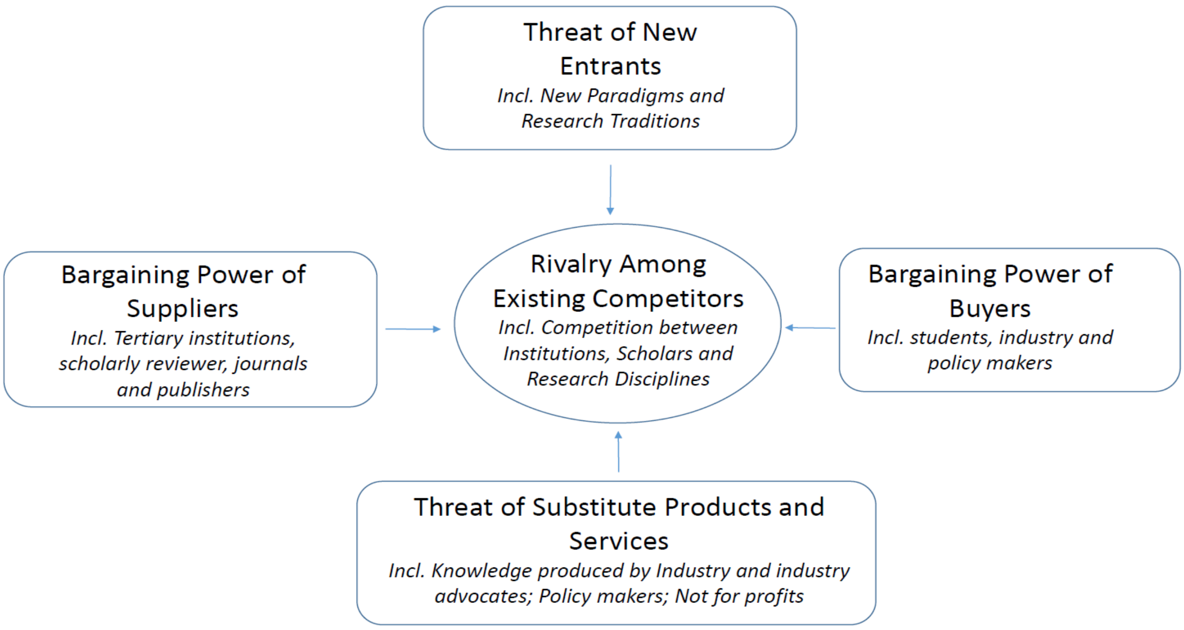

Figure 1: The Five Forces of Competitive Academic Knowledge (adapted from Porter, 2008)

Rivalry amongst Existing Competitors

Academia is an institutionalised and corporatized entity which has made substantial contributions to the economies of many nations (Valero & Van Reenen, 2019). Whitley (2003, p. 1016) has defined public science systems, of which universities are typically a part, as a ‘set of organisations whose employees undertake research primarily for publication together with the institutional arrangements governing their operation, including their funding, establishment of priorities, evaluation of performance and allocation of rewards’. Tourism’s academic institutions had their origins in the development of catering and hospitality degrees in Europe and North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (tourism specific programmes then began to emerge in the 1960s) (see Sharpley, 2011). The first chair in tourism was founded in Austria in the 1930s and *Tourism* (then *Tourist*) *Review* was launched as the world’s first scholarly journal devoted to the study of tourism in 1946 (Laesser, Bieger, Pechlaner, Keller, & Buhalis, 2019). There was a gap of some 50 years before The International Academy for the Study of Tourism was formed in 1988 and, since then, a range of smaller regional associations including the BEST Education Network, the Critical Tourism Studies Community and the Tourism Education Futures Initiative have been formed to advocate for specific industry concerns or regional interests (Schweinsberg & Darcy, 2022). The diversity of scholars in the tourism academy is reflective of the range of disciplinary perspectives that have been applied to the study of tourism. The applied nature of tourism study, as well as a perceived reluctance of some tourism scholars to engage with theory (Schweinsberg, Wearing, & Lai, 2020), has led Shani and Uriely (2017) to suggest that the study of tourism has sometimes struggled to achieve recognition as a legitimate field of academic scholarship. The popular press has also not hesitated to label tourism degree programmes ‘mickey mouse degrees’ (Evening Standard, 2007) and, at least anecdotally, there is a feeling amongst some academics that tourism focussed grant applications are less likely to be approved than more traditional discipline based projects.

It is arguably this legitimacy crisis that has helped to spur, along with associated institutional pressures, a focus amongst tourism scholars in competing through institutional rankings (e.g. the Shanghai Ranking, the Good University Guide and the Guardian, which draw on metrics including research performance and national level student experience data), journal rankings (McKercher, 2007; McKercher, Law, & Lam, 2006) and personal research rankings (Law, Leung, & Buhalis, 2010; Ryan, 2005; Zhao & Ritchie, 2007). Buckley (2019) has recently argued that ranking frameworks such as the Academic Ranking of World Universities creates opportunities for “arbitrage, and pressures for trade and purchase … [of] publications through indirect mechanisms such as fractional, emeritus, adjunct, and visiting appointments and affiliations”. Similarly, there is also the opportunity for competition at the national level where governments can develop education policies that provide preferential funding to high ranked universities and encourage the development of multi-university research consortia with a view to attracting greater portion of the international education export market (Buckley, 2019).

Porter (2008) has argued that the ‘strength of rivalry [in this case, between institutions and between academics] reflects not just the intensity of competition but also the basis of competition’ (p. 32). Over the last four decades, the study of tourism in higher education settings has evolved in response to fluctuating levels of government funding of universities and student demand (Airey, Tribe, Benckendorff, & Xiao, 2015; Goh & King, 2020). While Porter (2008) suggests that government is “not best understood as a sixth competitive force because government involvement is neither inherently good nor bad for industry profitability” (p. 33), it is none the less the case that government policies do impact on the five competitive forces in a tourism knowledge context. For instance, Markwell et al. (2017) have reported that ‘little tourism research is being undertaken by Papua New Guinea Nationals and government funding is not available to support such research within the university sector’ (p.

204). In Australia, the reduction in competitive government grants (category 1) and an increasing appetite for category 2, 3 and 4 including market research contracts can be tracked through the decreasing category 1 'pie' and increasing academic competition. Australian Research Council statistics, for instance, point to some $5.3 million in research funding for 10 tourism projects in the period 2012 to 2020. This is compared to $298 million (for 501 projects) in biotechnology and $263 million (for 498 projects) in materials engineering over the same period (Australian Research Council, 2015). Huang et al. (2019) note that the absence of research funding in Australia may be connected to the multidisciplinary nature of tourism scholarship and because 'tourism was only chosen as a relevant context for researchers from a different discipline rather than taken as a focussed field research of its own right'.

Ryan (2018) linked the growth in the academic study of tourism in the second half of the twentieth century to the confluence of two trends. On the one hand there was the decision of policy makers in the United States, the United Kingdom and elsewhere to increase the number of people studying at university on social justice grounds. The simultaneous growth in the size of the tourism industry and the positioning of many tertiary tourism departments within tertiary business schools (see Schweinsberg, Wearing, & McManus, 2013) has had the effect of corporatizing tourism academics and academic output. However, whilst many academics would privately suggest that they have become de-professionalised 'costs' in a neo-liberal, profit oriented higher education system; a potentially bigger issue is that the orientation of tourism in business degrees may not always be fit for purpose given the complex and wicked management debates faced by the sector (see Goh and King, 2020). While a shift towards cross-disciplinary and often more creative research output may be a logical solution to the complex problems facing the sector, the challenge going forwards will be rationalising the value that different disciplines bring to the study of tourism. Tribe (2010) has identified the presence of rivalry and competition between some paradigmatic tribes. This is exacerbated in a university sector where change may be sought by government funders and central university administrators but resisted by disciplinary silos that do not value or undervalue interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary knowledge. Traditionally, universities have been characterised by hierarchies based on "professional power the authority of established scholars, the enculturation of new comers, ties of loyalty between both and alliances or feuds between schools" (Reitz, 2017, pp. 875-876). However, does the presence of greater competition from within the academy represent a zero sum game? This is a question that more tourism academics have been asking in relation to the need to develop greater levels of race and gender based diversity in both the tourism canon and in the composition of our global academic institutions (Chambers, Munar, Khoo-Lattimore, & Biran, 2017; Dashper, Turner, & Wengel, 2020; Munar, Khoo-Lattimore, Chambers, & Biran, 2017; Wijesinghe, Mura, & Bouchon, 2019).

The Power of Suppliers

> In popular myth, intellectuals live on the smell of an oily rag, yet actual knowledge production projects, on a society-wide scale, require funding and institutional resources (Connell, 2017, p. 12)

Competition between members of tourism's scholarly community is generated, at least in part, by the power exerted by suppliers. Gehl and Porter (2020) identified suppliers as those that 'provide the valuable inputs that allow rivals to produce their products and services' (p. 31). Porter (2008) has argued that suppliers tend to be powerful when they are more concentrated than the industry they sell to. Universities fit into this category in that they provide a source of employment for tourism academics (exceptions include those scholars working for private innovation labs, those in consultancy roles and those working for not-for-profit organisations), providing research facilities and funding opportunities that underpin knowledge formation. Reviewers also fit into the supplier category based on their ability to influence a scholar's ability to obtain grants (Oviedo-García, 2016), gain admission into sought-after academic roles and to publish in key scholarly journals (Lane et al. 2018). Perhaps one of the most famous historical examples of reviewers influencing the career trajectory of scholars was Albert Einstein. Whilst Einstein was undoubtedly one of the most influential scientific minds of the twentieth century, there is evidence of his creativity and academic agency dovetailing for better or worse with the academic institutions of which he was a part. Notable was the enlightened decision of the French philosopher Henri Poincaré to support Einstein's appointment to the ETH Zürich (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich) as Professor of Theoretical Physics, despite the fact that '… since he seeks [insights] in all directions, one must expect the majority of the paths on which he embarks to be blind alleys' (Seelig, 1954, p. 163 in Miller, 1992, p. 386). Numerous tourism academics have similarly been affected positively and negatively by different institutional circumstances, as demonstrated in the personal reminiscences of critical theorists in Doorne et al. (2007) and the academic portrait series in the journal *Anatolia.*

Scholarly journals form both a supplier and consumer of knowledge and it is in the former capacity that they are discussed here. The number of journals and other publications available to tourism scholars to do their work has increased exponentially over the last thirty years. According to McKercher (2020), there are currently some 250 scholarly journals that have a dominant tourism theme. On the one hand, this volume of publications might be seen as diluting the power of individual publications (though a great many are owned by a small number of international publishing houses). On the other hand academics are under pressure from universities to focus on submitting higher ranking journals with high rejection rates, with lower ranking journal often struggling to attract submissions. Buckley (2019) has observed that the Academic Ranking of World Universities only counts academic publications if they are published 'in one of the 45InCites®tourism-group journals. This list may change year to year, but currently excludes a large number of tourism, sport, hospitality and leisure journals that are included, for example, in Google®Scholar®listings, rankings, and calculations such as H indices' (p. 127). The majority of journals are also written in English which, as Wijesinghe et al. (2019) note, exerts a considerable competitive pressure on scholars from 'peripheral nations'. Such scholars are often unfairly 'obligated to the industrialised nations for books, journals, applied research findings, and for the majority of knowledge in the scientific and technical fields, but ironically also for research and knowledge about their own countries and cultures (Wijesinghe, Mura, & Culala, 2019, p. 179). Lu and Nepal (2009) for instance argued that the publishing of the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* in the United Kingdom may have contributed to sustainable tourism being seen as a 'western construct' and at odds with social norms, culture and political contexts of the developing world. Going forwards it is essential that journal publishers continue to search for ways to engage with authors from all parts of the world.

Ensuring a diversity in scholarly perspectives will likely become more complicated as the business model of open access journals, where monies are typically transferred from institutions to journal publishers, which can preclude many otherwise authoritative voices from developing nations from being heard (Wingfield & Millar, 2019). When this is combined with the fact that not many open-access journals published in the developing world are internationally recognised (Bayry, 2013), it becomes essential to ask whether we are truly the international Academy we all pride ourselves as being? As Green (2019, p. 281) has argued:

> Diversity is championed in the academic world, and yet in far too many realms of the global North, minority voices are crowded out of academic progress, trumped by the priorities of class and connection.

It is possible for academics to employ participatory research methodologies to engage in collaborative work with indigenous populations (e.g. Reggers, Grabowski, Wearing, Chatterton, & Schweinsberg, 2016), as well as undertaking critical reviews of the dangers inherent in outdated colonialist and other similar narratives regarding what should or should not constitute the tourist experience (e.g. Everingham, Peters, & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021). However, the degree to which the tourism academy continues to be characterised by elitism driven by the nature of our knowledge curation apparatus is not an issue that can be ignored.

The strong competitive positioning of book and journal publishers over academics stems from a gradual evolution in publisher form and function. Lane (2018) has observed that, whilst in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, journals 'were the property of learned societies or of universities … [today] they are largely tradeable commodities, the properties of large multi-national corporates, who are able to fund useful smart websites and global distribution systems' (p. 162). With a business model based on citations and download data, subscription journals tend to be somewhat conservative in their focus, often reasoning that by offering an accepted platform for the 'best scholars' to publish the 'best research', they have in effect cornered the market of both knowledge producers and consumers. In addition, the competitive positioning of publishers is enhanced because of the high level of essentially pro-bono work that is completed by editors, reviewers and scholars. The personal pressure on all of these stakeholders is immense. Whilst competition between journals publishers is often low on account of the specialised nature of the publications in question (McGuigan & Russell, 2008), this same specialisation also creates more competition amongst individual scholars who are forced to compete for finite numbers of spots in journals aligned to their own research interest. At the time of writing, acceptance rates for leading journals hover around 5-15% and, increasingly, journals are observing a greater proportion of papers being written by author teams (McKercher & Tung, 2015). Agunis et al. (2021) recently argued that multi-author teams can, if not managed, lead to 'reciprocal systems of sham authorship and publication credit' (p. 2491). There is also a danger that specialisation can lead to a fragmentation of tourism knowledge (McKercher & Tung, 2015) as authors align themselves to methodologies that are in favour with particular journal editors and editorial boards (Aguinis et al., 2021). At the time of writing, open access publishing regimes are changing the competitive landscape around academic publishing. On the one hand, open-access publishing has had the effect of eroding the considerable profit-margins of international publishing houses (Editorial, 2019). At the same time, however, it has had the effect of making individual scholars more dependent on the institutions they are affiliated to for research funding to cover publication costs. In the past this dependence manifested itself in the ability of an institution to purchase institutional licences to high quality academic scholarship (see Editorial, 2019). Today, dependence is displayed in an institution's capacity to determine whether research is published at all.

Bargaining Power of Buyers

> If formal knowledge is needed for competitiveness, then action needs to be taken to bring the tourism educated not only to the sector but also to destinations who need them (Åberg, 2021, p. 13)

The world of tourism includes such stakeholders as tourists, individuals (including students), the tourism industry, government and interest groups; collectively, they comprise both the starting point for research as well as the ultimate consumers of the knowledge that academics produce (Tribe & Liburd, 2016). In traditional industrial settings, the power of consumers rests with their ability to drive down prices, 'demanding better quality or more service (thereby driving up costs) and playing industry participants off against one another' (Porter, 2008, p. 30). Such pressures are in evidence in terms of tourism education given that undergraduate and postgraduate students make up one of the principal groupings of academic knowledge consumers. As Devinney and Dowling (2020) have argued, universities maintain a focus on teaching and research because each "cross-subsidises the other – teaching pays for research" (p. 127). The more than 300 institutions teaching tourism and Hospitality in the Shanghai rankings (see https://www.shanghairanking.com/) is illustrative of the range of degree choice available to undergraduate, postgraduate and HDR students and, by implication, the high level of consumer bargaining power. Li et al. (2020) have for instance argued that Chinese doctoral students will make decisions on PhD programs based on a range of personal factors including institutional image, evaluation of the programme itself, perception of the city/ country, and so on. Similarly, undergraduate students are able to make choices based on an institution's reputation, industry (career) opportunities and strength of Faculty staff (Dodds & Muchnick, 2008; O'Mahony, Whitelaw, & McWilliams, 2008). When students make choices regarding where or what to study (Weiler, Moyle, & McLennan, 2012; Ying & Xiao, 2012) or when there are disruptive external forces like the COVID-19 pandemic (Tjia, Marshman, Beard, & Baré, 2020), there are flow-on effects (also pipeline effects in the way that changes on enrolment affect future earnings until the 'new normal' equilibrium has been established) on institutional reputation and other operational considerations.

Becken et al. (2016), in an online survey of 189 academics from 31 countries, found that whilst most tourism academics will engage at some timewith other tourism academics, "less than 10% reported that they 'always' engage with other stakeholder groups, for example local or national Government or international organisations". In this way, while scholars continue to advocate for the importance of research informed teaching (Benckendorff & Shu, 2019) and individual scholars and scholarly groups continue to produce impactful research in conjunction with policy makers and industry (e.g. Buhalis, Darcy, & Ambrose, 2012); in many cases academics and industry talk past each other, being part of the same world but not reliant on each other for advancement (McCool, Butler, Buckley, Weaver, & Wheeler, 2015). Olszewski and Bednarska (2016) have argued that whilst open innovation is becoming increasingly recognised in organizational studies, the involvement of universities and university researchers in tourism innovation has been limited with organisations tending to favour internally developed solutions. Lane (2018) has noted that the translation of research into practice requires "working with the industry, with social enterprises, with public sector policy makers and with communities" (p. 163). This is, however, complicated by the presence of a range of institutional barriers in universities, a lack of appreciation amongst some in industry regarding how to work with academia and other more subjective cultural barriers relating to institutional fit (Olszewski & Bednarska, 2016). In working with industry and indeed society more broadly academics must also be cognisant of the presence of more pluralist modes of understanding that are characteristic of web 2.0 (Liburd, 2012). Liburd (2012) argued that whilst traditional modes of tourism knowledge development limited consumers of knowledge to 'passive viewing and download of largely copyrighted material, web 2.0 refers to the principles and practice of facilitating information sharing and social interaction by users generating, altering and uploading web-based content' (p. 897). However, with the surrendering of control to networks of knowledge creators come issues of quality control which are a hallmark of established peer reviewed approaches to knowledge dissemination and curation (Tribe, 2018).

Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) recently drew attention to some of the competing perspectives that exist in the community over the value of tourism academic knowledge during COVID-19. Rightly or wrongly, it was noted that industry will interpret the value of tourism scholarship based on its ability to solve the immediate problems faced by the sector (see also Wang, Ayres, & Huyton, 2010). In recent years, tourism scholars have come to focus increasingly on how to best measure the impact of our research on industry and society at large (Benckendorff & Shu, 2019; Brauer, Dymitrow, & Tribe, 2019; Phillips, Page, & Sebu, 2020). Rhodes et al. (2018) have linked the interest of scholars in research impact to a broader 'trend to establish a performance and audit culture in higher education, [one where] the merit of research is judged by its economic and social benefits, and where impact is a proxy for return on investment [for public funding institutions]' (p. 140). In this sense, whilst McCabe (in Joppe, Lew, & McCabe, 2020) has argued that academics must be circumspect in assuming that the relevance of our research to industry should be the sole defining condition of research quality, we cannot deny that academics and the tertiary institutions they inhabit are often increasingly characteristic of neoliberal market based entities and subject to competitive pressures from knowledge consumers.

The Threat of Substitutes

Porter (2008, p. 31) has defined a substitute as one which 'performs the same function as an industry's product by a different means'. In relation to academic knowledge, this includes the process through which knowledge is delivered to consumers as well as substitute knowledge products. Sources of substitute knowledge from outside academia include, but are not limited to: the World Tourism Organization's knowledge dashboard (see https://www.unwto.org/unwto-tourism-dashboard); statistical and strategic research from government agencies such as Tourism Research Australia (https://www.tra.gov.au/) and Visit Britain (https://www.visitbritain.org/england-research-insights); research produced by industry advocacy groups like the Greek Tourism Confederation (https://sete.gr/); and the work of not-for-profits like the International Ecotourism Society (https://ecotourism.org/overview/).

In the case of tourism academia this competitive force is often not as strong as some others on account of the fact that such groups variously perform complimentary research tasks in concert with tourism academics. Alternatively, they can also take on quite different tasks targeting different audiences and consumers. With respect to complimentary tasks, the lead author of this paper has used the research of Megan Eplar Wood (Director of the International Sustainable Tourism Initiative and Founder of the NGO the International Ecotourism Society) entitled *Sustainable Tourism on a Finite Planet* as the textbook in his undergraduate sustainable tourism subject for the last three years. His rationale for doing so was partly connected to sentiments espoused by Wearing et al. (2005) who suggested that NGOs are often illustrative of how we can broaden "research [and educational] philosophies allow[ing] access to approaches that pursue decommodification in tourism as they move beyond the almost exclusive pursuit of industry profits and place social, cultural and ecological value on local environments and economics" (p. 424).

Within different parts of the global tourism industry such as whale watching, there is a recognised lack of high quality industry and policy research that is available and accessible to individual operators (Dimmock, Hawkins, & Tiyce, 2014). The opportunity for academics to fill this void is limited by the requirement that research will only be valuable if it is 'presented in a manner that enables industry to have a comprehensive understanding of the results, what they mean for their industry and how they can be applied practically and effectively' (Walters, Burns, & Stettler, 2015, p. 492). In this sense, the work of industry associations can, in certain contexts, enjoy a competitive advantage over academics in that their stated public aim is to 'champion positive public policy reforms on behalf of industry' and to 'produce carefully crafted policy research to support our public advocacy' (TTF Australia: Tourism and Transport Forum, 2021). While the statistical and other empirical information they produce ‘may not have a long lifespan in terms of their usefulness … they [do] provide [targeted and expedited] knowledge transfer and alignment to the [immediate concerns of the] tourism industry’ (Vogt, 2021, p. 435). Such outcomes often give such knowledge sources a competitive edge over academic journals on the basis of review times, which can be particularly important in the context of evolving areas of practice including the share economy and smart tourism (Baumber, Schweinsberg, Scerri, Kaya, & Sajib, 2021; Xiang, Stienmetz, & Fesenmaier, 2021). The ability of a substitute product to gain traction with a consumer and thus potentially threaten the competitive position of tourism academia is dependent on their level of relative value in the eyes of the end user (Porter, 2008). To this end, academics would be advised to assess how we can work more effectively with alternative knowledge sources. Masefield et al. (2020) have argued in the context of NGOs and health research that such groups could benefit from the sharing of data sets with academic institutions.

Threat of New Entrants

In recent years, there has been evidence of an expansion in the epistemological and paradigmatical framings that academics have brought to the study of tourism (Chon, Park, & Zoltan, 2020; Kock, Nørfelt, Josiassen, Assaf, & Tsionas, 2020). The historical framing of tourism against a narrow set of paradigms including business studies, anthropology, sociology and geography (see Jafari & Ritchie, 1981) has given way to an increasingly diverse range of theoretical perspectives including critical tourism (Mura & Wijesinghe, 2021) and the Asian paradigm (Chon et al., 2020). However, what will be the effect of new entrants on the competitive strength of academic knowledge? Equally, what could be the effect of re-entrants such as geography and anthropology exerting pressure on academics in struggling tourism programmes? Anecdotally the authors are aware of some established tourism academics relocating their research into geography in order to ensure greater employment security.

Porter (2008, p. 26) identified that ‘new entrants to an industry bring new capacity and a desire to gain market share’. Such desires have frequently characterised academics representing different disciplinary perspectives. For example, in the field of tourism geography (see Pearce, 1979); Richard Butler, perhaps the most well-known tourism geographer of the last half century and author of seminal scholarship on the tourism destination life-cycle (Butler, 1980) saw tourism as ‘a great subject through which to explore how people relate to and interact with the world at large and the environment around them’ (Suntikul, 2014, p. 508). Similar sentiments have been expressed by Britton who observed that the study of tourism is dependent upon a ‘theorisation that explicitly recognises, and unveils, tourism as a predominantly capitalistically organised activity driven by the inherent and defining social dynamics of that system’ (Britton, 1991, p. 476). While for some academics including Alison Gill (Professor Emerita in the Department of Geography - Simon Fraser University) the decision to engage with the study of tourism was deliberate in that it gave the opportunity for the reinvigoration of geography through its application to industries that in many respects characterise the nature of twenty-first century society (Gill, 2012); in other instances new entrants to the tourism academy will emerge serendipitously from scholars who would not have seen themselves as playing a role in the study of tourism. The quintessential example of such a scholar is John Urry, the ‘Archdeacon of space and place and the bard of mobility studies’ (Hollinshead, 2016, p. 309). A sociologist by training, Urry’s original research interests were in the sociology of revolution and power. Over time, however, his work shifted to examining the broad issue of societal consumption with a particular focus on leisure and then tourism (Hollinshead, 2016). Today, Urry’s ubiquitous work *The Tourist Gaze* (Urry & Larsen, 2011) has gained seminal status amongst tourism scholars. When Urry’s work, along with that of other pioneering scholars of different eras including Dean MacCannell (1976), entered the academic consciousness it became part of the market place of ideas. Hall (2013) has observed that:

> Ideally, [knowledge] success is dependent on the truthfulness of the idea as it competes in the evolutionary competition of ideas in research institutes and universities as well as the users of such knowledge in the public and private sectors. Alternatively, it could be argued that the marketplace of ideas is not a level playing field and how knowledge becomes normalised or dominant—or marginal—has something to do with the proponent and where they are located as well as the receptors and sponsors of knowledge. (p. 605)

When Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) outlined select examples of stakeholder sentiment around tourism industry degrowth it was observed that some pro-growth proponents were critical of the effect that newer critical knowledge perspectives have had on the academic community. While tourism academics often talk up the value of academic educators developing critical and reflexive thinking in their charges and ensuring that future generations of tourism leaders embody decision-making frameworks are open to alternative realities (Schweinsberg, Heizmann, Darcy, Wearing, & Djolic, 2018); industry players often draw attention to the potential for such alternative realities to distract tourism academia from more traditional and immediate concerns around industry profitability. Such concerns often translate into a level of scepticism around the ability of academics to teach the next generation of tourism professionals.

Porter (2008) has noted that the competitive advantage a new entrant is able to experience will be dependent on the barriers to entry that exist. Barriers to entry that new entrant scholars may experience include: whether they are accepted into pre-existing scholarly communities; the extent to which their research resonates with the industry and is recognised as providing a 'unique' perspective on problems they are facing; the availability of specialist/ relevant journals; and whether their research resonates with researchers from other disciplines and is recognised as making a strategic contribution to the development of tourism knowledge.

Conclusion

Hall (2010) once argued that the community of tourism scholars is "an institutionalising social group … a context within which individual tourism academics are socialised and which helps define the internal goals of their subject area in the context of the external structures within which they operate (p. 298). In the present paper we have used Porter's Five Forces model as a conceptual lens with which to explore some of the underlying contextual forces influencing tourism academia. At the time of writing tourism academia is at something of a cross-roads. Impact factors are coming to dominate the business models of universities and the career trajectories of individual academics (Hall & Page, 2015). Tourism specific teaching programmes are being closed or blended back into broader business studies programmes with increasing frequency. Anecdotally, we would suggest that, at least in many 'Western' universities, there has also been a decline in the levels of postgraduate tourism study/ research, a trend which will potentially be more pronounced in the future owing to the effect of global geopolitical manoeuvrings on the free-flow movement of students. If tourism academia is to not only survive but thrive in the future, it becomes essential to use our understanding of our strategic positioning, not to defend against the pressures of the various competitive forces we have been discussing. After all, knowledge generation is, as we have discussed, a social and collaborative process where the best of different knowledge paradigms come together and intersect with extra-disciplinary knowledge forms (see Tribe and Liburd, 2016). Rather, as Porter (2008) has argued, we can instead consider "where the [competitive] forces are weakest" (p. 35).

For example, with respect to substitute products and services, how can we cultivate limitations in other knowledge bases to carve out an ongoing niche for scholarly outputs? In doing so we have to be mindful of the fact that universities are now recognised as having a third mission beyond teaching and research; specifically, the "bundle of activities that generate, use, apply and exploit knowledge and other university capabilities - outside academic environments" (Rinaldi, Cavicchi, & Robinson, 2020). While such outcomes can be pursued through reciprocal knowledge sharing between academics, policy and industry based actors (see Higuchi & Yamanaka, 2017), is there a possibility for the sharing of knowledge creators across tertiary, policy and industry research bodies? If such relationships are to extend beyond traditional adjunct roles and other established mechanisms of industry/ academia collaboration (Walters et al., 2015), we must also consider the complexities that such relationships would raise for universities, which the present paper has presented as a supplier based competitive force on academic knowledge creation. For instance, how would a tourism academic working with industry generate knowledge in a manner that fulfils the core goal of public universities to maintain economic welfare, whilst also developing knowledge in a manner that yields industry partners their own competitive advantage through the development of proprietary knowledge and innovation? (see Hillerbrand & Werker, 2019). Porter has argued that in industrial situations where there is a homogeneity in product offerings, there is often "little incentive for the firms to innovate" (Argyres & McGahan, 2002, p. 49). In recent years tourism academics have not been averse to pursuing innovation around key aspects of our internal processes including the merits of virtual conferences to limit the climate impact from global academic air travel (see Chalvatzis & Ormosi, 2020; Higham & Font, 2020). However, until we also look beyond our own internal processes, we run the risk of stifling innovation and limiting the attainment of a more influential competitive position.

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