

## A novel review approach on adventure tourism scholarship

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### Introduction

As a niche market, adventure tourism has been developing rapidly in many regions and territories, evidenced by increasing number of participants and intensive growth of adventure tourism products (Adventure Travel Trade Association, 2013; Tourism New Zealand, 2013). It has become an important component of the tourism industry in many Western countries (e.g. New Zealand) and is gaining some prominence in domestic tourism in select emerging countries (e.g. China and Brazil). This particular growth of adventure tourism sector in past two decades is closely related to the increase of all types of nature-based tourism. Adventure tourism has been strongly likened to outdoor and adventure recreation (Buckley, 2006; Pomfret & Bramwell, 2014; Sung, Morrison, & O'Leary, 1996). Buckley (2006), for example, sees little distinction between the terms adventure tourism, nature tourism, outdoor and adventure recreation in some cases. However, research in adventure tourism has been slight, especially when compared with the large number of other dominant special interest tourism studies (Buckley, 2010). As such, an updated review article on adventure tourism in the tourism context seems essential.

The aim of this paper is to advance extant reviews on adventure tourism through a more, systematic, objective and integrated review of this literature. The distinctive contribution of this study is our novel and comprehensive empirical approach in analyzing the structure and content of the adventure tourism field. Our approach identifies the theoretical foundations and key themes that underpin the core of the adventure tourism field by combining bibliometric methods of network based direction-citation and co-citation analysis, content analysis and a quantitative systemic review.

### Methods

In this study, adventure tourism related publications were identified through EBSCOHost, Science Direct, and Google Scholar, three of the largest and most popular online databases and search engines (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Only articles published in refereed academic journals were reviewed, as these papers have already been evaluated to be of a suitable standard for publication (Jang & Park, 2011) and the assessment of references from this article strengthens the reliability of the results obtained by using bibliometric analysis (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004). As a result, 114 articles were identified.

Co-citation analysis enables a clear picture of the theoretical foundation and structure of a

particular field. Content analysis allows the researcher to uncover conceptual insights in details by moving the level of analysis from authors and their citations to the actual text used by the authors. This facilitates the systematic discovery of key themes and concepts within the adventure tourism field. Quantitative systemic review approach helps map the literature in a quantitative manner to highlight the boundaries around generalizations derived from the literature. The use of these complementary approaches allows for a more structured, vigorous and holistic overview of this rapidly growing field, as it helps reduce the bias that are often related to traditional literature reviews and expert interviews.

## **Discussion**

Our study reveals three broad research areas within adventure tourism research: (1) the adventure tourism experience, (2) destination planning and development, and (3) adventure tourism operators. Thus far, the literature is predominately concerned with adventure tourism experience, while destination planning, development, and adventure tourism operators have received relatively little attention despite being regarded as equally important in recent years. More specifically, academic literature on adventure tourism experience has a strong focus on Western tourists, while an emerging Asian tourist segment is notably under-represented. Adventure tourism has an intellectual tradition from a variety of disciplines, such as sports, psychology and recreation.

Despite the gradually changing focus, the scholarship in adventure tourism field is not as diverse, updated or as in-depth as many other tourism niche markets. This highlights the early stages of adventure tourism investigation and the physical difficulty of the researchers to personally experience (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2014) or of the environment to research that challenged the ecological validity (Jones, Hollenhorst, & Perna, 2003). Yet, our co-citation analysis indicates that while there is not any particular reference dominating the whole network, it does show the importance of several authors' works that bridge a number of research domains, such as Weber (2001) and Beedie and Hudson (2003). There appears a need for better integration of other related disciplinary theories with adventure tourism research.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, our findings present a clearer and richer understanding of different school of thoughts and key concepts that comprise adventure tourism, and establish a more theoretically and unified grounded framework for the field. Future research directions include further investigations from an emic approach to different adventure tourism segments, particularly Asian tourists and the link between adventure tourism and new trends (e.g. social media). Advancing cross-disciplinary approaches to conceptualize adventure tourism will aid in addressing the challenges posed to understanding this complex phenomena. This systematic, objective and integrated review of this literature has facilitated a rigorous approach by which to integrate and extend research on adventure tourism and associated literature review research methods.

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