

A Review of Business Events Literature 2000 – 2009

Judith Mair

Tourism Research Unit, Monash University, Melbourne Australia

judith.mair@buseco.monash.edu.au

Abstract

This paper examines the developments in research into business events over ten years from 2000 to 2009. It examines both the main themes of the research that has been undertaken, and highlights research gaps. Before 2000, researchers had identified considerable gaps in the business events literature. The reason most often cited for lack of research was the difficulty in obtaining statistics. Considerable research has been completed since then, yet researchers are still faced with the difficulties of obtaining meaningful statistics on the business events industry. Existing reviews of the business events literature demonstrate that some of the main themes which have emerged as important research topics include the economic impact of events and the site selection process of conference and convention organisers. This review identified further areas which have been the focus of considerable research efforts in the period 2000 – 2009. These include the evaluation of satisfaction by meeting planners, the role of destination image in convention attendance and the decision-making process of convention attendees. Research gaps and issues are still being identified in many areas of business events. The paper concludes with a discussion on this, including a lack of rigour in much business events research, a tendency towards descriptive statistics and analysis, a lack of research into the social and environmental impacts of business events, and a failure to include reference to incentives in the business events literature.

Keywords: business events; MICE; convention site selection, convention destination image; review

A Review of Business Events Literature 2000 – 2009

Introduction

In the 1990s, studies into business events were at an early stage, variously described as “limited research” (Abbey & Link 1994, p 275), “virtually non-existent” research (Witt *et al* 1995, p 559) “a dearth of reliable intelligence” (Davidson 1994, p 377) and “a largely neglected area of tourism research” (Oppermann 1996, p 11).

Although over 15 years have passed since then, researchers in the business events field still consider that there is a lack of literature to guide them (*inter alia* Mair & Thompson 2009; Oh, Kim & Hong 2009). However, it is reasonable to question whether it is still accurate to highlight a dearth of research overall, or whether the field has progressed to a stage where it is more helpful to identify research strengths and gaps. In the early years of the last decade, a number of reviews of research in convention research suggested that the field was growing, with Lee and Back (2005) identifying 135 articles written on conventions between 1990 and 2003 (their review excluded exhibitions and incentives).

The aim of this paper is to review the business events (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions) literature from 2000 to 2009 and to identify areas of research strengths and highlight research gaps.

Background

According to Reid and Andereck (1989), academic journals constitute an indicator of the direction and nature of research in a field. Further, Van Doren, Koh & McCahill (1994) suggest that a crucial gauge of the maturity of any growing field of research is an analysis of the extent and direction of its evolving research literature.

Other fields of research in the social sciences have been the focus of detailed literature reviews. For example, Baloglu and Assante (1999) carried out an extensive review of the hospitality literature, using content analysis of over one thousand articles. However, as Yoo and Chon (2005) point out, the same does not hold true for convention tourism research. The existing studies include an evaluation of trends in MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions) in Australia (Carlsen 1996); an evaluation of research into a specific topic - association site selection – by Crouch and Ritchie (1998); and two reviews of convention and meeting literature up to 2003 (Yoo and Weber, 2005 and Lee and Back 2005). Therefore it seems timely to consider both the direction and nature, and the extent of research into business events in more recent years.

Lee and Back (2005) suggest two distinct orientations of observation that can be used when compiling a literature review: statistical reviews and thematic reviews. They classify statistical reviews as those which focus on identifying general trends of methodological use

and research areas over the years, and which often are presented in numerical format. Thematic reviews, on the other hand, review a certain industry sector or specific functional area (e.g. marketing or human resources) (Lee and Back 2005). It is possible, and indeed may be advisable, to combine both approaches, compiling a review which covers both general trends and specific content areas.

There are only two main reviews that cover convention and meeting research in total that have been published in recent years. In 2005, Yoo and Weber published their article on 'Progress in Convention Tourism Research' using a statistical and thematic approach. They identified 115 articles published in 14 academic journals up to 2003. Adopting content analysis, they coded the articles in terms of subject area, nature of the research, statistical technique used and regional research focus. Their findings indicated that half of the articles focused on the area of marketing, throughout the years surveyed and across all the journals. In addition, there was a significant focus on meeting planners, and on administration and strategy.

With regard to the nature of the research, a trend towards increasing numbers of empirical papers was highlighted, along with an increase in the use of multivariate statistics (although descriptive statistics were employed most frequently) (Yoo and Weber 2005). They also examined the regional focus of the articles, finding that more than half of the articles had a focus on North America. However, a developing trend towards the publication of more articles focussing on Asia and Australia was also identified (Yoo and Weber 2005).

Lee and Back also published a paper in 2005 entitled 'A review of convention and meeting management research 1990 – 2003' which collected and content analysed 137 convention articles published in major hospitality and tourism journals. The difference in the number of articles identified in the Lee and Back (2005) and Yoo and Weber (2005) studies, over a similar period of time, illustrates the difficulties associated with comparing reviews.

Lee and Back (2005) categorised the articles in their review on the basis of nature of article, research design, statistical technique, research focus and functional area. Their findings are, not surprisingly, similar to those of Yoo and Weber (2005), including the fact that although descriptive research dominated the articles reviewed, there was a discernible trend towards more sophisticated quantitative research techniques, particularly from 2000 onwards. Lee and Back (2005) also highlighted that association site selection processes, destination marketing, and the economic impacts of conventions were the dominant research themes.

Both reviews suggested areas where there are gaps in the literature. According to Yoo and Weber (2005, p. 206) 'there is a need for studies evaluating economic, social and cultural impacts of convention tourism'. This, however, appears to contradict the finding by Lee and Back (2005) that economic impacts of conventions was a dominant research theme. Lee and Back (2005) pointed to the importance of meeting attendees and proposed that future research efforts should be directed towards association members and their meeting participation behaviour.

In summary, existing reviews of literature in the business events area points to the dominance of descriptive research, but with a trend towards increasing use of multivariate statistics, and a predominance of research into meeting planners' and associations' site selection processes. Gaps in the area of economic, social and cultural impacts, and convention attendees were identified. This research will examine the more recent literature with a view to examining whether the research gaps identified have been addressed, and whether the trends identified (particularly the trend towards more sophisticated research methods and data analysis techniques) have indeed continued.

Method

This paper uses a content analysis of the manifest content of a range of articles published between 2000 and 2009, all on the subject of business events (MICE). Manifest content involves denotative meaning – the meaning that most people give to particular words and phrases (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998). Therefore, the analysis will not consider any hidden meanings, or latent content. The starting date of 2000 was chosen so that there was some overlap, and arguably some continuity between the existing reviews of the literature (Yoo and Weber 2005; Lee and Back 2005) and this review. Relatively straightforward categories were selected initially in order to search the online publication databases. These were 'business events', 'MICE', and 'meetings', 'incentives', 'conventions', 'conferences' and 'exhibitions' as separate words. Articles that were simply conference or convention reports were excluded. This initial search elicited 152 articles. A few were removed from further analysis, for example where the topic was not considered to be relevant to this study (such as articles that were primarily focussed on accreditation, or human resources or education, but where the business events context was mentioned briefly). The final total of articles to be reviewed was 144.

Once the articles to be analysed have been identified, the next step in the content analysis process is to determine appropriate content categories (McMurray, Pace, & Scott, 2004). Following the literature review, a number of content categories appeared to be relevant. These are shown in Table 1. Each of the categories above was further broken down into sub-categories as shown.

Table 1 - Content Categories

Main content category	Sub-categories
Journal	
Year of Publication	
Research Focus	Attendee Destination Meeting Planner Meeting Supplier Industry General Research Reviews
Sub Theme	Attendee decision-making process

	Convention Centre development Destination image Destination/CVB marketing Economic impact Evaluation of satisfaction/service Quality/destination Hotel/meetings/sales operations Meeting planning (budgets, schedules etc) Other areas (law, government etc) Other meeting venues Site selection Technology Trends and Issues
Research Approach	Quantitative Qualitative Conceptual Descriptive Analysis
Analysis type	Descriptive Statistics Multivariate Statistics Conceptual Paper

In content analysis it is important to consider the reliability of the analysis. One of the major areas where content analysis can become flawed is when a number of people are coding the analysis – in that instance, reporting inter-coder reliability is suggested (Riffe et al., 1998). However in this study all coding was carried out by the author and therefore no inter-coder bias can have occurred. In order to reduce the subjective nature of the coding process where a single coder is used, an additional researcher reviewed the coding of some early articles to ensure a consistent approach. Nonetheless, categorisation of material was done on a discretionary and judgemental basis, as is often the case with content analysis, and therefore the results of this exploratory study provide some reflections on the themes and issues connected to research in the area of business events without attempting to provide a definitive resource.

Findings

With regard to the total number of articles published in each journal (Table 2), it can clearly be seen that the majority of articles (58 of the total 144) were published in the Journal of Convention and Event Tourism. When the 40 articles published in the Journal of Convention and Exhibition Management (the former title of JCET) are taken in account, these two outlets comprise a significant number of the total articles published in the business events area (98 out of 144). This is of course not surprising in itself, as these journals have business events as a major focus. Perhaps more interesting is the fact that number three on the list is Tourism Management, recognised by a number of journal ranking systems as one of the highest quality journals in tourism. This suggests that quality research endeavours in the business

events field are considered to be as worthy of publication as more traditional areas of tourism. In addition, there are publications in non-tourism specific journals, such as the Journal of Brand Management, Journal of Retail and Leisure Property and the Journal of Services Marketing.

Table 2 – Journals publishing articles on business events

Journal	Total Number of Articles
Journal of Convention and Event Tourism	58
Journal of Convention and Exhibition Management	40
Tourism Management	10
Event Management	7
Journal of Travel Research	6
Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly	4
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	3
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	3
Journal of Vacation Marketing	2
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	2
International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration	1
International Journal of Hospitality Management	1
Journal of Brand Management	1
Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	1
Journal of Retail and Leisure Property	1
Journal of Services Marketing	1
Organization	1
The Service Industries Journal	1
Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing	1
	144

When the articles were analysed to investigate the research focus, it was clear that meeting planners were the subject of the highest number of articles, with 41. This is illustrated in Table 3. However, both meeting suppliers, attendees and the destination were also common topics. There were only four papers during the review time which attempted to review research in business events (as discussed in the literature review, one focussed on only one area of business events – association site selection – whilst another took only the Australian context as its theme. The remaining two (Lee and Back 2005 and Yoo and Weber 2005) have also been discussed in the literature review.

Table 3 – Articles’ Research Focus

Research focus	Total Number of Articles
Meeting planners	41
Meeting suppliers	29

Research focus	Total Number of Articles
Attendees	25
Destination	22
Industry general	17
Research reviews	4
Meeting planners, attendees	4
Types of meeting	2
	144

Further investigations of the research sub-themes illustrated that a number of categories were particularly popular with researchers – see Table 4. In particular, papers on the evaluation of satisfaction (with the destination, the event and the service quality) were relatively numerous (21 in total). There were also many articles on technology (16), primarily on the potential of the internet and email to change conference registration and booking processes. Many of these articles, although interesting, are now considerably out of date, as technology has moved on since they were published. The attendee decision-making process and factors that play a role in the attendance decision were the subject of 15 articles between 2000 and 2009. This is of particular interest, because many authors have pointed to the attendee as being under-researched in the business events field. The meeting planner/association site selection process was also a significant contributor of papers. Finally, it is interesting to note that relatively few articles covered the topic of economic impacts and/or evaluations, which had been noted previously (Lee and Back 2005) as being an area of significant research activity.

Table 4 – Articles’ sub themes

Sub Themes	Total Number of Articles
Evaluation of satisfaction, services/destinations	21
Technology	16
Other areas (law, government etc)	16
Attendee decision-making process/factors	15
Site selection process	14
Trends & Issues and the future of the industry	13
Destination marketing/CVB operations	12
Convention Centre development/operations	9
Hotel meeting sales/operations	7
Meeting planning (budgets, schedules etc)	6
Other meeting venues	5
Destination Image	5
Economic Impact	5
	144

The articles were analysed in order to examine the type and of research methods employed. Table 5 shows that over half of the articles reviewed were quantitative analyses. There were 34 qualitative papers, 18 papers which relied on a descriptive analysis of secondary data, and 16 papers which were conceptual in nature, proposing models and frameworks and building theory in the business events area. Of the 76 quantitative articles, 56 used multivariate statistics of some type (ranging from t-tests, ANOVAs and factor analyses through to path analysis and structural equation modelling). The remainder reported only descriptive statistics.

Table 5 – Research Approach and analysis level

Research Approach	Level of Analysis	Total Number of Articles
Quantitative	Multivariate statistics (56)	76
	Descriptive statistics (20)	
Qualitative	Descriptive analysis (34)	34
Descriptive analysis	Descriptive analysis (18)	18
Conceptual paper	Conceptual paper (16)	16
		144

When taken together with the fact that in many cases the qualitative papers (by necessity) reported descriptive statistics, and there were also significant numbers of papers with only descriptive analysis, it appears that in total, 72 papers reported only descriptive statistics. For the qualitative studies, this may in many cases (although by no means all) suggest a lack of rigour in the research undertaken in the business events area.

Conclusion

This review has indicated that the majority of papers in the business events field have been published in the Journal of Convention and Event Tourism (formerly Journal of Convention and Exhibition Management), have been focussed on the meeting planner, and in particular on their evaluation of satisfaction. Other dominant themes have been technology, the attendee decision-making process and site selection. By far the majority of papers utilise a quantitative approach, but many of them report only descriptive statistics, and often the level of analysis remains descriptive.

There are a few points worth making at this juncture. Regarding the journals that have published business events related papers, although JCET has published most in number, it is worth noting that several highly regarded journals (e.g. Tourism Management and Journal of Travel Research) have also published papers on business events topics and therefore it seems advisable to target a range of journals with business events papers.

With reference to the research focus and sub-themes of the papers reviewed, meeting planners, and their site selection and evaluation processes appear to be popular topics. This is similar to findings by Lee and Back (2005). However, Lee and Back (2005) point to the lack of research in the area of meeting attendees, which appears largely to have been addressed in

the time period under review. Yoo and Weber (2005) suggest that research is needed in the area of economic impacts (as well as social and environmental impacts). Despite a suggestion from Lee and Back (2005) that economic impacts have been a fruitful area of research, this review demonstrates that economic impact studies are still few in number. Both Yoo and Weber (2005) and Lee and Back (2005) highlighted that there was a trend towards the use of increasingly sophisticated multivariate techniques, and whilst this review also noted the use of multivariate techniques, it appears that they are still in the minority overall.

The final purpose of this paper is to identify research gaps that have been highlighted during this review process. One of the main gaps that appears to required to be rectified is the complete absence of studies examining the social and environmental impacts of business events. It may be argued that business events have less of an impact on the host community than other types of events, but business events certainly have significant environmental impacts (Mair and Jago 2010) and this has not yet been researched in any detail. Finally, although there was a plethora of articles on meetings and conventions, and several articles with a focus on the exhibition sector, there appeared to be no articles on the subject of incentive travel. Given that this area of business events is of significant importance to a number of destinations worldwide it seems vital that future business events research should include incentive travel.

References

- Abbey, J. R., & Link, C. K. (1994). The Convention and Meetings Sector - Its Operation and Research Needs. In J. R. B. Ritchie & C. R. Goeldner (Eds.), *Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Research* (2nd Edition ed., pp. 273-283). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Baloglu, S. & Assante, L.M. (1999). A content analysis of subject areas and research methods used in five hospitality management journals. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research* 23(1) 53-70
- Carlsen, J. (1996). A Review of the MICE Industry - Evaluation and Research in Asia and Australia 1988-1998. *Journal of Convention and Exhibition Management*, 1(4), 51-66
- Crouch, G. I., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (1998). Convention Site Selection Research. A Review, Conceptual Model and Propositional Framework. *Journal of Convention and Exhibition Management*, 1(1), 49-69.
- Davidson, R. (1994). European Business Travel and Tourism. In A. V. Seaton (Ed.), *Tourism: The State of the Art* (pp. 377-382). Chichester: John Wiley.
- Lee, M. J., & Back, K.-J. (2005). A Review of Convention and Meeting Management Research 1990 - 2003 -- Identification of Statistical Methods and Subject Areas. *Journal of Convention & Event Tourism*, 7(2), 1 - 20.
- Mair, J. & Thompson, K. (2009) Towards a conceptual model of the UK association conference attendance decision-making process. *Tourism Management* 30 pp 400-409
- Mair, J & Jago, L.K. (2010). 'The development of a conceptual model of greening in the business events tourism sector'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 18(1) 77-94
- McMurray, A. J., Pace, R. W., & Scott, D. (2004). *Research: A Commonsense Approach*. Southbank, Victoria: Thomson Social Science Press.
- Oh, H., Kim, H.-C., & Hong, K.-W. (2009). A dynamic perspective of meeting planners' satisfaction: Toward conceptualization of critical relevancy. *Tourism Management*, 30(4), 471-482.
- Opperman, M. (1996b). Convention Destination Images: Analysis of Association Meeting Planner's Perceptions. *Tourism Management*, 17(3), 175-182.
- Reid, L. J., & Andereck, K. L. (1989). Statistical analyses use in tourism research. *Journal of Travel Research* 27 (2) pp 21-24
- Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. G. (1998). *Analyzing media messages - Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research*. Mahwah New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- McMurray, Pace, & Scott, 2004

Van Doren, C. S., Koh, Y. K. & McCahill, A. (1994). Tourism Research: A state-of-the-art citation. In A.V. Seaton (Ed) *Tourism the State of the Art*. Chichester, UK. New York, John Wiley

Witt, S. F., Sykes, A. M., & Dartus, M. (1995). Forecasting International Conference Attending. *Tourism Management*, 16(8), 559-570.

Yoo, J. J. E., & Weber, K. (2005). Progress in convention tourism research. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 29(2), 194.