



Viewpoint

Paradox of expertise in publishing tourism research

Vincent Wing Sun Tung^{a,*}, Denis Tolkach^b^a School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 17 Science Museum Road, Tsim Sha Tsui East, Kowloon, Hong Kong^b College of Business, Law and Governance, James Cook University, 1/14-88 McGregor Rd, Smithfield, QLD 4878, Australia

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Generating and disseminating knowledge is the fundamental purpose of tourism research. Opinions from senior-level academics, however, have suggested that less knowledge is being developed despite more from publications in the field (Beritelli et al., 2016; McKercher, 2018; Tribe, 2018). Many reasons have been suggested, from pressures to publish or perish, to the lack of individual creativity and holistic research skills (Kock et al., 2020). These reasons generally focus on the *deficiency* of capacity to produce groundbreaking research. In this viewpoint, we seek to provide an additional explanation: rather than deficiency, we should consider the *proficiency* in the skill of publishing; that is, many tourism academics are *too good* at publishing and fall into the paradox of expertise.

The paradox of expertise suggests that the more successful individuals are in their domain, the harder it could be for them to see new patterns, prospects, and possibilities (Dror, 2011). Although expertise is associated with abilities and enhanced performance, expert may use selective attention and schemas to make decisions and perform tasks quickly and efficiently based on past successes (in this case, 'experts' are academics who learn the tricks-of-the-trade in 'getting published' and the know-how of acceptable – or minimum – standards to get over the bar for particular journals). However, schemas could also lead to tunnel vision and bias that degrade innovation and creativity.

What are the implications of the paradox of expertise for tourism academia from knowledge-generation and ethical perspectives? We present two schools of thoughts: first, given the significant pressures to publish, as well as intrinsic (e.g., reputation) and extrinsic motivations (e.g., career and financial implications), academics may opt to maximize their quantitative output. A researcher may carve out a review paper for Journal A; pitch a methodology-focused paper for Journal B; spin-off qualitative and quantitative papers for Journals C and D. In this example, some may argue there is technically no loss in aggregated knowledge generated to the field. Compared to publishing only one journal article for the above work, one could suggest that

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: vincent.tung@polyu.edu.hk, (V.W.S. Tung), denis.tolkach@jcu.edu.au. (D. Tolkach).

there is actually more knowledge generated from the sum of the parts/papers, and more potential to reach a diverse readership across multiple outlets. In this viewpoint, we call this an *expansionism* school of thought.

The opposite is the *reductionism* school of thought. In the above example, an accumulated outcome is the manifestation of the 'lowest common denominator' across the field. When a new paper is published, it sets precedence for the amount of content that reviewers and readers may expect for that journal going forward. Reviewers may look to recently published papers as a gauge of expectations, and aspiring authors may use accepted articles as a benchmark for their future work. With each paper that is divided and accepted, the publishing standards will become slightly lowered.

The paradox of expertise sparks ethical dilemmas. Two different approaches to ethics could be employed: teleology and deontology (Fennell, 2017). Teleology focuses on consequences of actions. In such utilitarian approach, an action that creates the greatest good is the most ethical. The expansionist school of thought appears to be ethical from such a viewpoint. Individuals gain recognition and promotion, while universities achieve higher rankings and potentially better government funding. The caveat to utilitarianism is the tragedy of the commons. The mastery of academic skills combined with institutional incentives may lead to dubious behaviors in publishing. While the quantified utility is high, it could negatively exacerbate the publish-or-perish practice. As experts driven by their internal and external motivation publish more, other academics are benchmarked against the publication metrics. Consequently, whether academics like it or not, they become defined by their publication metrics while others perish.

In contrast to teleology, deontology focuses on the intent of actions rather than consequences. It approaches ethics from the viewpoint of what one's duty should be. The public expects academics to pursue knowledge that benefits the broader society, and publishing is a consequence for knowledge dissemination. For instance, the Research Excellence Framework (REF 2021) for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions assesses research impact beyond academia. The caveat here is the tragedy of careers. Although the decoupling of staff and outputs in this framework may relieve a certain degree of pressure to publish for researchers, employment contracts and individual job performance expectations are oftentimes separate from the framework's requirements given pressures to publish to improve the score in the 'research' component for university league tables. For researchers who work at research-focused institutions outside of such assessment frameworks, the lack of high publishing output may lead to career stagnation.

We have become extremely proficient at publishing. Yet, the key question is, "what collectively do we want to achieve in our publications?" This is a balance between deontology and teleology: the duty of an expert should be to publish knowledge that benefits society rather than to produce more publications just because we can; however, we operate within a neo-liberal metrics system that values output quantity. To avoid the tragedy of the commons, and ensure tourism research fulfills its societal obligations as well as aspirations of researchers at various stages of their career, we need to discuss how we respond to the neo-liberal university system and how we can best exercise our expertise in publishing.

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Vincent Wing Sun Tung is an Associate Professor at the School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His research interests include tourism experiences, host-guest relations, and destination management.

Denis Tolkach is a Senior Lecturer in Tourism and Hospitality Management at James Cook University, Cairns. He has developed research in areas of sustainable tourism, ethics in tourism, community-based tourism, nature-based tourism and tourism in Small Island Developing States.