

Strategy implementation research in hospitality and tourism: Current status and future potential

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Strategy implementation
Hospitality
Tourism
Strategic management
Systematic literature review

ABSTRACT

To achieve their business objectives, hospitality and tourism organizations need effective implementation as well as consistent strategy formulation. However, the implementation aspect of strategy has attracted relatively less scholarly interest than strategic planning despite its critical role in achieving performance outcomes. Consequently, it is timely to provide an in-depth analysis of the strategy implementation literature. This is particularly the case in hospitality and tourism management where comprehensive literature reviews of strategy implementation have been lacking. To address the knowledge gap, the authors conduct a systematic literature review of 139 articles that appeared in 42 journals over the period 1988–2019. The items were grouped into six topic clusters with a view to generating novel research questions that have the potential to advance the field. We identify four main gaps that should be addressed and suggest prospective research directions.

1. Introduction

The constant pressure to outperform competitors is prompting contemporary businesses to make substantial investments of time and other resources in the formulation of strategy (Wolf and Floyd, 2017). A different though comparable challenge involves how strategies can be executed across whole organizations. The dependence of successful strategizing on the effectiveness of implementation is rather self-evident (Hrebiniak, 2006). Organizations across all economic sectors face the challenge of achieving consistent strategy formulation, and without effective implementation will struggle to reach their intended targets (Brenes et al., 2008). Superior performance will only be achieved when strategies are effectively implemented. While strategic planning has been one of the most commonplace tools in management (Wolf and Floyd, 2017), implementation related problems (Verweire, 2014) have frequently impeded its effectiveness.

Although strategy implementation occupies a critical space between strategic planning and performance outcomes, its scholarly appeal has been overshadowed by the formulation aspect of strategy. While researchers have proposed abundant theories and techniques about how to plan effectively, they have devoted less attention to the relationship between strategy implementation and performance outputs (Hrebiniak,

2006).

There has been some increase of interest in strategy implementation amongst hospitality and tourism researchers over recent years (Harrington et al., 2014). However, challenges remain despite this considerable scholarly output. Strategy implementation is multi-faceted and encompasses a multitude of activities that are undertaken by different levels of management (Noble, 1999). The multi-dimensional nature of the implementation concept has opened up alternative paths of investigation and has led to a fragmentation of the research domain (Yang et al., 2010). In parallel to the developing literature, practitioners have been embracing new approaches to strategy implementation, thereby adding complexity and indiscipline to the existing knowledge base (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). As the body of knowledge has continued to grow, there has been an increasing need to consolidate and organize the sum of scholarly insights (Kunisch et al., 2018).

Noting the combined growth of interest in and around the topic and a fragmentation in the research area, we believe that it is timely to consolidate and integrate the strategy implementation literature in hospitality and tourism management. We propose a “state-of-the-art” evaluation of the strategy implementation literature in hospitality and tourism with a view to advancing debate and asking the following meaningful questions that can be considered by future researchers:

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102556>

Received 8 September 2019; Received in revised form 29 April 2020; Accepted 2 May 2020

Available online 08 May 2020

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- 1) What are the key features and trends of the strategy implementation literature in hospitality and tourism management?
- 2) How can strategy implementation research in hospitality and tourism be classified in terms of research life cycle, issues explored and methodologies?
- 3) What are the prospective future research directions?

The authors address the first research question by deploying a systematic literature review of the type that has been described by Denyer and Tranfield (2009) and Tranfield et al. (2003). Such approaches adopt a structured approach that is both repeatable and testable. They follow carefully defined steps to reveal the research territory, thereby creating the opportunity to provide a more comprehensive view of the relevant phenomenon. The authors identify the current state of the literature and any potential gaps which merit consideration. To address the second research question, we classify the articles according to their position in the research life cycle, using a framework proposed by Edmondson and McManus (2007). This approach provides a basis for assessing the maturity of strategy implementation studies in hospitality and tourism. It also allows for the identification of research avenues that merit closer attention. To answer the third research question, we combine our results from the other research questions and identify several potential research directions that can address gaps in current knowledge.

The main contribution of literature reviews is to provide a synthesis of existing evidence about a defined topic or domain in the pursuit of broad conclusions (Baumeister, 2013; Siddaway et al., 2019). Through such means, review studies play a critical role in guiding future research (Cropanzano, 2009). Furthermore, an increasing number of scholars have drawn attention to the importance of literature reviews to management which acknowledges a base of evidence (Rousseau et al., 2008; Rynes and Bartunek, 2017). Briner et al. (2009) have noted that systematic literature reviews are particularly valuable forms of evidence-based knowledge which can inform policy makers and practitioners. In this regard, our study makes several prospective contributions to hospitality and tourism knowledge. To the best of the authors' knowledge, it is the only literature review conducted over the past two decades on the subject of strategy implementation in hospitality and tourism. Given the crucial role of strategy implementation in achieving performance outcomes (Hrebiniak, 2006; Brenes et al., 2008), examining how the literature has developed over an extended timespan has important scholarly and managerial implications. Second, our review is the first to assess strategy implementation research according to its position in the research life cycle. This approach reveals which parts of the strategy implementation literature in hospitality and tourism may be viewed as nascent, intermediate and mature respectively, thereby opening up the prospect of new debates about future directions. The research life cycle approach also helps us recognize the studies that are most likely to contribute to future advances in the field. Thirdly, this study identifies gaps in the literature in terms of content and methodology by outlining a comprehensive map of the relevant domain. The review highlights potentially fruitful avenues for research.

The paper is organized into several sections. The first part presents a review of strategy implementation in the mainstream strategic management literature. In progressing the systematic literature review we then present a detailed explanation of key methodological decisions by contributing authors. The data analysis section reports the relevant results. Following this step, we classify the articles in our sample according to Edmondson and McManus's (2007) framework and topic clusters. We then draw upon our analysis results to discuss future research opportunities leading ultimately to the conclusions.

2. Literature review

There is no agreed upon definition of strategy implementation,

despite the importance of this topic for connecting theory with management practice. The attendant tension suggests a need to reach closer agreement. To date, some authors have adopted a managerial perspective as a basis for defining the term. Barrick et al. (2015), for example suggested that implementation concerns the willingness of senior management to 'specify and pursue strategic objectives, and to adopt clearly defined metrics to dynamically monitor progress' (p. 118). Along similar lines Schaap (2006), defined strategy implementation as 'those senior-level leadership behaviors and activities that will transform a working plan into a concrete reality' (p.14). Other studies have attempted to provide a more comprehensive view of strategy implementation, notably as the 'post-authorization phase of a strategic decision' (Anchor and Aldehayyat, 2016, p. 649). Another proposed definition has considered the whole organization as follows: 'the communication, interpretation, adoption, and enactment of strategic plans' (Noble, 1999). Most conventional approaches have adopted a temporal sequencing approach towards the three elements of strategic planning, formulation and implementation. Following this approach strategy is first formulated and then implemented. However, a practical reality is overlooked, namely the inseparability of different stages in the planning process and that organizations sometimes need to improvise emergent strategies in the face of uncertainty (McDermott and O'Connor, 2002). The need for organizations to improvise is particularly evident at the time of writing which coincides with the Covid-19 outbreak. Inevitably, hospitality and tourism organizations could not have been entirely prepared for such an eventuality.

Many variables are responsible for shaping strategy implementation, including organizational structure, control mechanisms, strategic consensus and leadership (Noble, 1999). Various scholars have examined the relationship between organizational structure and strategy implementation. For example, O'Reilly et al. (2010) examine how the implementation of strategic initiatives was influenced by the consistency of leadership effectiveness across different levels of the hierarchy. They concluded that 'it is not the effectiveness of a leader in isolation that affects organizational performance, but the alignment of leaders across hierarchical levels that is associated with the successful implementation of a strategic change' (p.111). On the other hand, Zott and Amit (2008) claim that performance is influenced by the fit between strategy and the prevailing business model. Another key managerial consideration is how to measure and evaluate performance during and after strategy implementation. The control function evidently occupies a critical position. Henri (2006) examined the relationship between management control systems and implementation success and suggests that an interactive use of performance measurement systems is significant in translating strategy into organizational performance.

Regardless of structure and control, strategy is implemented by people and this places interpersonal issues at the centre of implementation. The extent of strategic consensus is one of the most important interpersonal factors for implementation. Strategic consensus is defined as a shared organizational understanding and commitment to a strategy (Noble, 1999). Whereas strategic consensus has been treated as a critical success factor, Walter et al. (2013) also show that strategic alignment to the environment is an important complement to consensus. Studies that examine commitment at different managerial levels show that the strategy implementation process is vulnerable to potential conflicts between mid-level and top-level management (Huy, 2011). Similarly, and in the absence of sufficient leadership efforts, employee resistance may hinder strategic change (Furst and Cable, 2008). Bundy et al. (2013) adopt a broader view of strategic consensus and place their focus on external stakeholders. They propose that the responsiveness of firms to stakeholder concerns depends on strategic cognition, defined as the degree to which management prioritize a stakeholder issue. The literature on strategic consensus commonly articulates the merits of a collective organizational mind-set for purposes of implementation and performance. Despite the conventional assumption that strategic

consensus and implementation success are positively related, Kellermanns et al. (2011) note that the results of empirical studies about the characteristics of this relationship have been inconsistent. They find that the relationship between strategic consensus and performance is moderated by the place of participants in the hierarchy, type of strategy content, and environmental dynamism.

3. Methodology

This study deploys the systematic literature review method that has been described by Denyer and Tranfield (2009) and Tranfield et al. (2003). Systematic literature reviews have many advantages over their less structured equivalents, such as their use of a replicable and transparent process that minimizes biases and errors (Tranfield et al., 2003). The method has also been acknowledged as a reliable way to present a comprehensive view of existing knowledge in a specific field, since the adoption of step-by-step procedures ensures the validity of the process (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). For the preceding reasons, the authors of the current study deemed a systematic literature review to be the most applicable research method.

3.1. Setting conceptual boundaries

The first step in a systematic literature review is to define boundaries in line with the research goals (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). Since definitions of strategy implementation are not exclusive to hospitality and tourism, the current authors adopted a definition that has been widely used in the strategic management literature. Strategy implementation is defined for present purposes as ‘the communication, interpretation, adoption, and enactment of strategic plans’ (Noble, 1999). The review encompasses articles that relate to various elements of implementation in hospitality and tourism.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

In this step the authors set out to construct a comprehensive database of strategy implementation articles pertaining to hospitality and tourism. It is necessary to assemble such a database to extract useful data that identify prominent topics in strategy implementation. In building the database, the authors established exclusion and inclusion criteria by topic coverage, time range, search words and type of articles. First, we included only articles that have been published in academic journals. Second, we excluded articles that are not directly related to strategy implementation or to hospitality and tourism. Third, we used different search terms to conduct our search that reflect the multi-faceted nature of strategy implementation, such as ‘strategy and implement*’, ‘strategy and enact*’, ‘strategy and communication’, ‘strategy and participation’ and ‘strategy and stakeholder’ within the Scopus and Web of Science databases. We limited the research area to hospitality and tourism and our initial search generated 977 articles. Next, each member of the research team examined the article abstracts and selected articles that 1) directly address strategy implementation or 2) explicitly expresses concrete implications for strategy implementation. Following the application of the selection criteria, we identified 139 relevant articles that were published in academic journals over the period 1986–2019.

Following the selection phase, we read each article carefully to organize defining characteristics under categories such as research topic, country, name of journal, year of publication and methodology. We also grouped articles according to Edmondson and McManus’ (2007) research life cycle framework and classified research as nascent, intermediate or mature. In order to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data, each co-author undertook an independent reading of each article and codified data into his/her own database, following the Edmondson and McManus (2007) framework.

Table 1
Number of articles by journals.

#	Journal Title	Article Count
1	Advances in Hospitality and Leisure	1
2	African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure	1
3	Annals of Tourism Research	2
4	Asia Pasific Journal of Tourism Research	1
5	Bridging Tourism Theory and Practice	1
6	Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	5
7	Current Issues in Tourism	5
8	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	21
9	International Journal of Culture, Tourism, and Hospitality Research	1
10	International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration	4
11	International Journal of Hospitality Management	15
12	International Journal of Tourism Cities	1
13	International Journal of Tourism Policy	1
14	International Journal of Tourism Research	1
15	Journal of China Tourism Research	1
16	Journal of Destination Marketing and Management	2
17	Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism	3
18	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	1
19	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	7
20	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	1
21	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	2
22	Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism	1
23	Journal of Place Management and Development	3
24	Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism	2
25	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	4
26	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	5
27	Journal of Travel Research	3
28	Journal of Vacation Marketing	5
29	Managing Leisure	1
30	Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism	3
31	Tourism	2
32	Tourism Analysis	3
33	Tourism and Hospitality Research	2
34	Tourism and Hospitality, Planning and Development	3
35	Tourism Economics	3
36	Tourism Geographies	1
37	Tourism in Marine Environments	1
38	Tourism Management	10
39	Tourism Planning and Development	2
40	Tourism, Culture and Communication	2
41	Tourismos	3
42	Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes	3
	TOTAL	139

4. Literature analysis

In the following section, we present the characteristics of the collected articles in order to provide a general picture of the strategy implementation literature in hospitality and tourism.

4.1. General considerations about journals, years of publication, and authors

We now report findings about the thematic codes which were respectively: name of journal and year of publication. It was found that the International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management contains the highest number of strategy implementation articles (n = 21). The other prominent journals in order of frequency of appearance are: International Journal of Hospitality Management (n = 15) and Tourism Management (n = 10). Table 1 presents a breakdown of the number of articles by journal. We observe that strategy implementation has been examined in both tourism and in hospitality focused journals. This shows a widespread concern for strategy implementation issues across the two areas.

Fig. 1 highlights the increasing volume of articles over the years and particularly in the period since 2004. In addition, and considering that

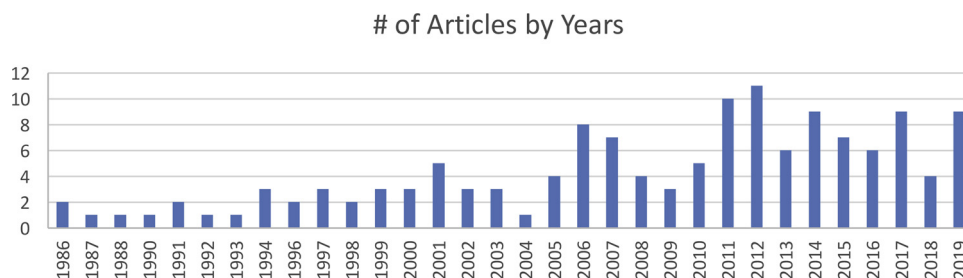


Fig. 1. Number of articles by years.

strategy implementation research began to flourish in 1980s (Candido and Santos, 2019), it is unsurprising to see the appearance of related articles in hospitality and tourism journals during the same period. However, the figure shows that scholarly interest remained low until the early 2000s. Although strategy implementation has been researched for more than thirty years in hospitality and tourism, the topic is still attractive for scholars as a growth area.

Thirdly, we examined the lead authors of selected articles and the countries where their host institutions are located. Regarding countries of affiliation, we observe that US-based authors published the highest number of articles (n = 33). These were followed by authors located in the United Kingdom (n = 19), Canada (n = 15) and Australia (n = 12). The number of articles published by each country are shown in Fig. 2.

4.2. Theoretical perspectives

In this section, we examine theoretical aspects of the articles that are under consideration. Specifically, we explore the authors' use of management theories. It is commonplace for literature reviews to consider the theoretical perspectives that have been adopted in articles that are being considered (Danese et al., 2018). During their reading of each article, the authors considered references to existing theories, and to author arguments and contributions. In cases where papers were theory based, we made an assessment of which was most applicable.

None of the previous articles stated the theoretical frameworks from which they were derived. The current researchers sought to identify the related theories as they read through each of the relevant articles. It was observed that most of the articles drew from multiple theories. However, when pressed to determine the primary theoretical framework that is adopted by an article, it was found that stakeholder theory is the most commonly used (n = 53). The stakeholder theory perspective views a company as a set of relationships amongst groups that have a stake in that business (Jones, 1995). Stakeholder theory asserts the critical importance of managing these relationships for the creation and

distribution of value (Freeman, 1984). It views stakeholders as playing a significant role as influencers of strategic decisions (Rodgers and Gago, 2004; Murillo-Luna et al., 2008). From these observations, it is evident that stakeholder theory provides a useful lens for examining strategy implementation issues from a relational perspective. Most of the articles in our sample that used stakeholder theory are focused on the implementation of tourism and/or destination management strategies. One explanation for the popularity of stakeholder relationships as a topic in strategy implementation research is the necessity of assembling the collective efforts of various bodies to implement such plans. Comparatively speaking, stakeholder theory has not been a popular framework in mainstream strategic management studies and scholarly interest has only increased recently (Laplume et al., 2008; Bridoux and Stoelhorst, 2014). Its relative prominence in hospitality and tourism studies may be attributable to field specific characteristics. The particular need for stakeholder cooperation and coordination in tourism strategy implementation may have enhanced the usefulness of stakeholder theory as a lens to illuminate different parts of the process.

The resource-based view of the firm is the second most commonly used framework (n = 32). This approach views the firm as a bundle of resources and competitive advantage, depending on whether these resources are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). The essence of this framework is the need to develop and obtain new resources to increase competitiveness. The incidence of the resource-based view in our sample applies to a wide range of topics, including barriers to strategy implementation, marketing, human resources and social media strategies.

The third common framework is contingency theory (n = 19). The concept of fit is centre stage in this approach. Contingency theory asserts that organizational structure and environment must fit together if an organization is to survive (Drazin and Van de Ven, 1985). The main appearance of contingency theory in our sample is to examine how strategy implementation processes are shaped by the external environment.

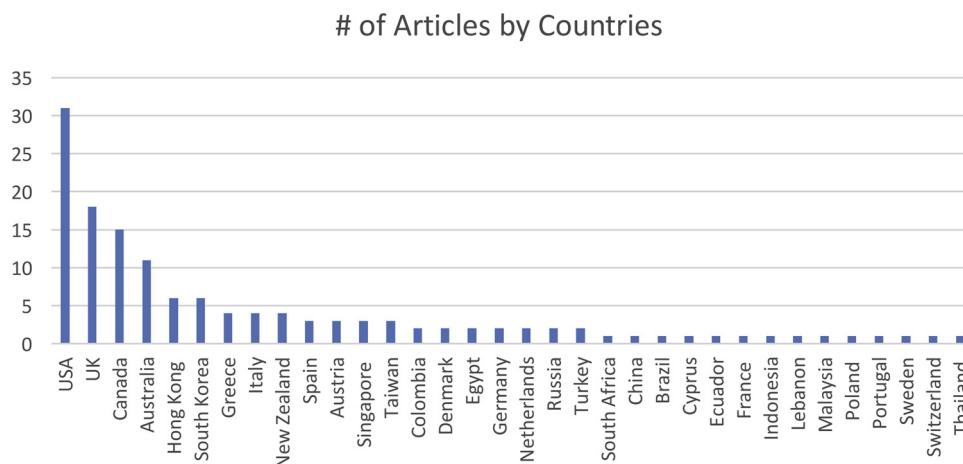


Fig. 2. Number of articles by countries.

Social capital theory is the fourth most commonly used framework ($n = 14$) in the sample. Social capital has been defined as “the sum of actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by individuals or social units” (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998, p.243). Social capital theory has a focus on social relationships and networks and has been used extensively to examine outcomes at individual and organization levels (Payne et al., 2011). The important role of social capital in strategic management has also been established by previous researchers (Acquaah, 2007). Most deployments of social capital theory in hospitality and tourism management articles have sought to investigate the effects of organizational characteristics on strategy implementation.

Agency theory is the next most commonly encountered framework in the sample ($n = 13$). It derives from economics and examines the principal-agent relationships which typically involve delegation in work settings (Eisenhardt, 1989). The agency problem is frequently encountered in such relationships since the principal and agent may have divergent interests and it is costly to verify the work of the agent (Eisenhardt, 1989; Jensen, 1994). In our sample, agency theory is used most prominently for the examination of management control issues to ensure the effectiveness of strategy implementation.

Industrial organization theory ($n = 6$) follows agency theory in terms of incidence. Industrial organization theory is the essence of Porter’s five forces model and places reliance on industry forces to explain strategic firm behaviours (Porter, 1981). According to this theory, industry forces constrain firm level strategy formulation, implementation and performance (Young et al., 1996). In our sample, industrial organization was used primarily to demonstrate barriers and constraints to the implementation of marketing strategies. Relative to mainstream studies, however, industrial organization is used infrequently in hospitality.

Human capital theory ($n = 4$) is the least commonly used theory in our sample. This approach focuses on individual capabilities and their development rather than on social ties (Nafukho et al., 2004). Human capital is the combination of knowledge, information, ideas, skills, and health of an individual (Becker, 2009). According to human capital theory, individuals with greater human capital are likely to succeed more in strategy implementation (Greer et al., 2017; Dimov and Shepherd, 2005). A small number of articles in our sample used human capital theory to study managerial capabilities in strategy implementation. When we compare hospitality and tourism management with mainstream strategic management, it is notable to observe such minimal interest in the role of individual qualities in strategy implementation.

Lastly, we observed the changing preferences for theoretical perspective by analyzing the use of theories by year and ordering. The

relevant findings are presented in Fig. 3.

Little theoretical variation was evident in most of the years leading up to 2005. Prior to 2005 only one or two different theoretical perspectives were observable, except in the case of 1997 and 2001. We observed an increase in the use of different theoretical frameworks after 2005.

It is noteworthy that human capital theory was first observed rather late (in 2001) but has been on the rise over the past two years. A similar situation holds for industrial organization theory which has attracted increasing recent interest. Agency theory has been another subject of renewed scholarly interest, particularly over the past decade. Social capital, on the other hand has been attracting less recent attention. The trend is more stable in the case of contingency theory, stakeholder theory and the resource-based view. Despite periodic setbacks, there has been consistent use of these theories.

4.3. Countries of research focus

This section considers countries where empirical studies have been conducted. Our review shows that only six studies used data that were collected in multiple countries. 108 studies were conducted in the single country settings. Amongst the single country studies, 74 were explorative and 32 of them tested theory or theories. In addition, all the studies that used data from multiple countries are explorative studies. Given the limited generalizability of explorative studies, it is evident that strategy implementation research in hospitality and tourism has been highly country specific. This points to a need for more investigations that compare data from different countries.

4.4. Research types and methodologies

The following section presents the findings about methodologies deployed in the various articles under review. We first classified the type of research into three categories according to their aims: explorative, theory building and theory testing. Explorative studies include open-ended inquiries about a phenomenon of interest, whereas theory building studies aimed to build a theoretical framework using different concepts and theory testing studies conducted empirical tests to verify predetermined theories. According to this classification, explorative studies constitute the majority in our sample ($n = 87$) and are followed by theory testing ($n = 32$) and theory building studies ($n = 22$). The prominence of explorative studies signals a need for theory development and indicates that new investigations should be undertaken to validate new constructs and propositions. Only a limited number of studies made explicit mention of their methods ($n = 32$). In these studies the methods deployed were: single case study ($n = 23$),

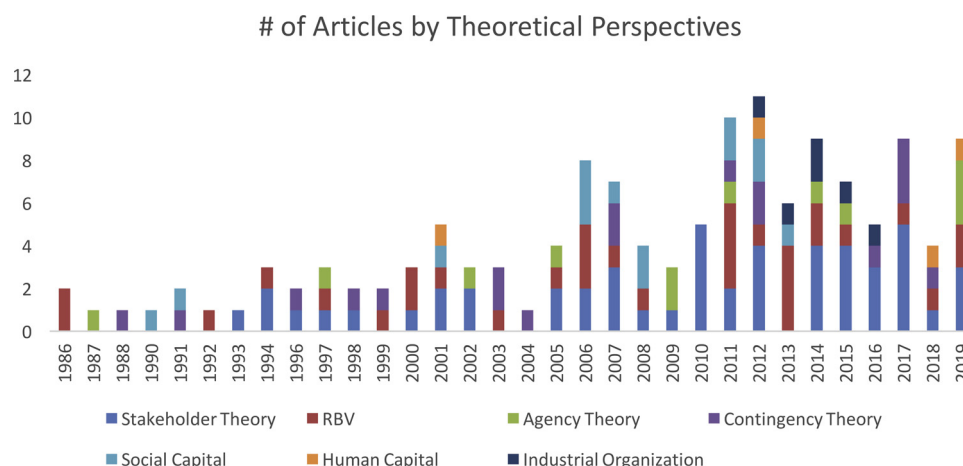


Fig. 3. Number of articles by theoretical perspectives.

Table 2
Categorization of research according to the life cycle framework.
Adopted from Edmondson and McManus (2007).

	NASCENT	INTERMEDIATE	MATURE
Research questions	Open-ended inquiry about a topic (n = 103)	Proposed relationships between new and established constructs (n = 2)	Focused questions and/or hypotheses relating established constructs (n = 34)
Type of data	Qualitative (n = 71)	Both qualitative and quantitative (n = 8)	Quantitative (n = 39)
Data collection method	Interviews, observations, documents (n = 78)	Interviews, observations, documents (n = 78)	Surveys, systematically coded and quantified interviews and observations (n = 40)
Constructs and measures	New constructs, few formal measures (n = 0)	One or more new constructs and/or new measures (n = 0)	Established constructs and measures (n = 139)
Goal of data analysis	Identifying patterns and themes in the data (n = 72)	Preliminary or exploratory testing of new propositions and/or new constructs (n = 19)	Hypothesis Testing (n = 27)
Method of data analysis	Thematic content analysis to identify new constructs (n = 2)	Content analysis, exploratory statistics, and preliminary tests (n = 76)	Statistical analysis (n = 39)
Theoretical contribution	A suggestive theory, often an invitation for further work on the issue or set of issues opened up by the study (n = 0)	A provisional theory, often one that integrates previously separate bodies of work (n = 25)	A supported theory that may add specificity, new mechanisms, or new boundaries to existing theories (n = 114)

multiple case study (n = 8) and action research (n = 1). The minimal use of well-defined theoretical frameworks stemmed primarily from the high number of explorative articles. However, it also indicates a need for more studies to test and verify existing theories in the hospitality and tourism context.

The current authors next deployed Edmondson and McManus's (2007) research life cycle framework in order to categorize the articles under seven dimensions. These were respectively: research questions, type of data collected, data collection methods, constructs and measures, goal of data analysis, data analysis methods and theoretical contributions. This approach provided a useful tool for the authors to place hospitality and tourism studies within the wider field of strategic management research. According to this framework, research articles fit into one of three phases: nascent, intermediate or mature. The following section presents the characteristics of the various phases and how our sample fits into the Edmondson and McManus's (2007) framework.

In this framework, articles are assessed according to the above-mentioned seven dimensions. These characteristics are used to locate them within the research life cycle. Table 2 includes the typical properties of nascent, intermediate and mature research articles. However, these categories should be seen as a continuum rather than as rigid and mutually exclusive points.

In Table 2 we observe that researchers preferred open-ended inquiries rather than asking focused research questions or testing hypotheses. Accordingly, there was a predominance of qualitative over quantitative data. Only a tiny fraction of the sample used hybrid or mixed data. While surveys were the main data collection method for studies testing existing theories, it was unsurprising that nascent and intermediate research relied primarily on interviews and text data. When constructs and measures are considered, all of the studies employed established constructs or measures and none introduced any new concepts. Researchers evidently preferred using existing constructs and measures for the hospitality and tourism context, rather than developing something new. Most of the studies that included data analysis aimed to identify patterns in data, while others aimed to run preliminary tests on new propositions and to test formal hypotheses. Content analysis was the primary method for examining qualitative data, though analyses of thematic content were only undertaken in two studies. The remaining articles used common statistical techniques to analyse quantitative data.

Lastly, it is notable that none of the studies in the sample introduced a suggestive theory that invites further work on a set of issues. Most contributed to the literature by adding specificity, new mechanisms, or new boundaries to existing theories. The other studies offered a provisional theoretical contribution by integrating separate bodies of work. When the overall state of the strategy implementation literature in

hospitality and tourism is evaluated, we see that most articles fit into the nascent or intermediate research categories. In other words, we can safely claim that strategy implementation research in hospitality and tourism remains immature. At best, it may be concluded that hospitality and tourism articles provided provisional theoretical contributions. Combining these two facts, there is a need for stronger theoretical contributions in the area, for methodological refinements and empirical testing. Future studies should both introduce generalizable and testable theories emerging from the field and test existing theories more intensively.

4.5. Content of the research

This section aims to identify the strategy implementation issues that have been most actively examined by hospitality and tourism scholars. We observe the predominance across the relevant literature of some issues over others. Six topic clusters of research are identified in our review: (1) understanding how relationships with the external environment are managed in strategy implementation, (2) examining how organizational characteristics influence strategy implementation, (3) exploring success factors and impediments in strategy implementation, (4) developing strategy implementation frameworks and (5) assessing strategy implementation effectiveness. Table 3 provides a detailed presentation of the various topic clusters and issues that have been explored.

It is evident in Table 3 that the largest number of articles have dealt with success factors and impediments respectively in strategy implementation. This indicates that strategy implementation has been examined as a managerial concern rather than as a theoretical one. Relative to other sub-branches, more attention has been given within this cluster towards external barriers to strategy implementation and success factors in marketing strategy implementation for hotels and destinations. Another interesting finding in this cluster was that sustainability is the third most common area in which implementation issues are discussed. This is consistent with the increasing popularity of sustainability research in management and organization studies. Information technology, innovation and revenue management strategies are the least studied subjects in terms of implementation success. Considering the increasing importance of data management and innovation in business performance and competitiveness, information technologies and innovation deserve more attention from hospitality and tourism researchers. It is noted that big data and artificial intelligence are especially relevant for strategy research (Van Rijmenam et al., 2019). Therefore, more studies are needed in hospitality and tourism to address their current status and future promise for strategy implementation.

Articles on the role of organizational characteristics in strategy

Table 3
Content analysis of strategy implementation articles in hospitality and tourism.

TOPIC CLUSTER	ISSUES EXPLORED
Understanding how relationships with the external environment are managed during strategy implementation (n = 30)	Stakeholder relationships in the implementation of tourism strategies (n = 16) Cooperation of hotels for implementing joint strategies (n = 2) Marketing strategy implementation for destinations (n = 4) Implementation of corporate social responsibility strategies in hotels and restaurants (n = 3) Implementation of sustainability strategies in hotels (n = 1) Implementation of customer relationship strategies in restaurants (n = 1) Impact of environmental characteristics on strategy implementation (n = 2) Industry forces and strategy implementation in hotels (n = 1)
Examining how organizational characteristics influence strategy implementation (n = 43)	Balanced scorecard implementation in hotels (n = 2) Corporate boards and implementation of diversification strategies (n = 1) Brand strategy implementation for hotels (n = 1) Role of budgeting in implementing marketing strategies (n = 1) Implementation of cost management strategies in hotels (n = 1) Implementing corporate social responsibility strategies in casinos (n = 1) Implementation of marketing strategies in hotels and restaurants (n = 9) Implementation of expansion strategies in hotels (n = 2) Implementing human resources strategies in hospitality businesses (n = 6) Information technology strategies in hotels (n = 1) Managerial capabilities and strategy implementation (n = 4) Organizational structure and strategy implementation (n = 6) Organizational communication and strategy implementation (n = 1) Employee participation in strategy implementation (n = 6) Organizational politics and strategy implementation (1)
Exploring success factors and impediments in strategy implementation (n = 51)	External barriers to strategy implementation (n = 12) Internal barriers to strategy implementation (n = 4) Success factors in marketing strategy implementation for hotels and destinations (n = 21) Success factors in sustainability strategy implementation for hotels and destinations (n = 8) Stakeholder factors in successful strategy implementation (n = 3) Success factors in information technology strategy implementation (n = 1) Success factors in innovation technology strategy implementation (n = 1) Success factors in revenue management strategy implementation (n = 1)
Developing strategy implementation frameworks (n = 11)	Strategy implementation framework for tourism management and marketing (n = 9) Strategy implementation frameworks for revenue management (n = 1) Strategy implementation framework for total quality management (n = 1)
Assessing strategy implementation effectiveness (n = 3)	Measuring implementation performance for tourism marketing (n = 2) Measuring implementation performance for hotels (n = 1)

implementation constitute the second largest topic cluster. Human resource development, employee participation, organizational structure and managerial capabilities are among the most studied factors that influence strategy implementation. Marketing is again the most examined organizational function similar to the previous cluster. On the other hand, governance of strategy implementation processes has been largely neglected at the organizational level. Then minimal research on the governance of strategy implementation consists of two articles on balanced scorecard applications and a single article on corporate boards. Governance is critically important for effective implementation since it functions both as a control mechanism to address principal-agent problems and as a feedback mechanism that ensures information flow. Thus, governance of strategy implementation at the organizational level is a potential investigative avenue for future researchers.

The third largest cluster includes articles that aim to understand how relationships with the external environment are managed during strategy implementation. Stakeholder relationships in tourism development strategies are examined by more than half of the articles in this group. These articles typically study how different bodies cooperate in developing a tourism region. The other subbranches contain low numbers of articles. Considering that inter-organizational relationships lie at the center of organization-environment interactions, more studies are needed on how businesses manage their environment. This is especially the case for studies about the management of resource dependencies through cooperation and negotiation with other actors. Such investigations would make an important contribution to the field.

Developing strategy implementation frameworks is the next topic cluster and features a relatively small number of articles. Since strategy implementation is not peculiar to hospitality and tourism, it is natural to adopt implementation processes that have been developed outside the field. However, it would be interesting to determine the extent to which hospitality and tourism constitutes a unique context that has sector specific influence on strategy implementation.

Lastly, assessment of strategy implementation performance contains only three articles and constitutes the smallest cluster. This is indicative of the lack of interest in post-implementation issues in hospitality and tourism. Since performance assessment is a fundamental component of strategy evaluation, it serves as an important feedback mechanism for rearranging and improving strategy implementation (Tayler, 2010). Hospitality and tourism studies can potentially benefit from innovative investigations of strategy implementation assessment.

5. Future research opportunities

This section highlights future research directions, drawing on gaps in the literature and classifications based on the research life cycle. We also provide possible research questions that are applicable to each knowledge gap.

Our review has identified four types of gap in the literature and prospective future avenues for research. The first type of gap concerns context. Given the increasingly international nature of the hospitality and tourism sector, we believe that multi-country studies deserve

Table 4
Topic clusters and future research questions.

TYPE OF GAP	SAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the differences between multinational and single country businesses in terms of strategy implementation in the hospitality and tourism industry?
Theoretical Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do cultural traits affect how strategies are implemented in the hospitality and tourism industry? • How do national institutions affect multinational businesses in the hospitality and tourism industry while executing their strategies? • How do strategy implementation tools gain legitimacy in hospitality and tourism organizations?
Research content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do resource dependencies affect strategy implementation in hospitality and tourism organizations? • How does diversity affect strategy implementation in hospitality and tourism organizations? • How do new technologies affect organizational actors' implementation efforts in hospitality and tourism organizations? • What type of leadership is likely to get better results in strategy implementation in hospitality and tourism organizations? • How do hospitality and tourism organizations approach new strategy tools such as strategy maps? • How do multinational businesses in the hospitality and tourism industry establish their strategy implementation frameworks? • How are the tensions between the corporate headquarters and subsidiaries handled in the strategy implementation processes of multinational businesses in the hospitality and tourism industry? • What are the success factors of strategy implementation in multinational hospitality and tourism businesses?

greater attention. Considering that strategy implementation is influenced by both context and by organizational factors, cross-country comparative studies can illuminate the issues that are faced by multinational hospitality businesses. For example, comparative case studies may offer an enhanced understanding of how successful implementation processes can be transferred to properties in other countries across international hotel chains.

The second gap concerns theoretical perspectives. The current literature has deployed a narrow range of theoretical frameworks to address a limited range of important topics. Future studies may use new theoretical frameworks such as resource dependence theory or new institutional theory to shed light on implementation related topics. For example, resource dependence theory may prove useful when examining how hospitality businesses implement strategies to manage their resource dependencies with the external environment. Meanwhile, institutional theory may add new insights about how strategy implementation practices are influenced by different institutional arrangements in various contexts. On the other hand, future studies can also apply previously used theories to new topics. For example, agency theory may be deployed to examine the principal-agent relationships between company headquarters and foreign branches in hotel chains.

The third gap relates to methodology. Most of the studies which provide explicit expression of their preferred methods use single case studies. More variation is needed in terms of research methods if relevant issues are to be addressed accurately. Where case studies are used they should extend multiple cases in order to enable comparison within samples. Secondly, our overall findings about the research life cycle have shown that strategy implementation research in hospitality and tourism remains immature. More testing of theory is needed to move this research area towards maturity. It was also striking that explorative studies have been used intensively, though no suggestive theory has been produced for the area. Those conducting future explorative studies should aim to make a stronger theoretical contribution. We also observed that hybrid data were only used in a small number of studies. The deployment of mixed research methods might enable researchers to provide more significant theoretical contributions. To date, even theory testing studies did not express their theoretical approach explicitly or state the theories that were being tested. Future studies should give greater prominence to the refinement of methodologies and clearer articulation of research aims.

The fourth type of gap in the literature pertains to research content. Strategy implementation studies should address emerging trends that are likely to affect the future of strategy implementation. Advances in information technologies, artificial intelligence and big data are among the top trends that will cause long-lasting changes to the implementation of strategy in hospitality and tourism. Such topics evidently offer fruitful research avenues for the future. Another under-researched

subject is the organizational governance of strategy implementation. Governance related articles in the literature generally focused on relationships with external stakeholders. However, governance mechanisms for strategy implementation inside the organization did not receive the attention that they deserved. Future researchers should address overlooked issues such as control mechanisms, implementation tools, corporate politics and power relations among related actors. A largely neglected area of content was the assessment of implementation performance. Measuring implementation performance serves an important function in strategy evaluation and therefore deserves more interest from future researchers. A final research domain for potential contributions is the development of new strategy implementation frameworks for hospitality organizations. The topic clusters and the research life cycle framework offer novel insights about optimal research directions. The four types of gap in the literature and possible future research questions are presented in Table 4.

6. Conclusions

This study has provided a systematic literature review of strategy implementation research in tourism and hospitality, and has presented the selection and analysis of 139 articles that were published during the period 1986–2019. By conducting a literature analysis, we have identified five topic clusters and four major gaps in the strategy implementation literature within hospitality and tourism.

The main contribution of the study has been to provide a picture of the current state and trends in the literature, by grouping articles according to features such as theoretical perspectives, research topics, countries and methodologies. Through such means, the paper has identified gaps that also point to potentially fruitful avenues of research.

Some limitations of the study should also be noted. Firstly, our search was confined to hospitality and tourism journals. Our sample may have missed articles in other journals that utilize data from hospitality and tourism organizations. Second, we excluded book chapters, conference proceedings and grey literature. Nevertheless, we believe that the selected articles are sufficient to cover a wide range of topics related to the research area. Third, though we employed a multitude of search terms that would cover different aspects of strategy implementation, we may have missed related articles with different keywords. Lastly, our suggestions for future research are based on the literature analysis, leaving limited scope for creativity. However, we believe that our approach is justified, since we have ensured the reliability of the process by following transparent steps.

In conclusion, this review provides a clear picture of the strategy implementation literature in tourism and hospitality through an analysis of the content and methodologies of 139 articles. Our analysis has identified four major gaps in the literature and has offered possible

future research questions pertaining to different topic clusters. Having addressed significant gaps in the literature, we hope that this paper will provide a stimulus for future researchers.

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