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A systematic review of systematic reviews in tourism

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ABSTRACT

Traditional literature reviews and more advanced systematic reviews have been a focal point in assessing the epistemological progress of any field. However, studies assessing the nature and quality of the systematic review papers published in tourism and hospitality literature are scarce. Considering the items of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses, this study reviews how tourism and hospitality scholars have operationalised systematic reviews. All systematic reviews published across 34 tourism journals until 2017 were considered for this review and the results of the study portray multiple limitations in the design, organization and execution of current systematic reviews.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, undertaking a review of the literature has been conceived as a method for enabling researchers to map the existing intellectual territory (Weed, 2006). Reviews of "undiscovered public knowledge" (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003) – a term used to identify knowledge circulating in the public domain but not properly assessed and coherently organised – have been regarded as a crucial exercise to develop policies and expand the boundaries of existing research based on the maximum (re)use of previous research findings. More specifically, the importance of reviews lies on the recognition that "most research can only be understood in context – and a key part of that context consists of the results of other studies" (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, p. 3). Weed (2006, p. 261) points out that reviews of the literature allow researchers to "filter out research that contributes little (clearing the brickyard), moderate variable findings of similar research (sorting out the bricks), and build edifices of previously undiscovered public knowledge".

It is important to emphasise that different typologies of reviews exist. Grant and Booth (2009), for example, identify 14 types of reviews, based on the different methods employed for searching, appraising, synthesising and analysing the items constituting the body of knowledge. However, Noblit and Hare (2018) have argued that the traditional methods employed to conduct literature reviews present several limitations, including a lack of scientific rigour. As Briner and Walshe (2014, p. 417) have claimed, "traditional or narrative literature reviews, while useful in many ways, have rather different and often unclear aims, do not adopt an explicit or systematic method, cherry-pick research, may adopt a stance, and include only evidence that tends to support that position". In short, traditional literature reviews have been critiqued for their lack of reliability, validity, and extent of research bias in the production of evidence-based knowledge (Grant and Booth, 2009). These limitations have encouraged scholars to develop more reliable and comprehensive assessments of the existing knowledge (Green et al., 2008).

Systematic approaches for conducting reviews of "undiscovered public knowledge" have been developed in the medical field (i.e. Cochrane Collaboration- http://www.cochrane.org, National Health Science Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, National Institute for Clinical Excellence) with the intent to improve the quality and transparency of literature reviews by reducing biases and omissions (Tranfield et al., 2003). This type of reviews (and other associated methods, such as meta-analyses) adopts "a replicable, scientific and transparent process, in other words, a detailed technology that aims to minimise bias through exhaustive literature searches by providing an audit trail of the reviewers' decisions, procedures and conclusions." (Tranfield et al., 2003, p. 209). They apply a range of methods in order to conduct research on existing research (Briner & Walshe, 2014). The fundamental characteristic that differentiates systematic reviews from other types of reviews concerns the methodical procedures involved in the synthesis of findings, which provide unbiased searches with a higher degree of efficiency and quality (Liberati et al., 2009; Mulrow, 1994). Particularly, the term 'systematic' refers to a research protocol that "helps protect objectivity by providing explicit descriptions of the

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steps taken" (Tranfield et al., 2003, p. 215), including the specific questions, the focus of the study, the research strategy and the inclusion and exclusion criteria used for the reviews (Davies & Crombie, 1998). By doing so, systematic reviews are capable of supporting evidence-based practices and are regarded as a 'fundamental scientific activity' in many disciplines (both science and social science) (Mulrow, 1994, p. 597).

As the field of tourism has progressed since the 1970s (Airey, 2015), its knowledge base has gradually expanded. Researchers have participated in the mapping of the field by casting light into its epistemological, theoretical and methodological developments (see Airey, 2015; Law, Sun, Fong, & Fu, 2016; Huang & Chen, 2016; Khoo-Lattimore, Mura, & Yung, 2017; Mura & Pahlevan Sharif, 2015; Wijesinghe, Mura, & Bouchon, 2017). However, although multiple literature reviews and some systematic reviews have been conducted in tourism, the approaches and basic tenets underpinning these assessments are unknown. As such, there exists a gap in the tourism literature concerning the ways in which researchers in the field have undertaken systematic reviews (or general reviews) of the literature.

To our best knowledge, at the current time, the study conducted by Kim, Bai, Kim, and Chon (2018) is the only work that provides a systematic analysis of review papers in the hospitality and tourism literature. However, although their work represents a solid contribution to our understanding of the trends and impacts of the existing review studies, it only considers work published in *Web of Science* indexed journals (namely 32 journals). A further limitation of the study is the analysis itself, which focuses on the type of methods used, citation analysis, the scope of studies, and research trends in general, but does not focus on the procedures undertaken by tourism researchers conducting systematic reviews.

Based on these assumptions, the current study was conceived to address the need to analyse the quality of systematic reviews in tourism in a more comprehensive fashion, paying particular attention to the specific guidelines followed in these reviews. More specifically, by considering the items of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Liberati et al., 2009), the current study analyses systematic reviews in the field of tourism to shed light on the criteria employed to conduct the reviews. PRISMA (Liberati et al., 2009) is a protocol to conduct systematic reviews consisting of a 27-item checklist and a four-phase flow diagram (see Fig. 1), which was developed in the medical field by a group of 29 scholars with the intent to increase the transparency and accuracy of literature reviews. The reason behind the choice of PRISMA (Liberati et al., 2009) over other existing protocols lies on the recognition of its comprehensiveness, its use in several disciplines worldwide beyond the medical fields, and its potential to increase consistency across reviews.

Drawing on Dwivedi, Rana, Chen, & Williams (2011), Kim et al. (2018, p. 49) note that "for a field to progress, it must be conscious of its historical patterns to obtain insights into possible future developments and implications that contribute to the accumulation of knowledge". We believe that the ways in which systematic reviews have been operationalised in research have major implications for those who 'utilize' their findings. Hence, we contend that a comprehensive analysis of systematic reviews in tourism against the PRISMA checklist would contribute to having a better understanding of the execution, quality and rigour of systematic reviews. Overall, through the use of a systematic review of review studies in the field, the current study aims to provide recommendations to improve the validity and reliability of future reviews in hospitality and tourism.

2. Methods

A systematic review of systematic review papers (hereafter meta-review) in tourism and hospitality was performed to identify how scholars in this field conducted and reported systematic quantitative literature reviews. This systematic review was conducted by following the reporting checklist of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA; Liberati et al. 2009). For the purpose of this study, a comprehensive literature search was undertaken to identify systematic review papers. More specifically, all the papers published until the end of June 2017 in tourism and hospitality journals, included in the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) journal quality list were searched for systematic review papers (Mura and Pahlevan Sharif, 2017). The choice of the ABDC list lies on the fact that it is more comprehensive than other journal ranking lists, such as social sciences citation index (SSCI), Association of Business Schools (ABS), and Scopus (Mura & Pahlevan Sharif, 2015). Sixty six journals (5 A*, 11 A, 22 B, and 28 C journals) were included in the ABDC master journal list.

A protocol was developed in advance to document the analysis method and inclusion criteria. We utilized Scopus, Google Scholar, Emerald, ProQuest, Tandfonline, and in some cases the website of the journals to search for systematic reviews published in the selected journals containing the term "review" in their titles, abstracts, and/or keywords while no date and language restrictions were imposed. The reason for not selecting "systematic" as a search keyword was to avoid missing systematic reviews that did not use the term "systematic" in their titles, abstracts, or keywords. Indeed, due to the lack of a detailed checklist (such as PRISMA) for conducting a systematic review in social sciences, even the authors who intended to perform a systematic review have to refer to the existing narrative guidelines (e.g. Petticrew & Roberts, 2006; Pickering & Bryne, 2014) and perhaps perform and report the steps selectively and arbitrary. The last search was run on 1st July 2017.

The title, abstract, keywords, authors' names and affiliations, journal name, and year of publication of the identified records were exported to an MS Excel spreadsheet. Two independent reviewers screened the titles and abstracts of the records independently and papers that clearly were not systematic reviews, such as empirical, descriptive, and conceptual papers, were discarded. Then, the two reviewers performed eligibility assessment by carefully screening the full texts of the remaining papers independently. During this phase, disagreements between the reviewers were discussed and resolved by consensus. If no agreement could be reached, the views of a third reviewer would have been taken into consideration. We included all review papers that to some extent showed that the methods they used to identify and select the literature were explicit, reproducible and without a priori assumptions on the relevance of the literature selected (Booth, 2016; Petticrew & Roberts, 2006; Pickering & Bryne, 2014). More specifically, we selected reviews that identified and selected papers by searching pre-selected keywords in journal databases (Pickering & Bryne, 2014). Also, studies that reviewed papers published in only one journal were removed. In contrast to systematic literature reviews, narrative literature reviews identify and select literature based on the authors' judgment, typically without mentioning the criteria employed to conduct the search. We acknowledge that the authors of some of the papers that we identified and included in this study did not label their reviews as "systematic". However, as all the selected papers reported that they identified literature using keywords and databases/journals rather than subjectively, they can be considered as reviews whose methods resemble systematic approaches. In this respect, by reviewing these "grey reviews" this study not only improves our understanding of systematic reviews (which would enhance the validity of the findings of such reviews) but also provides guidelines on how to conduct a review systematically.

The MS Excel spreadsheet was modified by adding the items for which data were sought for data management. More specifically, the bibliographic details of the included studies, the essential items of PRISMA checklist with some extensions, and an item to address reporting the PRISMA flowchart were added to the data management spreadsheet (see Table 2). Items related to the risk of bias, confidence intervals, measures of consistency, sensitivity or subgroup analyses,

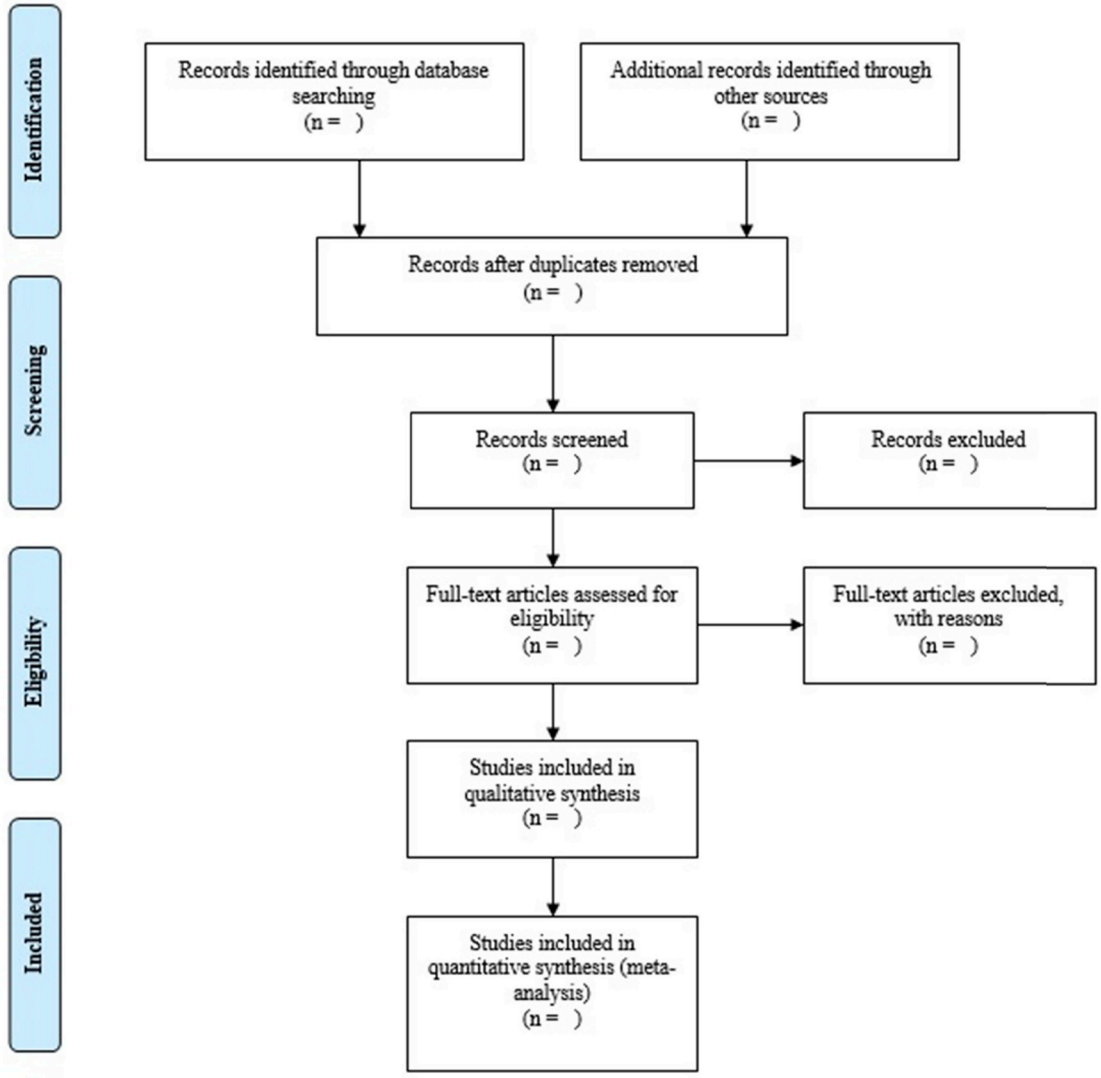

Fig. 1. The PRISMA flow diagram.

outcome level assessment, and combining results of meta-analysis studies (items 12–16 and 19, 20, 22, and 23) were omitted as they were not applicable to systematic reviews in this field and the scope of this study. We pilot-tested 40 randomly-selected included papers and refined the checklist accordingly. During the pilot test we amended some of the items of the checklist that despite being relevant within the medical fields, may not be of value to hospitality and tourism scholars. For example, PICOS components representing participants, interventions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design were removed from several items (i.e. objectives in the introduction section, eligibility criteria and data items from the methods section, as well as study characteristics from the results section). In the end, 18 items remained in the checklist.

One author extracted the data from the included papers and the second author checked the extracted data. Disagreements were resolved by discussion between the two reviewers. Subsequently, all the included papers were carefully reviewed to extract and code the data.

3. Results

The current study reviewed 192 review papers. The study selection process has been summarized in Fig. 2. While the literature search against the databases and search engines resulted in 2420 records, 1848 were eliminated as they were not systematic reviews, despite mentioning the keyword “review” in their titles, abstracts, and/or keywords. The full texts of the remaining 572 reviews were carefully screened and 378 reviews were excluded, as they did not meet the eligibility criteria. Two additional studies were discarded as although they claimed that they conducted systematic reviews, they were more traditional narrative reviews (for example see Gössling, Scott, Hall, Ceron, & Dubois, 2012; El-Gohary ad Eid, 2012). In the end, 192 papers from 34 journals (49 papers from A*, 85 from A, 51 from B, and 7 from C journals) remained.

Table 1 reports the journals name and year of publication of included reviews. The results show that conducting reviews systematically is growing over time. More than 75% of the reviews were conducted since 2012 and only less than 9% of them were conducted before 2009. Moreover, highly ranked journals, based on ABDC ranking system, published more systematic review papers. While A* and A journals published 9.80 and 7.73 reviews per journal respectively, each B and C journals on average published 2.32 and 0.25 reviews respectively. This clearly shows a link between journal quality ranking and publishing systematic review papers.

More than 40% of the reviews used Google Scholar to search for literature followed by EBSCO, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, and Scopus/Elsevier. The most commonly used tourism journals to search for

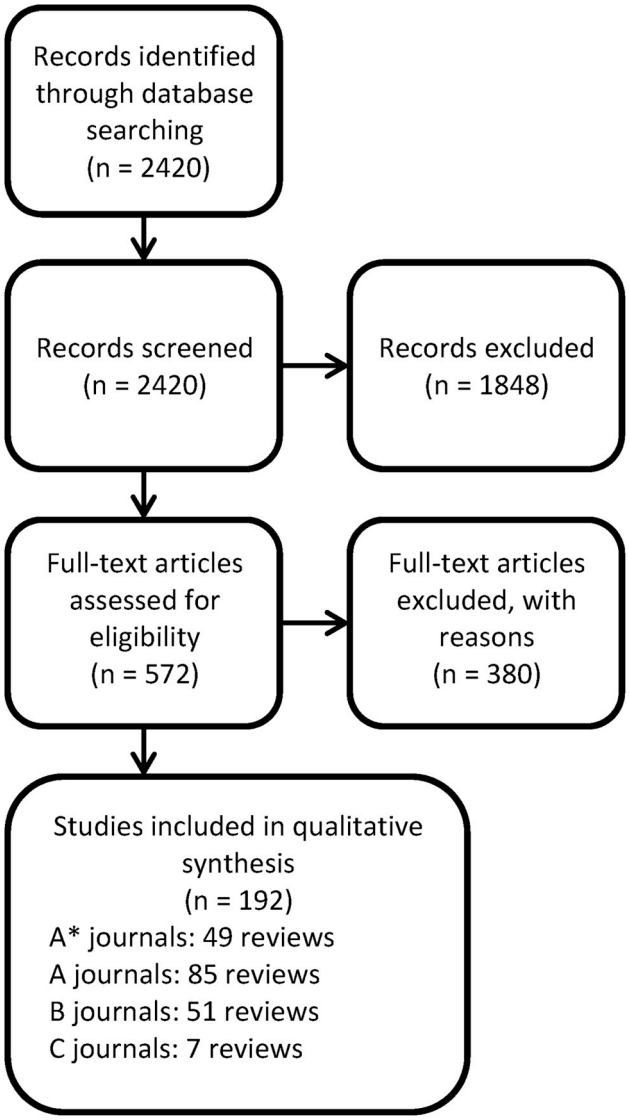

Fig. 2. Flow chart of study selection process.

literature included all five A* (Tourism Management, 25%; Annals of Tourism Research, 20.83%; Journal of Travel Research, 19.79%; International Journal of Hospitality Management, 15.63%; and Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 9.90%) and four A tourism and hospitality journals (International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 15.63%; Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research, 15.10%; Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, 13.02%; and Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing, 8.85%).

Table 2 reports a summary assessing the extent to which the included reviews are in accordance with the PRISMA checklist. This is followed by a summary of the findings.

3.1. Title, abstract and introduction

The results revealed that the title of 14 papers (7.29%) contained the term "systematic review". The titles of half of the papers did not contain the words "literature review" or "review". Some of the systematic reviews identified their report as a meta-analysis, meta-study, or narrative review. The abstracts of about 15% of the reviews (29 reviews) were structured and addressed the methods appropriately. This could be partly due to the format prescribed by the journals. More than 90% of the reviews described the rationale for the review (n = 175, 91.15%) and provided an explicit statement of the research questions or research objectives being addressed (n = 180, 93.75%).

3.2. Methods

Some reviews discussed the methods in the introduction section (n = 41, 21.35%). Five reviews used a protocol to conduct the review, a figure that indicates that the registration of a systematic review with a protocol is not yet common in this field. In terms of defining and reporting study characteristics used as eligibility criteria to include in the literature, the majority of reviews specified years considered (n = 159, 82.81%) and publication status (n = 111, 57.81%). While 69 reviews (35.94%) reported whether they imposed language restrictions, 57 (29.69%) reported how they assessed the relevance of the identified literature by providing some examples. The majority of the reviews described information sources in the search (e.g. databases, search engines, selected journals, etc.). Less than 10% of the reviews (n = 18) only provided some examples of the information sources. With regard to the search date, 74 reviews (38.54%) explicitly or implicitly only reported the year of conducting the search, 42 (21.88%) reported month and year, and 9 (4.69%) reported the exact date in which the search was performed. The majority of reviews (n = 111, 57.81%) did not provide the full list of keywords and terms employed to search the databases, an aspect that does not allow other researchers to repeat the search.

Forty-eight reviews (25.00%) reported how the retrieved records were initially screened (typically screening titles and abstracts) and 30 (15.63%) how often it was necessary to review the full text. Performing an eligibility assessment – either by an individual reviewer (n = 3, 1.56%) or by two reviewers independently (n = 20, 10.42%) – was indicated in 23 reviews. Also, the reviews lack transparency in terms of explaining the different aspects of the data collection process, including the data management method (n = 12, 6.25%) and whether the final data collection was conducted individually (n = 2, 1.04%) or by two independent reviewers (n = 31, 16.15%). Four reviews pilot-tested the data collection. Among them, 3 (1.56%) were conducted individually and 1 (0.52%) by two independent reviewers. Less than half of the reviews (n = 91, 47.40%) listed the variables for which data were sought.

3.3. Results

A total of 57 reviews (29.69%) reported the number of studies that were identified from electronic databases/sources. Less than 30 papers disclosed how many studies were excluded due to duplications (n = 26, 13.54%) and failure to meet the eligibility criteria (n = 29, 15.10%). The number of papers included in the reviews was disclosed in 182 reviews (94.79%). Five papers (2.60%) used a flow diagram to summarize the study selection process. Twenty five percent of the reviews (n = 48) listed the characteristics for which data were extracted. Not many reviews reported the context (n = 31, 16.15%), methods (n = 16, 8.33%), and sample size (n = 4, 2.08%) of the included papers. The majority of reviews synthesized the results (n = 148, 77.08%) and 56 (29.17%) provided the list of included papers in the text or appendix.

3.4. Discussion and funding

The findings were summarized in 74 reviews (38.54%) and 24 provided a summary of the findings in the conclusion (12.50%). The limitations of the review were addressed in 73 reviews (38.02%). The majority of the reviews provided a conclusion (n = 117, 60.94%) and 137 (71.35%) offered implications and/or suggestions for future research. Also, a total of 31 reviews (16.15%) described the sources of funding for conducting the review (if any).

Table 1
A summary of the names of the journals and year of publication of the included reviews.

Journal Names	ABDC Rank	2000–2002	2003–2005	2006–2008	2009–2011	2012–2014	2015–2017	Total
International Journal of Hospitality Management	A*	–	3	–	1	9	5	18
Tourism Management	A*	–	–	4	1	1	5	11
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	A*	1	–	1	2	–	5	9
Journal of Travel Research	A*	–	–	–	–	6	1	7
Annals of Tourism Research	A*	–	–	–	1	2	1	4
All A* Journals (5 listed journals)		**1 (2.04%)**	**3 (6.12%)**	**5 (10.20%)**	**5 (10.20%)**	**18 (36.73%)**	**17 (34.69%)**	**49 (100.00%)**
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	A	–	1	–	5	3	20	29
Current Issues in Tourism	A	–	–	1	–	6	12	19
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	A	–	–	–	4	3	7	14
Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	A	–	–	–	2	2	2	6
Tourism Analysis	A	–	–	2	1	–	2	5
International Journal of Tourism Research	A	–	–	–	1	–	3	4
Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	A	–	–	–	1	2	–	3
Tourism Geographies	A	–	–	–	–	–	2	2
Tourism Recreation Research	A	–	1	–	–	–	1	2
Tourism Economics	A	–	–	–	1	–	–	1
All A Journals (11 listed journals)		**0 (0.00%)**	**2 (2.35%)**	**3 (3.53%)**	**15 (17.65%)**	**16 (18.82%)**	**49 (57.65%)**	**85 (100.00%)**
Tourism Management Perspectives	B	–	–	–	–	7	7	14
Journal of China Tourism Research	B	–	–	–	3	1	2	6
Tourism Review	B	–	–	–	2	2	1	5
Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	B	–	–	–	1	1	2	4
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	B	–	–	1	–	1	2	4
International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration	B	–	–	1	–	–	2	3
Journal of Sport and Tourism	B	–	–	–	–	1	2	3
Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism	B	–	–	1	–	–	2	3
Information Technology and Tourism	B	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
International Journal of Culture, Tourism, and Hospitality Research	B	–	–	–	–	1	–	1
Journal of Convention and Event Tourism	B	–	–	–	–	1	–	1
Journal of Heritage Tourism	B	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	B	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events	B	–	–	–	1	–	–	1
Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism	B	–	–	–	–	–	2	2
Tourism Planning and Development	B	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
All B Journals (22 listed journals)		**0 (0.00%)**	**0 (0.00%)**	**3 (5.88%)**	**7 (13.73%)**	**15 (29.41%)**	**26 (50.98%)**	**51 (100.00%)**
International Journal of Tourism Policy	C	–	–	–	1	–	–	1
Journal of Teaching in Travel and Tourism	C	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes	C	–	–	–	2	–	3	5
All C Journals (28 listed journals)		**0 (0.00%)**	**0 (0.00%)**	**0 (0.00%)**	**3 (42.86%)**	**0 (0.00%)**	**4 (57.14%)**	**7 (100.00%)**
Total		**1 (0.52%)**	**5 (2.60%)**	**11 (5.73%)**	**30 (15.63%)**	**49 (25.52%)**	**96 (50.00%)**	**192 (100.00%)**

Note: Journals without any included systematic review were not listed in this table.

4. Discussion of the empirical material

As tourism (as a field of inquiry) has progressively expanded and supposedly achieved conceptual and methodological maturity in the last 40 years (Airey, 2015), various attempts of mapping and synthesising the existing body of knowledge have appeared in the literature. Among the different types of analysis conducted by scholars (see Weed, 2006), systematic reviews have emerged as one of the main strategies to assess the status of tourism knowledge. The results of our analysis clearly show this trend as they indicate a growing number of reviews conducted in tourism in the last decade. However, our study also raises doubts concerning the processes and procedures employed by the authors. More specifically, the question arises as to whether the reviews labelled by scholars as "systematic" employ systematic guidelines and practices to review the literature.

An important point to take into consideration is that systematic reviews (as any other types of reviews) often involve procedures and interpretivist practices that may not be necessarily objective. In this regard, MacLure (2005, p. 394) encourages scholars to critically assess "the *discourse* of systematic review", namely the fact that reviews not only represent but also produce knowledge within specific political and socio-cultural boundaries. Despite this, the idea of employing transparent and comprehensive guidelines is important to minimise bias and produce trustworthy (and less subjective) assessments of the existing body of knowledge. The PRISMA protocol (Liberati et al., 2009), for example, could be employed by tourism scholars as it represents one of the most comprehensive checklists to assess current and future trends in any field. Unfortunately, our study indicates that only five reviews followed a protocol. Moreover, in most of the reviews published in tourism journals many of the eligibility criteria provided by the PRISMA protocol were not taken into consideration or indicated in the paper. For example, even important information underpinning the review, such as the specific keywords selected to search the databases, was often not specified in the published reviews.

The inconsistencies emerging by comparing the different systematic reviews may be attributed to the multi/interdisciplinary nature of tourism. As a field of inquiry that has not achieved the status of a discipline yet (Tribe, 1997), tourism is a subject that is investigated by a group of scholars with different educational backgrounds (e.g. sociology, anthropology, business, marketing, communication, geography, etc.) and epistemological stances (e.g. positivist, interpretivist, critical theory, etc.). As such, it is not surprising that different practices and paradigms are mobilised to approach the field. This raises doubts concerning the supposed maturity of the field (Airey, 2015) and does not facilitate agreements on the type of protocols or checklists to use when producing a representation of the body of knowledge. Moreover, although the majority of reviews do provide implications and recommendations for future research, their conclusions rarely allow

Table 2
A summary of the assessment of the included reviews.

Year	2000–2002	2003–2005	2006–2008	2009–2011	2012–2014	2015–2017	Total
No. of included papers	1	5	11	30	49	96	192 (100.00%)
Title							
Systematic review/Systematic literature review	0	0	0	0	5	9	14 (7.29%)
Review	0	1	4	13	20	34	72 (37.50%)
Literature review	0	0	1	0	4	6	11 (5.73%)
Critical review	0	0	1	0	2	6	9 (4.69%)
Abstract							
Structured summary	0	1	1	5	2	20	29 (15.10%)
Introduction							
Rational	1	3	11	26	46	88	175 (91.15%)
Research Objectives/Questions	1	5	11	29	46	88	180 (93.75%)
Methods							
Methods misplacement	0	4	2	8	11	16	41 (21.35%)
Protocol and registration	0	1	0	1	1	2	5 (2.60%)
Reference for conducting the review	0	1	1	1	7	21	31 (16.15%)
Eligibility criteria							
Publication year	1	5	7	27	38	81	159 (82.81%)
Publication status	0	1	6	14	27	63	111 (57.81%)
Language	0	0	3	9	15	42	69 (35.94%)
Relevance with examples	1	1	4	3	14	34	57 (29.69%)
Others	0	1	3	2	6	9	21 (10.94%)
Information sources	1	3	9	25	41	88	167 (86.98%)
Only some examples of information sources	0	1	2	4	6	5	18 (9.38%)
Reference for selecting information sources	0	1	2	8	16	25	52 (27.08%)
Search date							
Date-month-year	0	0	0	1	5	3	9 (4.69%)
Month-year	0	0	4	4	14	20	42 (21.88%)
Year	1	5	5	22	19	22	74 (38.54%)
Search keywords	0	0	4	11	29	37	81 (42.19%)
Only some examples of search keywords	0	1	1	3	6	5	16 (8.33%)
Study selection process							
Retrieved records screening	0	0	2	4	16	26	48 (25.00%)
How often it was necessary to review the full text	0	0	1	6	12	11	30 (15.63%)
Conducting eligibility assessment	0	0	0	3	13	7	23 (11.98%)
Individually	0	0	0	0	2	1	3 (1.56%)
Two independent reviewers	0	0	0	3	11	6	20 (10.42%)
Resolving disagreements	0	0	0	0	7	4	11 (5.73%)
Data collection process							
Data management	0	0	2	0	2	8	12 (6.25%)
Data management software	0	0	0	1	1	3	5 (2.60%)
Pilot testing	0	0	2	2	0	0	4 (2.08%)
Individually	0	0	1	2	0	0	3 (1.56%)
Two independent reviewers	0	0	1	0	0	0	1 (0.52%)
Resolving disagreements	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0.00%)
Final Data collection	0	0	1	6	8	18	33 (17.19%)
Individually	0	0	0	2	0	0	2 (1.04%)
Two independent reviewers	0	0	1	4	8	18	31 (16.15%)
Resolving disagreements	0	0	0	3	8	15	26 (13.54%)
Listing data items	1	3	5	15	28	39	91 (47.40%)
Results							
Study selection							
No. of studies found and screened	0	2	4	3	10	38	57 (29.69%)
No. of duplicates if applicable	0	0	0	0	0	26	26 (13.54%)
No. of excluded papers	0	0	0	1	0	28	29 (15.10%)
Reasons for exclusions at each stage	0	0	0	0	0	3	3 (1.56%)
No. of included papers	1	4	10	30	44	93	182 (94.79%)
Flow diagram	0	0	0	1	0	4	5 (2.60%)
Study characteristics							
List all variables	1	1	2	9	18	17	48 (25.00%)
Only listing some of the variables	0	0	2	0	4	2	8 (4.17%)
Context of each study	0	0	2	4	11	14	31 (16.15%)
Contexts of some of the studies	0	0	2	0	4	1	7 (3.65%)
Methods	0	0	3	5	1	7	16 (8.33%)
Methods of some of the studies	0	0	1	0	1	1	3 (1.56%)
Sample size of each study	0	0	1	0	1	2	4 (2.08%)
Sample size of some of the studies	0	0	0	0	2	0	2 (1.04%)
Syntheses of results	1	5	11	30	49	52	148 (77.08%)
List of included papers	1	1	4	13	20	17	56 (29.17%)
Discussion							
Providing discussion and conclusion together	0	0	2	3	5	14	24 (12.50%)
Summary of evidence	1	2	5	10	30	26	74 (38.54%)
Limitations	0	0	5	13	24	31	73 (38.02%)
Conclusions	1	3	7	27	39	40	117 (60.94%)
Suggestions for future research/Implication	1	3	10	28	46	49	137 (71.35%)
Funding	0	0	2	4	17	8	31 (16.15%)

Table 3
Recommended items of PRISMA for future systematic reviews in tourism & hospitality.

Section/topic	Item number in PRISMA	Checklist item
TITLE		
Title	1	Identify the report as a systematic review.
ABSTRACT		
Structured summary	2	Provide a structured summary including, as applicable: background; objectives; data sources; study eligibility criteria, synthesis methods; results; limitations; conclusions and implications of key findings.
INTRODUCTION		
Rationale	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of what is already known.
Objectives	4	Provide an explicit statement of questions being addressed.
METHODS		
Protocol and registration	5	Indicate if a review protocol exists, if and where it can be accessed (e.g., Web address), and, if available, provide registration information including registration number.
Eligibility criteria	6	Specify study characteristics and report characteristics (e.g., years considered, language, publication status) used as criteria for eligibility, giving rationale.
Information sources	7	Describe all information sources (e.g., databases with dates of coverage, contact with study authors to identify additional studies) in the search and date last searched.
Search	8	Present full electronic search strategy for at least one database, including any limits used, such that it could be repeated.
Study selection	9	State the process for selecting studies (i.e., screening, eligibility included in systematic review).
Data collection process	10	Describe method of data extraction from reports (e.g., piloted forms, independently, in duplicate) and any processes for obtaining and confirming data from investigators.
Data items	11	List and define all variables for which data were sought and any assumptions and simplifications made.
RESULTS		
Study selection	17	Give numbers of studies screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the review, with reasons for exclusions at each stage, ideally with a flow diagram.
Study characteristics	18	For each study, present characteristics for which data were extracted (e.g., study size, context, methods) and provide the citations.
Synthesis of results	21	Present the main results of the review.
DISCUSSION		
Summary of evidence	24	Summarize the main findings including the strength of evidence for each main outcome; consider their relevance to key groups (e.g., researchers, practitioners, users, and policy makers).
Limitations	25	Discuss limitations at study and outcome level (e.g., risk of bias), and at review-level (e.g., incomplete retrieval of identified research, reporting bias).
Conclusions	26	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence, and implications for future research.
FUNDING		
Funding	27	Describe sources of funding for the systematic review and other support (e.g., supply of data); role of funders for the systematic review.

Adopted from Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, Altman DG, The PRISMA Group (2009). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement. PLoS Med 6(7): e1000097. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed1000097.

researchers to identify homogenous current and future trends.

This *status quo* has important implications for the tourism industry. Indeed, ideally systematic reviews, as evidence-based tools (Tranfield et al., 2003), should be able to support and inform the industry in several ways. In the medical fields, for example, reviews play an important role in directing future research paths and treatments (Smaïl-Faugeron, Fron-Chabouis, & Courson, 2014). Likewise, comprehensive and organic representations of tourism knowledge should be used by practitioners to develop tourism related policies and implement effective managerial and marketing practices. However, due to the fragmentary and inconsistent nature of the current systematic reviews in tourism, it is not clear to what extent they could support the industry.

5. Conclusion

Systematic reviews, as we have discussed, present an important avenue for scholars and practitioners to apply existing knowledge for further action (i.e. policy) and research. In this scenario, the protocols constituting systematic reviews ensure that the review itself is rigorous in order for it to provide viable (both objective and reliable) discussions and findings that could trigger further action. This study particularly focused on the PRISMA protocol items developed by Liberati et al. (2009) to increase and maintain the accuracy of review studies. By conducting a systematic review of review studies in tourism and hospitality, the results of the current study showcase the limitations of systematic reviews conducted by scholars in the field of tourism and hospitality.

Particularly, it was evident that the majority of the tourism and hospitality scholars have not considered many of the items constituting the PRISMA protocol for systematic reviews. We found several systematic reviews that did not provide a clear explanation of their process of data collection leading to a lack of transparency in the data collection and findings of the study. For example, a clear explanation of inclusion and exclusion criteria, keywords used for searches, the framework used for designing systematic reviews and justifications for database selections were omitted in the majority of review papers. A further limitation is the selected databases and journals for systematic reviews itself. It was evident through the review that the majority of systematic reviews conducted in tourism particularly did so by reviewing papers published in all five A* and four A tourism and hospitality journals. This projects a strong limitation in understanding a field of study that is 'global'.

Furthermore, we also found important information missing in most of the review papers with regards to the dates upon which data were collected, pilot testing, screening and data extraction procedures (i.e. author deliberations). A flow diagram (as called for when conducting systematic reviews) explaining the steps of the systematic process of review was not included in several papers.

Although we are not questioning the reliability of existing reviews conducted by tourism and hospitality scholars, we believe that there is an urgent need for scholars in the field to adopt protocols developed for systematic reviews. By doing so, future systematic reviews could be grounded on more transparent and reliable criteria, which are crucial to minimizing implicit assumptions and researchers' biases. As we work in a multidisciplinary field of study where we bring forth knowledge and developments of a multiplicity of other fields (including systematic reviews), it becomes important to maintain consistency to provide

reliable findings and discussions concerning the epistemology of tourism and hospitality. The current study, via its systematic review, provides an avenue for tourism and hospitality scholars conducting systematic reviews of the literature to consider the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of the process.

Upon considering the limitations of systematic reviews found through the analysis of the current study, we suggest that there remains an urgent need for consistency of systematic reviews in the field of tourism and hospitality. Although we agree that the PRISMA protocol is primarily aimed at systematic reviews in the field of medicine, and hence certain protocols under the model may not be relevant to social science disciplines, we recommend the items included in Table 3 (adopted and adjusted from PRISMA model) for future researchers conducting systematic reviews. We believe that this will enable transparency, reliability and validity to reviews in tourism. This in turn will enable greater consistency. Furthermore, we also recommend the implementation of protocols for systematic reviews at the journal level, hence requiring authors undertaking systematic reviews (and also other forms of reviews) to adopt the PRISMA items put forward in the current study. As the number of reviews is generally rising within the field of tourism and hospitality, we also contend that training is needed for scholars to understand the advancement of methods underpinning the study of tourism. This is particularly important for doctoral students who often undertake systematic literature reviews in their research journeys.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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