

Newspaper reporting of tourism topics

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An analysis of 8633 Queensland newspaper reports on tourism topics appearing over a 12-month period revealed that 48.6 per cent concerned event or activity promotions. Other frequently reported subjects included economic development, tourism authorities and government policy. Health and safety, statistics, and law and order topics received considerably less exposure. Analysis of the frequency and timing of tourism stories showed that most reports appeared between June and October, with fairly consistent levels of reporting observed for each topic area during the different months. Newspapers are identified as an important source of information about tourism and travel, with implications for the way the public perceives this industry.

TRAVEL and tourism is the world's largest industry, contributing significantly to the economies of many countries. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (1993), the industry currently generates \$US3.4 trillion in gross output, accounts for 127 million jobs, and produces capital investment exceeding \$US422 billion.

In Australia, 6.6 per cent of the nation's workforce are employed in tourism, and in 1993-94 expenditure derived from tourism was almost \$A44 billion. In 1994-95 international tour-

ism to Australia generated export earnings of \$12.3 billion, accounting for 12.7 per cent of the country's total export earnings (Commonwealth Department of Tourism 1995).

The strong focus on economic indicators in travel and tourism is apparent in many areas. For example, the 10th Annual Australian Tourism Conference (September 1994) considered many economic and fiscal topics under the theme "The Business of Tourism", while an examination of current reports available from the Bureau of Tourism Research in Canberra reveals that many are concerned with economic aspects of the industry (Bureau of Tourism Research 1995a). Economic forecasting and financial feasibility studies are also prominent in government and private enterprise projects (Arthur Andersen & Co. 1991; Business International Australia 1991; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Banking, Finance and Public Administration 1995). In particular, the development of new hotels and resorts provides opportunities for creating local employment and regional economic growth, with these initiatives being of special interest to potential investors (Blake Dawson Waldron 1994; Rider Hunt 1995).

Apart from economics, the industry is generally perceived by the public as glamorous and exciting, with high-profile industry personalities often appearing in the media. Industry awards and major sporting and cultural events provide considerable public interest, as well as hallmark events having the potential to generate substantial social and economic benefits for the host regions. For example, some 15.76 million non-staff visits were made to World Expo 88 in Brisbane (Carroll 1989), the event providing enormous international exposure for the city, and Queensland generally, as a tourist destination. Similarly, the 1996 Indy Car Race on the Gold Coast was televised globally to 126 countries, with an international viewing audience of 750 million people, putting it among the top four events televised out of Australia. In commercial terms, the media exposure alone was conservatively estimated to be worth \$108 million in publicity

for the Gold Coast (Indy Car Australia, personal communication).

While there remains considerable controversy about the extent to which governments should fund major cultural and sporting events, detailed studies show that there are many positive social and economic benefits to be gained apart from the direct financial aspects of event management, especially in terms of awareness and an enhanced image for the host region in the international marketplace (Fleming and Toepper 1990; Ritchie and Lyons 1990; Ritchie and Smith 1991).

Destinations and events are presented by professional marketing agents in the most colourful and enticing ways. Some commentators are scornful of this hype, and the relative neglect of the social costs associated with tourism (Craik 1991; McMillen and Lafferty 1991). Nevertheless, marketing and promotion strategies are very necessary elements in the continued growth of the travel and tourism industry (Holloway and Plant 1992).

The negative aspects of tourism, such as crime and violence, are less frequently discussed in the academic literature. Where they are described, it is often by way of anecdote and reference to adverse media attention, rather than by analysis of reliable data and rigorous scientific examination (Ryan 1993). The lack of objective data directly reflects the tourism industry's reluctance to highlight the negative aspects of travel, since this is perceived to be a "bad" marketing strategy (Wilks and Oldenburg 1995). However, issues of personal health and safety are of concern to travel organisers, as well as tourists themselves, and they form part of the overall public image of the industry.

In one recent study, Jackson, White and Schmierer (1995) found that tourists were most likely to attribute their positive holiday experiences to their own initiatives and behaviour, while attributing their negative experiences to external causes such as travel operators. Many of the negative experiences reported in that study concerned travel-related illnesses. For sound marketing reasons the industry tends not to highlight these negative customer experiences. However, this silence is not reflected in

the media, which is always keen to report sensationalist stories about injuries to tourists. Perhaps one of the best recent examples of this is the 1993 great white shark attack at Byron Bay, where a man was killed while scuba diving on his honeymoon. This created enormous media attention and had a severe impact on the local tourism industry in terms of visitor cancellations.

As noted by Wilks, Pendergast and Service (1996), newspapers are a particularly important source of information on travel and tourism for the general public. The extent to which tourism-related stories are considered newsworthy has recently been examined by Kelly (1995). He found that in Australia's major national newspaper (the *Australian*, and its weekend counterpart, the *Weekend Australian*) tourism-related items were reported on approximately two out of every three days in 1993. On average, the newspaper published 1.64 tourism-related articles per edition. Kelly's analysis revealed that the most frequently reported topics concerned aviation, tourism marketing, hotels/motels/guesthouses, casinos and gaming, events, government influence and destination development. These topics emerged from 413 published stories.

In order to provide a broader picture of the tourism-related topics that appear in newspapers, especially local and regional issues, a larger and more representative sample was drawn from within Queensland for the present study. In addition to the main national publications readily available to Queensland newspaper readers, regional newspapers were examined since Queensland is Australia's leading vacation destination, with 39 per cent of the domestic tourism market share for pleasure/holiday travel (Bureau of Tourism Research 1995b) and 65 per cent of the international market for holiday travel (Bureau of Tourism Research 1995c). During 1994, 1.6 million international tourists visited Queensland, with the Gold Coast, Cairns and Brisbane being among the top five of all regions visited in the country (Bureau of Tourism Research 1995c).

Within Queensland there are 14 regional tourism authorities each promoting their local areas, while the Brisbane-based

Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation promotes the State as a whole and is recognised as one of the most active and successful marketing organisations in the Australian industry. The result of these coordinated activities is a substantial amount of tourism information being available to the media. This is further enhanced by the Cabinet position held by the Minister for Tourism, Small Business and Industry (previously Tourism, Sport and Youth), allowing initiatives from this department to directly contribute to government policy.

The objective of the present study was to determine the overall mix of tourism-related topics reported in Queensland newspapers over a one-year period, as a means of understanding the picture of the industry presented by newspapers to the general public.

Based on the importance of marketing and economics to the success of the travel and tourism industry, it was predicted that a majority of the newspaper stories examined in the study would reflect these commercial interests. From the work of Kelly (1995) it was also expected that aviation, accommodation, events and government influence would all feature prominently in the newspapers. Finally, health and safety issues were expected to receive less attention in overall frequency (Wilks and Oldenburg 1995).

Methods

The Sample

The Queensland government Department of Tourism, Small Business and Industry employs a commercial information service to obtain copies of tourism-related stories printed in Queensland and major national newspapers. Relevant stories are collected and copied on a daily basis and delivered to the department, where they are then disseminated to staff. The service scans all metropolitan and regional papers in Queensland, as well as selected national publications, and therefore provides a fairly complete coverage of tourism news items to Queensland readers.

For the present study, all newspaper stories held by the department covering a 12-month period (January–December, 1994) were read and analysed. Stories were obtained from 218 individual publications. As each story was photocopied by the commercial service onto a single blank A4 page, many traditional measures used in content analysis (for example, size of story in relation to overall page size; size of story in relation to other stories; prominence of the story in terms of page position) were not available. Instead the analysis focused mainly on content rather than context of the stories.

A detailed coding scheme was developed to categorise each story in terms of 10 major topic areas: Award, Individual Personality, Event or Activity Promotion, Economic Development, Tourism Authorities, Economic Indicators, Health and Safety, Government Policy, Law and Order, and Statistics. These topic areas were selected after extensive reviews of the tourism literature. Definitions of the topic areas are presented in the appendix to this article. In addition, each story was coded for month of publication and name of the newspaper in which the story appeared.

A total of 9319 stories were coded by one of the authors and independently checked by another. All story headlines were then typed into the computer and sorted to check for replications that may have occurred where the original story and a copy of the same story had both been coded. This checking process identified 686 replications which were then removed from the analysis. The final sample contained 8633 original stories. A random sample of 2 per cent (173 stories) were then blind coded, yielding an inter-rater reliability of .90 for the final sample.

Results

Table 1 shows the 10 major sources of newspaper tourism stories, along with readership rates for Queensland, the number of stories coded, and proportion of the total stories coded for each publication.

Table 1: Examples of newspaper stories coded, sources and readership

Newspaper	Readership*	No. of tourism stories coded	% of total stories coded
Courier-Mail (Mon-Fri)	680,000	1103	12.8
(Saturday)	940,000		
Gold Coast Bulletin (Mon-Fri)	109,000	846	9.8
Cairns Post	105,280	731	8.5
Australian Financial Review	285,000	450	5.2
Sunday Mail	1,412,000	389	4.5
Townsville Bulletin	91,700	299	3.5
The Australian	389,000	293	3.4
Sunshine Coast Daily (Mon-Fri)	51,880	272	3.2
(Saturday)	94,990		
Weekend Bulletin (Gold Coast)	148,000	180	2.1
Daily Mercury (Mackay)	75,000	178	2.1

* Average 1994 readership figures supplied by newspaper offices.

The largest number of stories appeared in the *Courier-Mail*, Queensland's main daily newspaper, which covers news across the state. The next two largest contributions were from the Gold Coast and Cairns, which are the two main tourist destination centres in Queensland. The remaining newspapers in Table 1, representing a mix of national (the *Financial Review*; the *Australian*), regional daily (*Townsville Bulletin*; *Sunshine Coast Daily*; *Daily Mercury*) and weekend papers (*Sunday Mail*; *Weekend Bulletin*) all contribute considerably fewer stories than the main three. Together the 10 newspapers in Table 1 published 55 per cent of the tourism stories in the sample, while the remaining 45 per cent were distributed among the 208 other newspapers.

Table 2 presents the frequencies and proportions of the 10 tourism topic areas coded. As can be seen, Event or Activity Promotions, defined as "articles promoting events, activities, holiday destinations, conferences, meetings or providing post-

event updates and information" were substantially more often reported than other tourism topics. Economic Development was the second most frequently reported topic area, with much the same coverage as Tourism Authorities and Government Policy. Lowest coverage was given to the strict reporting of statistics without a broader contextual picture, and articles featuring legal matters relevant to tourism.

Table 2: Subject areas of tourism stories coded

Subject area	No. of tourism stories coded	% of total stories coded
Event or activity promotion	4192	48.6
Economic development	884	10.2
Tourism authorities	826	9.6
Government policy	825	9.6
Economic indicators	634	7.3
Individual personality	452	5.2
Awards	266	3.1
Health and safety	263	3.0
Statistics	158	1.8
Law and order	133	1.5

Figure 1 presents the frequency and timing of tourism news items reported over a 12-month period. The five months from June to October recorded the largest number of tourism stories, with the smallest number being published in March.

Table 3 provides greater detail of the timing and frequency of news items according to the topic areas reported during 1994. Event or Activity Promotions show a strong consistency across the calendar year, with not less than 35 per cent of the monthly stories related to this topic. Overall, reporting of all tourism topics was fairly consistent over the 12 months of 1994, though articles about Tourism Authorities showed a major drop in their proportion of stories during May (to 3%), the same month that Government Policy peaked (23%). Stories about Individual Personalities were highest in April, corresponding to the resignation

Figure 1: Frequency and timing of tourism stories coded

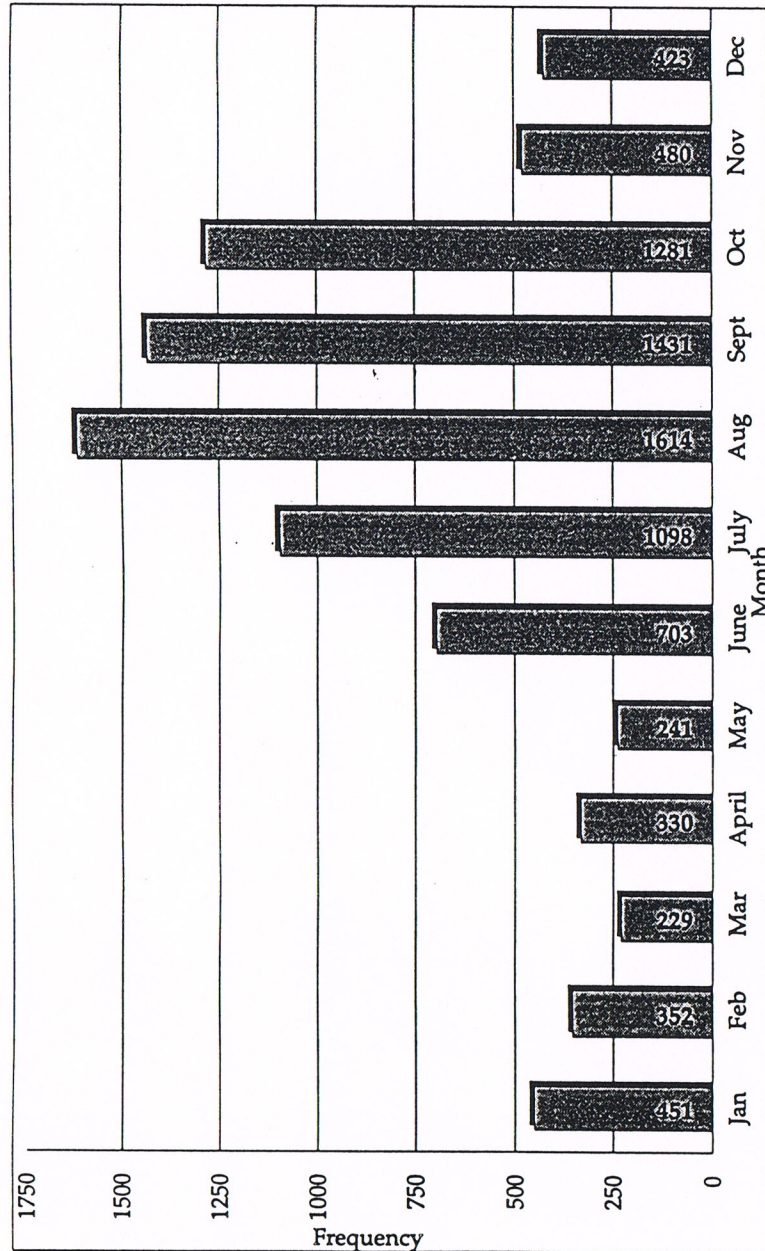


Table 3: Topic areas and proportion of stories reported by month*

Topic area	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Event or activity promotion	52	63	42	35	37	46	54	48	50	45	54	45
Economic development	8	6	7	12	13	10	9	10	12	12	12	10
Tourism authorities	15	8	13	8	3	10	7	9	10	11	10	11
Government policy	8	7	16	12	23	9	9	8	10	10	8	8
Economic indicators	9	5	6	14	5	7	5	8	8	8	6	8
Individual personality	4	5	7	14	8	4	6	5	3	4	4	9
Awards	<1	0	4	5	3	3	2	6	3	3	1	2
Health and safety	2	3	3	1	3	3	5	2	3	4	4	5
Statistics	1	<1	2	1	2	4	2	3	1	2	1	1
Law and order	1	2	2	2	3	3	2	1	1	2	<1	1

* Percentages (rounded to the nearest whole number) are each topic's proportion of the total stories reported for that month.

of Jim Kennedy and the new appointment of Frank Burnett as chairperson of the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation. Health and Safety, Statistics, and Law and Order reports were consistently low throughout each month, with Health and Safety only rising to 5 per cent of the total during July and December.

Discussion

As predicted, the majority of newspaper stories examined in this study concerned the marketing and economic aspects of tourism and travel. Reporting of Event or Activity Promotion was substantially more prominent than other topics, and for each month studied, Event or Activity Promotion provided not less than 35 per cent of the newspaper stories published. These findings may reflect the marketing role of bodies such as the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation in publicising events, activities and destinations within the state. They may also reflect the extent to which tourism stories in regional papers are PR-driven. Further research is needed to clarify the role of "active" marketing in the promotional content of news stories.

Regional tourism authorities also promote their local areas through publicity in the print media. When major stories break on the AAP Reuters service, regional dailies are using the lead story as a vehicle to add local content and opinions. The readership rates for the 10 main newspapers in this study (a total of 4.4 million potential readers) show that each tourism-related article published obtains considerable public exposure.

As suggested by Kelly (1995) Government Policy was also frequently reported in newspaper articles, reflecting the view that tourism is a major source of economic growth for the country (Commonwealth Department of Tourism 1992). In contrast, Health and Safety, Statistics, and Law and Order topics received considerably less exposure in the press.

Across the 12 months of 1994 some distinct patterns of tourism and travel reporting were identified. Most reports appeared between June and October, corresponding to the shoulder and

off-peak season for the industry. At these times, promotional initiatives are needed to stimulate the travel market; with major events, such as festivals, often planned to capitalise on the available accommodation (Tobias-Webb and Wilks 1993). Queensland's main tourism industry awards are held in October, though formal recognition of industry achievement occurs throughout the year, and provides opportunities for media promotion before and after these events. Health and Safety issues in 1994 peaked in July and December, corresponding to school holiday periods. Government Policy initiatives were highest between March and May, mainly related to a variety of proposed taxes on the tourism industry. Finally, April had the greatest number of stories about Individual Personalities, and this was related to an unexpected resignation and new appointment to the high-profile position of chair of the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation.

Previous studies have shown that newspapers are a very reliable source of reporting on public health issues (Rainey and Runyan 1992) and provide wide coverage of newsworthy information (Rudd and Glanz 1991). However, such content analyses often involve a small number of news articles (less than 100 stories) so the results are difficult to generalise. Given the small number of public health issues that are likely to be reported for the tourism and travel industry (Kelly 1995), future media research should attempt to analyse larger samples in order to determine reliable reporting trends.

While every attempt was made to examine all Queensland newspaper stories related to tourism in 1994, obtaining this sample from the Department of Tourism, Small Business and Industry during the December/January staff holiday period raises the possibility that some newspaper articles were missed in the collection. However, given the consistent proportions of each topic area reported by month in the analyses, there appears to be no systematic bias introduced even if some stories were not collected. Further research is needed to confirm whether monthly trends in reporting of specific topics are generally stable over time, or whether there are particular idiosyncrasies from year to

year. The first step in this process is to develop a standardised classification scheme for the types of material reported; a framework that would be internationally valid, and one that builds on analyses already available (for example, Kelly 1995).

Newspapers offer their readers considerable information of social and cultural interest, as well as providing an alternative to glossy brochures in terms of tourism and travel events, activities and destinations. Future research should investigate how consumers use the information provided by newspapers, and what overall image of the industry is portrayed by the print media. In addition to promotional activities, the extent to which newspapers stimulate public debate and provide a balanced and reliable coverage of various social and economic issues in tourism remains to be examined.

Appendix: Types of Stories

Award

Articles focusing on specific awards/prizes for tourism or tourism-related achievements. Stories included invitations to nominate and announcements of award winners.

Individual personality

Articles featuring person(s) relevant to the tourism industry. Focus of the story is the person(s) identified. (If the person is receiving an award, this is categorised in the award classification).

Event or activity promotion

Articles promoting events, activities, holiday destinations, conferences, meetings or providing post-event updates and information.

Economic development

Articles with the principal intent to inform readers about economic changes and progress. Clear reference to monetary figures was required.

Tourism authorities

Articles focusing on the activities, decision-making, progress and developments of various tourism bodies and authorities.

Economic indicators

Articles with the aim of informing readers about potential trends, patterns and predictions, and activities which may have an economic impact. No specific reference given to actual monetary figures, but other statistical information may have been incorporated.

Health and safety

Articles addressing health and safety issues, including incidents, reports, data, anecdotal stories, accidents, risk situations, and behaviours.

Government policy

Articles featuring government rules, regulations, policy-making, and implementation. Related factors such as economic implications were also included if directly linked to government policy.

Law and order

Articles featuring legal matters relevant to tourism, including reports of crimes and incidents, and various source updates of relevant statistics.

Statistics

Articles strictly reporting statistics, without a broader contextual picture.

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