
Research is foundational for the production of new knowledge. It is a set of processes that can grow our understanding of tourism, leisure, hospitality and related fields. Consequently, a new textbook for students in higher education presenting the fundamentals of these processes should be of great interest to instructors and scholars.

Four editors have prepared this book to fill a void they have identified as the lack of a research methods textbook for students in “the field of leisure sciences” (xvi). They maintain it is designed for an introductory research methods course covering leisure, recreation or tourism topics for advanced undergraduate and graduate students in “mainly English-speaking countries majoring in leisure sciences, recreation, parks, natural resource management, tourism management and hospitality departments” (xvi).

The editors and 19 other contributors have strong credentials in research in these fields. Most boast impressive publication records and are seasoned instructors in higher education. As opposed to other textbooks on leisure/hospitality/tourism research methods, such as Veal (2011) and Finn, Elliott-White, and Walton (2002), this one comprises chapters authored by different individuals rather than all written by an author or set of authors.

As a basic textbook on research methods, we should expect the editors and other authors to present objectives, principles and techniques of valid research for students. This requires presenting rather complex processes that adhere to widely accepted standards for sound research in a coherent manner to an audience with little or no background in research methods and applications. There cannot be ambiguity on concepts, definitions and methodologies without thoroughly confusing the students and confounding assessments of achievement of learning objectives.

I believe the central issue here is, does this edited textbook presenting materials from 23 authors convey research objectives, concepts and methods to inexperienced undergraduate and graduate students in a coherent, unified way? Regrettably, based on thirty-five years of tourism research experience and twenty years teaching the subject to graduate students, my answer is, "no".

The book is organized in sixteen chapters grouped in five parts. Features to aid learning in each chapter include learning objectives stated at the initiation, chapter summaries, key terms, discussion questions, examples “from the field of leisure sciences” (xviii) and references. These are provided uniformly throughout all chapters. An additional learning aid, “research boxes”, appears more fitfully. These are designed to “contain examples of research applications or scenarios that explore the nature of leisure, recreation and tourism research issues in a variety of research settings.” (xviii).

Unfortunately, these are found only in four chapters, rather than being “common elements of all of the 16 chapters” (xviii). Indeed, the book suffers from a lack of coherence in treatment of topics and inconsistencies in terminology. Chapter 1 can be a considerable source of confusion for students unfamiliar with the requirements of sound research. It defines “independent variables” as “causes that lead to change in the dependent variable.” (9) This position is reiterated several times. But then the authors assert that only experimental designs lead to understanding “true cause-and-effect relationships” (11). Using non-experimental research, the researcher “can never be certain if, in fact, your study variables really cause the outcome” (12). So the reader is left with a muddled understanding of what an “independent variable” is and how one can identify “true causes”.

Fortunately, the author of chapter 10, “Experimental Research,” sheds considerable light on the issue. He defines “causality” rigorously as a “relationship between variables where a change in one necessarily results in a change in another variable” (163). He then presents John Stuart Mill’s three requirements for a causal relationship and how this relates to experimental design. Finally, he links this discussion to internal validity and how experimental designs attempt to satisfy these requirements. This supplies much firmer ground for the research student than the chapter 1 discussion does. But this author ignores the concepts of “dependent variable” and “independent variable” stressed so heavily in chapter 1.

The provision of “key terms” by authors at the end of each chapter rather than in an overall, coherent glossary is likely to retard student comprehension. All told, 264 terms are listed in the 16 chapters with definitions. Thirty-four of these terms appear in two, three or five chapters. More effort should have been devoted to ensuring the consistency of the definitions. For example, in chapter 16, a “hypothesis” is defined as “a suggested explanation for a phenomenon that can be tested by research and written in such a way that it can be either accepted or rejected by research findings” (261), but in chapter 2, it is “an educated guess, a focused prediction of what we think the relationships between the variables will be in our study” (34). One wonders how an “educated guess” illustrates the requirements of valid research for students.

And whereas “reliability” is defined consistently in two chapters, “validity” is “a form of test that indicates accuracy of the measurements” in chapter 4, but the “extent to which a measurement tool captures reality or extent to which it measures what it meant to measure” in chapter 2. The “types of research” are either exploratory, descriptive and explanatory/relational (p. 12), or descriptive, relational and causal (p. 21). Selecting the appropriate measure of central tendency for each of the levels of measurement (i.e., nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio) is presented differently in chapter 4 than in chapter 12. It is difficult to see how students can master the fundamentals of research in our fields in the absence of coherence in presenting basic concepts.
The book is divided into five parts. Parts one and two deal with planning a research study: research design, literature reviews, measurement of variables, research proposal writing techniques. Part 3 discusses survey research but focuses only on equal probability sample designs, with scant attention to stratified sampling and none to cluster sampling. The discussion is outmoded. Mail surveys are not “becoming a thing of the past” but rather have been rising in reliability as part of Dillman’s Tailored Design Method (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009).

The chapter on qualitative research presents the only attempt to define qualitative research in contrast to quantitative research. The distinction of the former as focusing on differences in kind rather than quantity is an advance over the hoary “qualitative research is based on words while quantitative research is based on numbers” with its many exceptions. While addressing four qualitative techniques, the authors inexplicably ignore content analysis (perhaps too many numbers). The following chapter on grounded theory, however, is quite good and pitched at the appropriate level for students new to research. Enough detail is presented for students to make a competent stab at applying this research method.

The same cannot be said for chapter 9 on evaluation research methods. This one is full of lists with minimal exposition. Too much space is given to “informal evaluation” which is arguably not research as defined by the editors (“process by which new information and knowledge are produced to answer questions we deem valuable and beneficial in a planned and systematic way that is free from personal bias”) (15).

I have already mentioned the outstanding quality of the chapter on experimental research. This is well-grounded and rather technical, setting up students to benefit from their instructor’s introducing applications of ANOVA and factorial designs in the classroom. The conclusion, “The greatest benefit of an understanding of experiments is, however not that they allow one to conduct experiments but that they make one aware of the limitations of other research approaches” (177). I wish this chapter were placed at the beginning of this textbook.


Part IV provides four excellent chapters on data analysis. These provide authoritative introductions to summarizing and presenting data, inferential data analysis, and identifying and testing relationships (t-Tests, ANOVA, cross tabulations and correlation analysis). The book ends with a chapter on presenting research results in class reports, assignments, theses and dissertations, and preparing conference presentations.

Overall, this book suffers from the absence of a strong editor’s hand. One result is that the same topic is covered in different chapters in various ways. The same terms are defined differently in different chapters. While the seasoned researcher can overlook these anomalies, the student new to this technical and often confusing subject will require a great deal of instruction and hands-on applications to achieve functional understanding.

References

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