

The rise and potential fall of some tourism, hospitality and events journals¹

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1. The birth and death of journals

Independent and commercial publishing houses adopt different strategies when introducing or acquiring journals. Journals initiated by independent publishers, comprising mostly universities or societies, are often led by champions who pursue their development as passion projects. These champions feel there is a gap in the market that can be filled by a new journal (Andriotis, 2020). Often this gap is identified either through the perceived need to provide an outlet for a certain type of research, or as a consequence of the growth of a field of study. Jamali, Wakeling, and Abbasi (2022) indicate proper market analyses and business plans are conducted rarely. As a result, many of these journals prove to be marginally viable (Jamali et al., 2022).

Conversely, commercial publishers adopt one of two strategies. On the one hand, they test the market to determine if a need exists for new journals and then a business plan is developed to launch and support that journal (Jamali et al., 2022). On the other hand, they may acquire independent journals either outright or by signing management agreements to publish them under their umbrella brand.

Not all journals will succeed, though, with independent journals having a much higher failure rate than those operated by major publishing houses (Jamali et al., 2022). Indeed, Jamali et al. (2022) note that 88% of the discontinued journals belonged to educational institutions or societies. The reasons are manifest. To begin, they may

simply not be commercially viable, requiring ongoing subsidisation by the host institution or society. At a certain point these funding organisations may lose interest and withdraw support (Zeff, 1996). A change in institutional or departmental leadership may result in a change of priorities leading to the decision to discontinue a journal, as may the departure of the editor who drove the creation of the journal in the first place. Jamali et al. (2022) further identified burnout caused by too much reliance on voluntary work on behalf of the editors. In addition, independent journals face a challenge in convincing libraries to make one-off subscription purchases (Larivière, Haustien, & Mongeon, 2015).

The issue is complicated by the fact that academics are pressured to publish in so-called prestige journals that are included in various abstracting and indexing databases or that are ranked highly in research assessment exercises (Larivière et al., 2015; Serenko & Bontis, 2013). Larivière et al. (2015) suggest young researchers are guided to publish in prestigious journals to gain tenure and promotion, while Krauskopf (2018) notes terms and conditions of grant applications often take the prestige of a journal into account. Few journals operated by institutions or societies are found on such index lists, making them less attractive to authors (Jamali et al., 2022). Indeed, some potential authors are directed not to publish in these journals. The net result is that many journals suffer from the vicious circle of struggling to generate a sufficient flow of quality submissions (Jamali et al., 2022), that in turn hurts their prestige, making them unlikely to be included on index lists, that

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¹ Surprisingly little research has been conducted on the birth and death of academic journals (Jamali et al., 2022). This research note analyses trends in the number of tourism, hospitality and events journals introduced and/or discontinued over the past 40 years. Data were derived from the author's own journal database that was updated in March 2022.

² Prof Bob McKercher, from the University of Queensland Business School, has a long standing interest in the state of publishing in tourism, hospitality and events journals.

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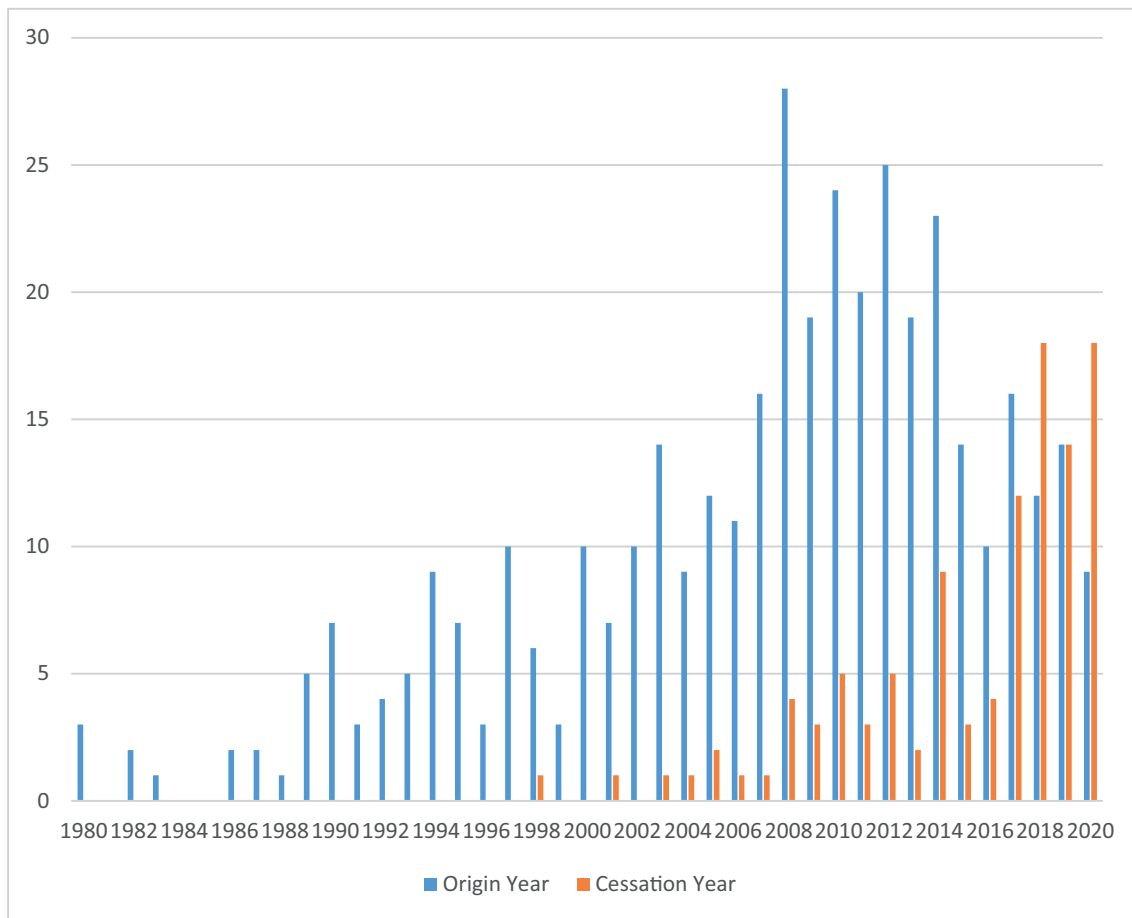


Fig. 1. Birth and Death of Journals 1981–2020 (all languages).

exacerbates the challenge of generating submissions.

2. Trends in tourism, hospitality and events journals

In 2021, some 316 tourism, hospitality and events journals were active, of which some 188 published in whole or in part in English, 39 in whole or in part in Portuguese, mostly originating out of Brazil, 27 in Spanish, and the rest in other languages. In total, more than 12,500 papers were published, with most, 8253, in English. Another 116 journals appeared to be inactive, having listed no publications on their websites since 2020 or earlier, or having inactive websites.

Most of the material published in English originates from the major publishing houses of Cognizant Communications Corp., Emerald Publishing, Elsevier, Sage Publications and Taylor and Francis. They maintain 61 journals and, collectively, published more than 5100 papers, or more than 60% of all English language material. Most of the other 127 English language journals originate in non-Western countries, with many being published out of India. They published just over 3100 papers.

Fig. 1 illustrates the number of new journals launched or that ceased publication since 1980. Steady growth was noted in the 1990s, with a dramatic expansion of the number of titles occurring between 2008 and 2014, when typically about 20 or more titles were launched each year. The number has slowed since then, but still six new titles were launched in 2021, with at least seven more titles scheduled for introduction in 2022. However, many titles have disappeared during the same period. In total, the author was able to identify the cessation year of 108 journals. Few journals ceased publications until the mid-2000s. Since then, and especially since 2017, the number of failed titles has increased

Table 1

Number of Papers Published in 2021 by Type of Publisher.

	Publishing house (major and minor)	Independent (university, society, not for profit organisation)	Predatory publisher
5 or fewer	2	20	11
6–10	3	47	7
11–20	8	59	1
21–50	16	61	4
>50	37	32	1

significantly, peaking at 18 defunct titles in 2020.

Many other journals appear to be marginally viable, as shown in Table 1, with independent publishers and publishers of predatory journals, most vulnerable. The good news is that three quarters of the predatory journals published 10 or fewer papers in 2021, with almost half publishing five or fewer papers. The more worrying news is that 67 independent journals also published 10 or fewer papers, of which 44 were English language titles. The small volume of papers published suggests they may be struggling to attract either quality submissions, or

Table 2

Number of Titles Ceasing Publication by Type of Publisher 1998–2020. (where full data are available).

Publishing house (major and minor)	Independent (university, society, not for profit organisation)	Predatory publisher
4	97	7

more likely, simply enough submissions.

Journals hosted by universities, societies or not for profit organisations were most likely to cease publication. As shown in Table 2, just under 90% of the defunct journals were hosted by these types of organisations. Another 6% were launched by predatory publishers and failed to attract enough submissions to keep them operational, while only a handful of defunct journals was hosted by publishing houses.

Editors of defunct journals were contacted to determine why the journal stopped publishing. The response rate was low, as only seven former editors responded. However, the reasons cited are instructive. COVID-19 played a decisive role in the demise of a number of marginal journals. The pandemic resulted in the number of submissions drying up, with one former editor mentioning the cancellation of conferences hurt the journal as they formed a key source of submissions.

A shortfall in submissions was another factor, which was also tied into the fact that the journals were not included on indexing services or listed highly enough in approved journal lists. One former publisher stated “I am not sure which factor dominates [but]...higher education in Central Europe focuses on journals indexed in Scopus and WOS database.” Another noted “it was discontinued most likely due to low submissions ... the journal was not linked to any publisher but a college publication instead.”

Change in leadership, editor fatigue and the removal of funding also contributed to various journals' demise. One journal “hasn't been published for about 10 years now since I moved to another university”, while another stopped publishing because “the founder of the journal and the editor-in-chief left.” A third added the cryptic comment that “in 2020, our editorial team has been completely overhauled...not all organizational activities turned out to be good.” Finally, editor fatigue led to the decision to close another journal, with the former editor writing “publishing the open-access journal was basically a one-person operation at that point, so I decided to end it.”

3. Discussion and conclusions

What is the state of tourism, hospitality and events research? Much of the news is good, but it is balanced by some worrying trends. Tourism research seems to be thriving in a number of non-English speaking economies, as witnessed by the fact that journals are published in more than 20 languages and originate in more than 40 economies. The field seems particularly strong in Asia and Latin America and is growing in popularity in Africa. A number of Eastern European economies are also actively hosting journals. The emergence of journals in these economies provides needed publication avenues for academics who might otherwise not be published.

The demise of some journals may also be beneficial. While this observation may seem counter-intuitive, a number of commentators feel their fields are publishing too many journals. Kai & Thomas (Kai & Thomas, 2020:238) writing about management studies state “the

unpalatable truth is that there are too many journals publishing too much research, most of which is barely read and very often has no impact whatsoever.” Bhatia (2015:322) concurs, noting “there are far too many universities all pushing their faculty to publish, [which results in] too many journals, too many conferences...” Oosterhaven's (2015) mathematical models show that the larger the number of outlets available for any paper, the greater the chance of it being accepted somewhere. He is even bold enough to argue mathematically, that “all manuscripts submitted to any journal will ultimately be published” (Oosterhaven, 2015: 261).

The English language independent journals in our field seem to face the same challenges noted elsewhere, for failure rates are particularly high caused by the same factors identified by Jamali et al. (2022), Lariviere et al. (2015), Serenko and Bontis (2013) and Zeff (1996). Independent tourism, hospitality and events journals also struggle with low submission rates, low quality papers, commercial non-viability, editor burnout, failure to be recognised by various indexing lists, loss of interest by host institutions and organisations and other factors. In addition, COVID-19 has been the death knell for a number of marginal journals.

What does the future hold? Based on publishing trends, further consolidation of English language journals is likely. It will occur in one of two ways. On the one hand, publishing houses will continue to make strategic acquisitions to fill a needed gap in their suite of offerings. On the other hand, the future of some independent journals looks rather bleak unless they can up their submission rates and gain inclusion to prestigious index lists. The future for independent non-English language journals is, perhaps, more optimistic, for few major publishing houses exist. Instead, the field is still dominated by university- and society-driven publishers who will continue to serve the needs of their academic communities.

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