

Intellectual Structure Of Wellness Tourism And Destination Loyalty Research: A Bibliometric Mapping Study



Aneesa Majeed KR¹, Dr. Kalapati Madhavi²

¹RESEARCH SCHOLAR; Department Of Commerce; Parks College (Autonomous), Tiruppur; BHARATHIAR UNIVERSITY; Email: aneesamajeed648@gmail.com. ORCID ID:0009-0003-3017-9523

²Dean, Department Of Commerce; Parks College (Autonomous), Tiruppur; BHARATHIAR UNIVERSITY; Email: dr.madhavikalapati@gmail.com

Abstract

Wellness tourism, tourist experience and destination loyalty are key constructs in tourism scholarship, but they have not been systematically integrated in the intellectual architecture that gives them life: their main proponents, collaboration among them and their thematic organisation. This paper presents the results of the network-oriented part of a bibliometric study of 13,551 documents (1980–2026) from 1,973 sources, processed using the workflow methodology of Biblioshiny/VOSviewer to explore author productivity and co-citation, international collaborations, keyword co-occurrence, citation networks, and thematic evolution.

Han Heesup, Hall C. Michael, Kozak Metin, Sthapit Eroze, and Scott Noel are the most prolific and well-connected authors, as well as the most locally cited, which represent two overlapping intellectual traditions: a tourism-studies core and a structural-equation-modelling/satisfaction-measurement tradition. The U.S. is the biggest producer of academic writing and the most globalised country for academic collaboration, followed by India and Italy, and then Australia, China, and the U.S. Both keyword co-occurrence and co-citation analyses show that a two-pole thematic structure exists, namely the sustainability/ecotourism pole, with its main anchor in the policy literature on sustainable development, and the tourist-experience/destination-loyalty pole, with its main anchor in psychometric models of satisfaction and destination loyalty (e.g. Fornell, 1981; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). A thematic map is a map that represents tourist destination and tourist behaviour as well-developed motor themes, tourism and sustainable tourism as niche themes and ecotourism, tourism development and sustainability as emerging or declining motor themes.

The results give a systematic overview of the most prominent contributors to this field, the cooperation network, and the conceptual structure of the field, which can serve as a reference for the identification of influential work, possible co-operators and thematic gaps for further research in the field.

Keywords: wellness tourism, co-authorship network, co-citation analysis, keyword co-occurrence, international collaboration, thematic map, VOS viewer, intellectual structure

Introduction

Wellness tourism is part of a broader literature on tourist experience, tourist satisfaction and tourist loyalty, and overlaps with the fields of spa and health tourism, nature-based tourism and mindfulness. The emphasis of tourist experience research has shifted away from the models that focus on satisfaction as a transaction to the models that take emotion, memory, authenticity and co-creation as examples. Satisfaction and loyalty are the constructs that are closely linked with the behavioural outcomes of tourism experience including revisit intention and word-of-mouth. Sustainable tourism brings another dimension to the equation, asking how the movement of visitors for experience and well-being can be in balance with environmental, social and economic sustainability at the destination.

But it is also vital to know who is generating this knowledge, how they work together, and what is conceptually organized in the field (that will be addressed in a companion paper to this one in this series). Tourist Satisfaction, Loyalty, and Revisit

Intention are the main concepts in this study. In this study, the main concepts are tourist satisfaction, tourist loyalty, and tourist revisit intention.

Tourist satisfaction is the extent to which a tourist feels his/her expectations have been met through the experience of a wellness tourism destination. It is widely accepted as a vital factor in the competitive and sustainable success of a destination as it is associated with the increased probability to return, be a positive recommendation and increase their destination loyalty. In fact, destination loyalty is reflected in the tourists' intention to return to the destination and their tendency to recommend it to others; it is empirically supported that tourist satisfaction is consistently related to destination loyalty as a tourism destination's key sustainability mechanism.

The features of a wellness tourism destination (facilities and services, natural and cultural resources, health, safety, and well-being, and hospitality and service quality) have significant effects on

destination loyalty as well. Well-managed destination attributes are crucial for building loyalty and gaining a competitive edge as tourists will return, recommend the destination, and develop an emotional attachment to it if they have positive perceptions of these attributes. In terms of destination attributes, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty, it seems that destination attributes are likely to affect the quality of tourist experiences, which in turn is likely to influence tourist satisfaction, which in turn is likely to affect destination loyalty - this suggests that, in practice, a

continuous improvement in destination attributes over time is important for building and sustaining tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

The two theoretical poles that the network analyses reported below suggest are driven by the desire to examine relationships that have been prompted by the research tradition in satisfaction and loyalty research (with the conventional approach from the psychometric and the structural-equation-modelling perspective) and by the sustainability and destination-management research tradition.

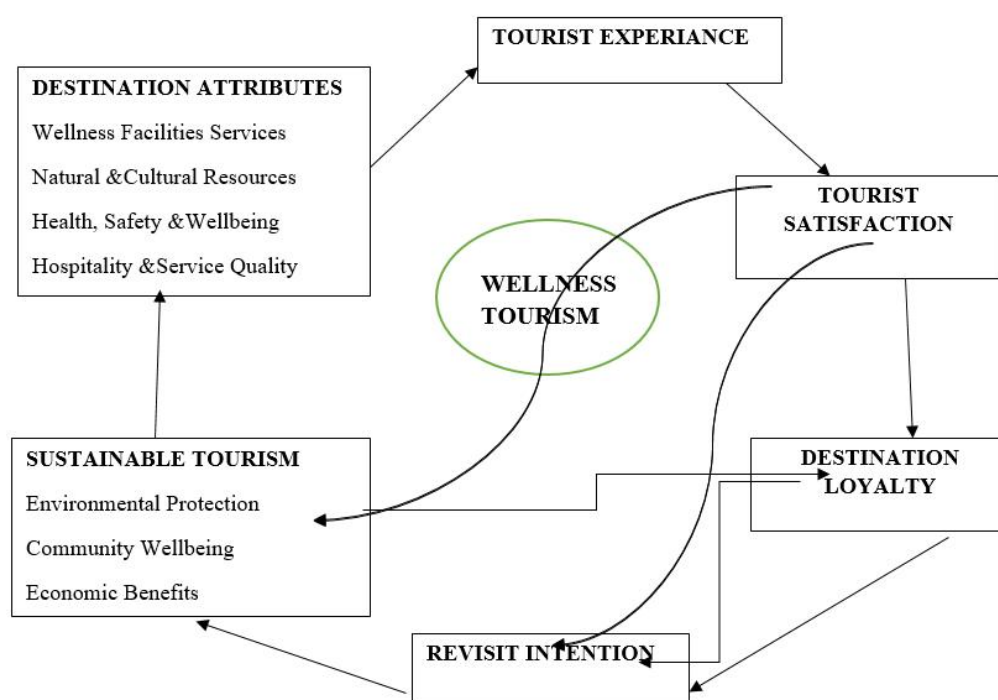


Figure 1. Cyclical relationship among wellness tourism destination attributes, tourist experience, satisfaction, loyalty, and sustainable tourism.

Research Objectives

- 1) To find the most productive and influential authors in the field of research on wellness tourism and tourist experience and destination loyalty.
- 2) To analyse the academic production and international cooperation of the top countries in the area of wellness tourism and tourist experience and destination loyalty.
- 3) To examine the intellectual structure of the research field with the help of keyword co-occurrence and co-citation analyses.

Materials and Methods

The present study is on bibliometric-review design. The records were extracted from Scopus by using the combination of search terms: "Wellness tourism" OR "tourist experience" OR "tourist contentment" OR "destination affection" OR "revisit intention" OR "tourist satisfaction" OR "destination loyalty" OR

"sustainable tourism" OR "tourism experience". The resulting dataset spans 1980-2026 (with a partial year at extraction) and includes 13,551 documents from 1,973 sources.

The authorship and co-authorship analysis, country-level production and collaboration, keyword co-occurrence and co-citation network analysis, citation networks of sources, countries, references and authors, strategic-cluster quantification (Callon centrality/density) and thematic mapping were performed at the network level and/or at the structure level using the Biblioshiny/VOSviewer workflow (R 4.6.0, VOSviewer 1.6.21). Since there is no Keywords plus (ID) field for 73.20% of all records in this export, keyword analyses were performed on the author-keyword (DE) field. Other companion papers of this series present the results of production-, citation-, and source-level analyses of the same data, including the complete metadata-completeness audit.

Results

Most Productive and Most Cited Authors

The 10 most locally cited sources (authors) are shown in figure 2. Hall C. M. (2,831 local citations) and Hair J. F. Gosling S. is in second place (2,713), with a significant gap. (1,980), Cohen E. (1,822), Han H. (1,801), Buhalis D. (1,747), Fornell C. (1,703), Richards G. (1,469), Sharpoley R. (1,432), and Bramwell B. (1,356).

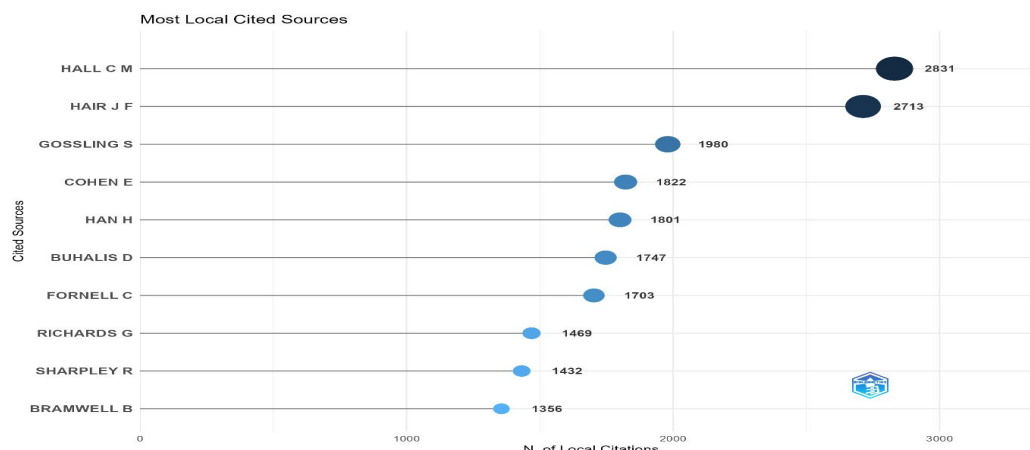


Figure 2 Ten most locally cited sources (authors)

The co-authorship network (Figure 3) reveals a separate group of highly prolific and inter-connected contemporary authors, with two nodes (Han Heesup, Hall C. Michael) being the two largest and most connected. Three broad collaboration clusters are evident: a red cluster around Hall, Pearce, Moscardo and Kastenholz, with a focus on destination management and tourist experience; a yellow/olive

Richards G. (1,469), Sharpoley R. (1,432), and Bramwell B. (1,356). The references to Hair and Fornell are especially prominent, indicating the methodological influence of structural-equation-modelling and satisfaction-measuring references in this literature, and the references to Hall, Gosling, Cohen, Buhalis, Sharpoley and Bramwell comprise the tourism-studies core.

cluster around Sthapit, Scott and Kim, with an interest in tourist behaviour and hospitality; and a blue/green cluster around Han, Kozak and Prayag, focused on modelling destination loyalty and satisfaction. The structure indicates that not all the authors of this field are in the same dense writer's group, but are distributed among various, loosely knit groups.

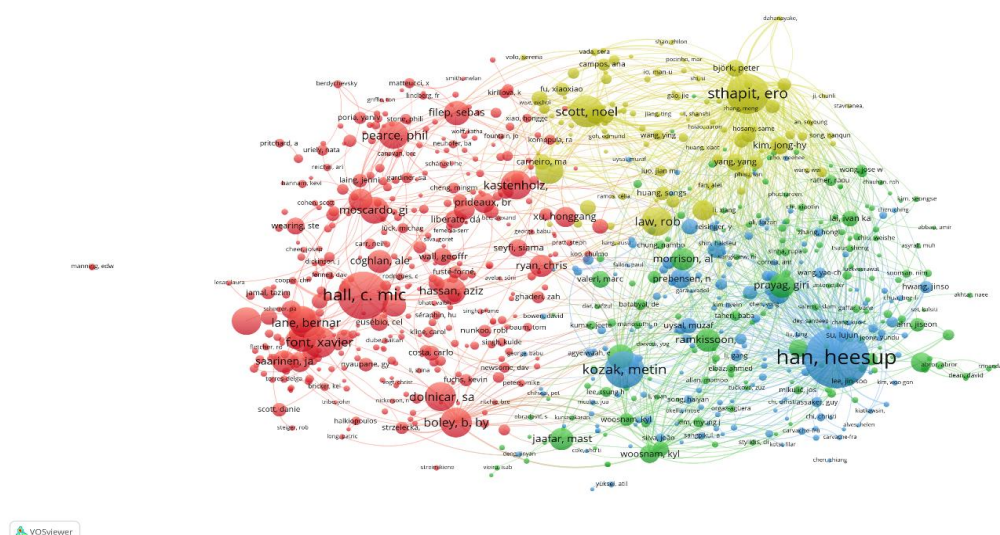


Figure 3 Co-authorship network of the most prolific authors

Country Scientific Production And Collaboration

Figure 4 visualises country level scientific production based on density visualisation in VOSviewer, showing the number of publications in which at least one author was affiliated to a country, with the size of nodes and the gradient of shading indicating the

number of publications. The field is dominated by a small number of large contributions (the United States, India and Italy), but it also includes a geographically extensive group of smaller contributors, including Austria, Poland, Denmark and long tail of smaller countries, such as Vietnam, Jordan, Uzbekistan and several in the Gulf and Central Asia.

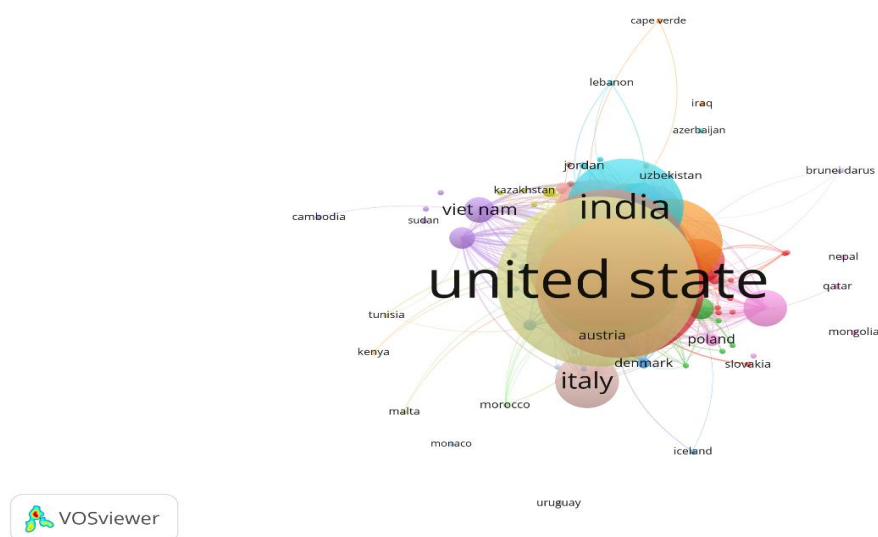


Figure 4 Country Scientific Production and Collaboration

For each country, line thickness shows the number of publications co-authored with other countries and shading shows the overall number of publications. Figure 12 shows the country collaboration network overlaid on a global map. The United States, China and Australia are the top three shaded nodes and top three well-connected international nodes, with having high output as well as being heavily linked

with international collaborators, and others, such as the United Kingdom, Italy and many other European and East Asian countries, also having strong positions in the world of collaboration. Africa and South America seem to be more on the margins in terms of output and collaborative linkages, suggesting an opportunity to further strengthen international collaborations on research related to wellness and sustainability tourism.

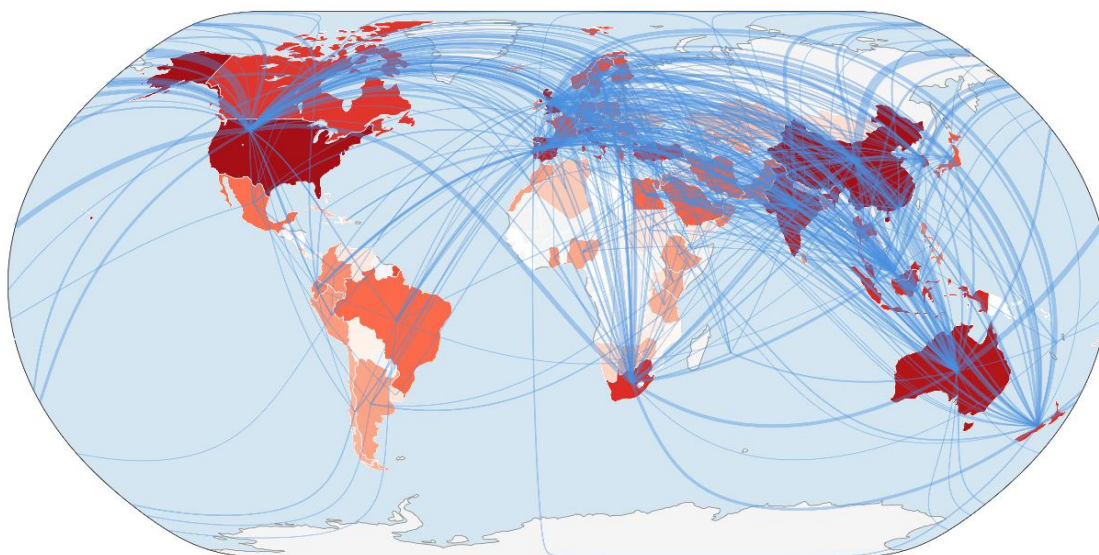


Figure 5 International collaboration network overlaid on a world map

Co-Occurrence Of Keywords And Word Cloud

Table 1 presents the top 30 author keywords being used in the dataset. Sustainable tourism (2,356) and tourism (2,006) are the two more dominant terms, followed at some distance by ecotourism (1,356), tourism development (1,145), tourist destination

(1,038), sustainability (995), sustainable development (956), tourist behaviour (883), and tourism management (832); satisfaction-related terms include satisfaction (562), revisit intention (539), tourist satisfaction (486), and destination loyalty (261) and are found at lower yet still significant frequencies.

Table 1: Thirty most frequent author keywords

Sl No.	Keyword	Occurrences
1	sustainable tourism	2356
2	tourism	2006
3	ecotourism	1356
4	tourism development	1145
5	tourist destination	1038
6	sustainability	995
7	sustainable development	956
8	tourist behaviour	883
9	tourism management	832
10	satisfaction	562
11	revisit intention	539
12	tourist satisfaction	486
13	tourist experience	469
14	tourism market	428
15	perception	367
16	china	332
17	destination image	331
18	heritage tourism	331
19	tourist attraction	301
20	sustainable tourism development	299
21	tourism experience	282
22	tourism economics	273
23	marketing	266
24	destination loyalty	261
25	covid-19	233
26	authenticity	222
27	stakeholder	216
28	travel behaviour	212

Sl No.	Keyword	Occurrences
29	wellness tourism	209
30	social media	201

This same ranking is shown in Figures 6 and 7, as a 'lollipop chart' and a 'proportional tree map' respectively, both of which reinforce the twofold thematic focus on sustainability/ecotourism on one side and tourist experience/behaviour/loyalty on the other.

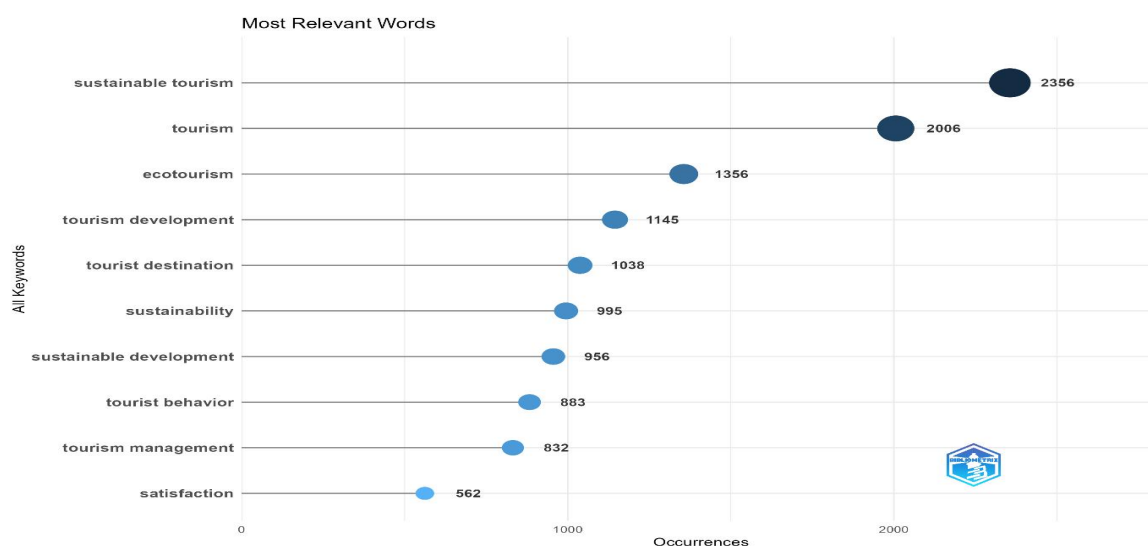


Figure 6: Most relevant author keywords by occurrence count

The graph, shown as Figure 7, depicts the number of occurrences of the top 10 keywords across the years. From the mid-90s, all terms are negligible, while sustainable tourism and tourism separate from these terms start to grow and quicken significantly after about 2015, which corresponds to the overall production growth after 2020 identified in Section

3.1. The flatter and more gradual growth of terms that are more closely associated with the tourist-experience/loyalty pole (tourist behaviour, tourism management, satisfaction) indicates that the vocabulary of sustainability has appeared earlier and has grown at a faster rate than the experience/loyalty vocabulary.

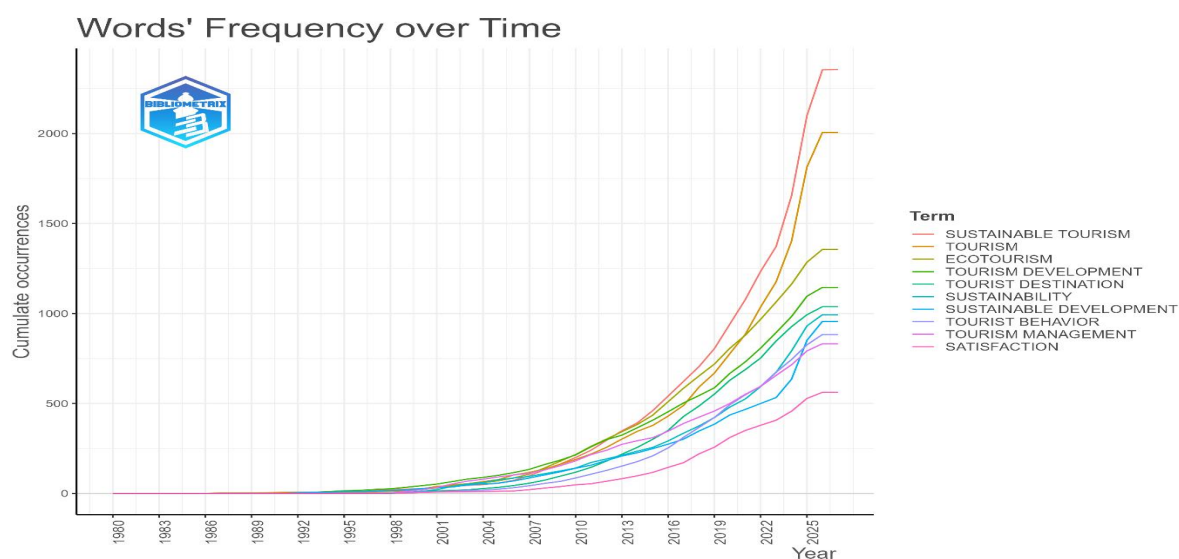


Figure 7: Cumulative occurrence of the ten leading author keywords over time

Citation Network Of Sources

The most global cited document analysis shows the seminal publications that have influenced the intellectual development of this research field. The most cited document of all, with 2,807 citations worldwide as of 1999, was Wang N. (1999) published in Annals of Tourism Research, which also remains the most influential publication for tourism theory and authenticity studies. Yoon Y. is followed by it. (2005) in Tourism Management (2,428 citations) and Cohen E. Both articles (1988) in Annals of Tourism Research (with 2,276 citations) have had a major impact on destination management and the sociology

of tourism. Other key studies cited by Chi (2008), Oh (2007), Kim (2012), Tung (2011), Quan (2004), Dann (1981), and Yüksel (2010) have contributed to the research of customer satisfaction, destination image, memorable tourism experiences, tourist motivation, and destination loyalty. The dominance of Annals of Tourism Research, Tourism Management, and the Journal of Travel Research underlines the pivotal place of these journals in transmitting high impact tourism scholarship. These publications form the backbone of the field's ideas and principles and remain relevant to current research and theory building

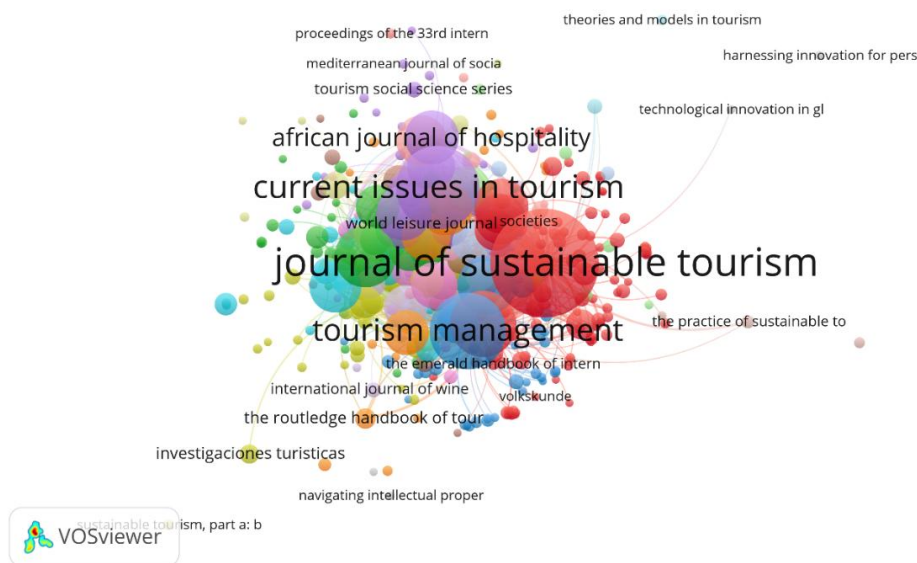


Figure 8: Citation Network of Sources

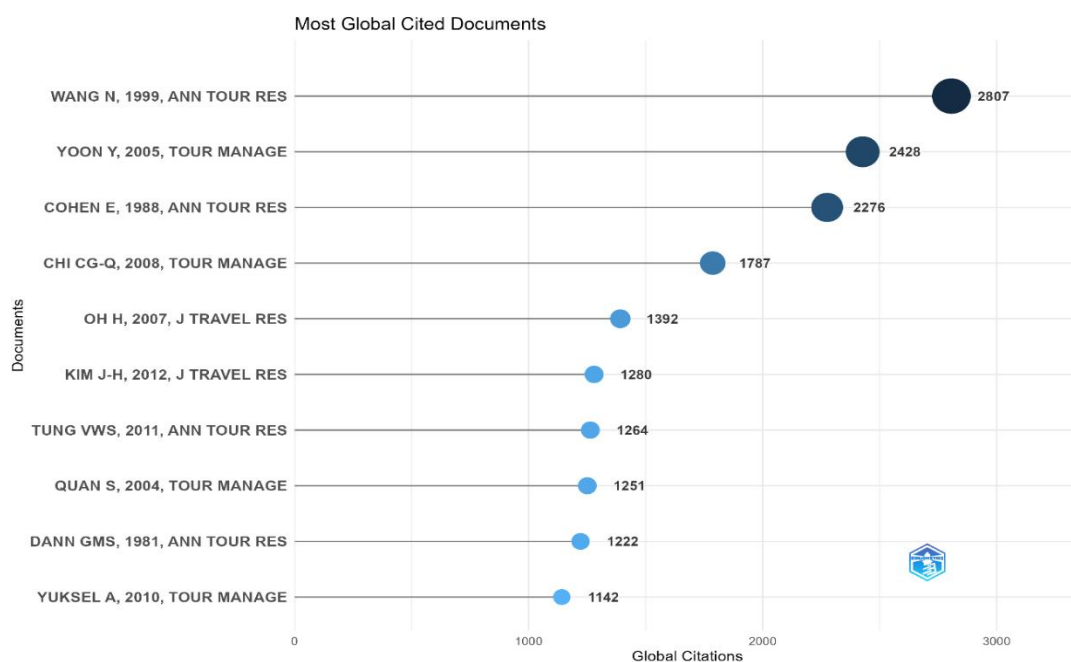


Figure 9: Most Global Cited Document

Citation And Co-Authorship Networks Of Countries

The country collaboration network (Figure 10) shows a very international and interconnected research landscape with five main collaboration clusters. The strongest collaboration node is the United States, which is well connected to North American, European, Asian, African, and Latin American countries. The Spanish collaboration centre is the main hub in Europe while Malaysia plays a

major role as a centre of collaboration in Asia, with strong international connections; and Italy and South Africa act as regional hubs between Europe and Africa respectively. Peripheral countries (Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Barbados, Türkiye, Yemen, and Sudan) have a comparatively small exchange volume, and the general structure of the network points to a well-developed and globally integrated research domain, dominated by a small number of key countries and an increasing number of emerging ones.

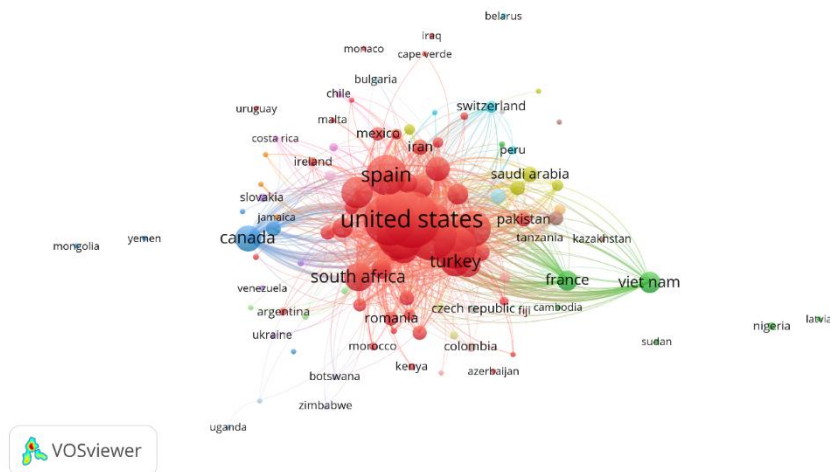


Figure 10: Citation Network of Countries

Co Citation Network Of Cited References

The co-citation network generated by the VOS viewer shows the intellectual structure of the research field in 5 separate clusters, but connected in a way that allows for understanding the concepts of the field. Uysal, M. as the most cited author has the highest node, pointing to its central influence in the field of tourism management and destination research, and it is also the highest co-cited author. Hall, C.M. and Cohen, E. are other intellectual pillars, and have made significant contributions to sustainable tourism, tourist behaviour, and tourism sociology. While the red cluster is related to tourism management, service

quality, and destination competitiveness, the green one is related to sustainability, community involvement and tourist experiences. The blue cluster gives the theoretical and sociological background of tourism studies, the yellow and purple cluster gives the perspective of consumer behaviour, marketing, hospitality and cross-cultural research. The strong linkages between the various clusters emphasize the multidisciplinary character of the sector and the need to conduct current tourism research within the context of an integrated approach which brings together management, behavioural science, social science, sustainability and marketing.

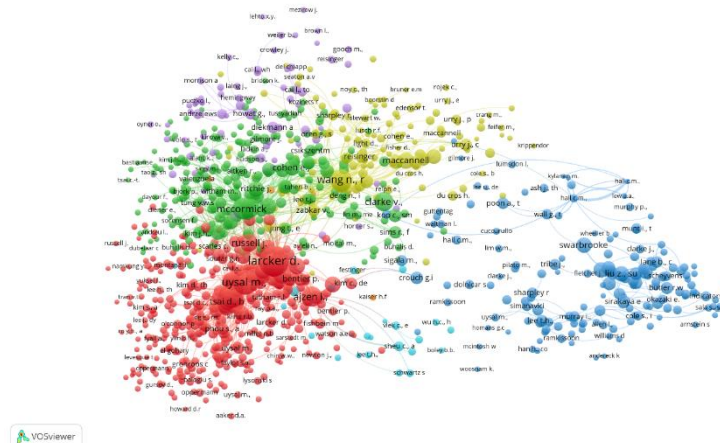


Figure 11: Co Citation Network of Cited References

Discussion

Similarly, the countries that have been most prolific in research output - the United States, India and Italy - are also the most internationally connected, with the authors who have contributed most - Han Heesup, Hall C. Michael and Kozak Metin - in the predominantly American, Indian and Australian networks of authorship. The juxtaposition of productivity and connectivity is in line with the maturing field and its continued internationalisation in tandem with its production.

The analysis of the intellectual field by means of keywords and co-citations is convergent towards a reading of the field structure in terms of two poles. The first pole focuses on sustainability and ecotourism, and is based on sustainable-development and sustainable-tourism-policy literature (Swarbrooke; the Brundtland Commission), while the second one focuses on tourist experiences and destination loyalty, and is based on psychometric and structural-equation-modelling traditions (Fornell & Larcker; Yoon & Uysal). The thematic map and thematic cluster indices make this clearer; the field's most developed and integrative is tourist destination, the densest, less integrative is ecotourism, and the high volume but still-diversifying is sustainable tourism whose sub-strands have yet to converge around an integrative core. Wellness tourism is located on the experiential/behavioural pole of this spectrum rather than in isolation, and can be seen as one motivation in this spectrum of two poles.

The co-citation network of references/author and the interconnections of these sub-literatures with each other and the rest of the literature further confirms this reading: A single issue, such as tourism-management/service-quality, is multiply interconnected with other issues (sustainability/community; sociological/theoretical; consumer-behaviour/marketing), and with literature that is not related directly to the issue, indicating a truly multidisciplinary field and not a series of isolated sub-literatures. The most widely referenced documents (Wang, 1999; Yoon, 2005; Cohen, 1988) reside not just at the heart of the traditions, but also help to account for their impact on both sides of the field.

Conclusion

This paper summarizes the trends and structure of the literature of this connection, based on the indicators of author productivity and co-citation, international cooperation, keywords co-occurrence and thematic analysis of all 13,551 documents (1980-2026). Han Heesup, Hall C. Michael and Kozak Metin are the highest ranked by number of publications and co-authorship centrality while the United States is the most prolific country and India the most internationally co-authorship country; tourist destination is the most integrative research theme of

the field. The intellectual structure of the field becomes apparent in two analytically separate poles, the sustainable-development pole based on literature from sustainable-development policy, and the tourist-experience/destination-loyalty pole based on psychometric satisfaction-and-loyalty modelling, and around a common and growing set of keyword terms. Digital transformation is also a promising research area, with the thematic-evolution patterns pointing out the new growing axis of AI, VR, smart tourism and digital marketing, in addition to the two established ones of sustainability and visitor-experience.

Reference

1. Aria, M., Misuraca, M., & Spano, M. (2020). Mapping the evolution of social research and data science on 30 years of Social Indicators Research. *Social Indicators Research*, 149, 803-831. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-020-02281-3>
2. Bettencourt, L. M., Kaiser, D. I., & Kaur, J. (2009). Scientific discovery and topological transitions in collaboration networks. *Journal of Informetrics*, 3(3), 210-221. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2009.03.001>
3. Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of Innovations* (5th ed.). New York: Free Press.
4. Small, H., & Upham, S. P. (2009). Citation structure of an emerging research area on the verge of application. *Scientometrics*, 79(2), 365-375. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-009-0424-0>
5. Wang, Q. (2018). A bibliometric model for identifying emerging research topics. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 69(2), 290-304. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.23930>
6. Callon, M., Courtial, J.-P., Turner, W. A., & Bauin, S. (1983). From translations to problematic networks: An introduction to co-word analysis. *Social Science Information*, 22(2), 191-235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901883022002003>
7. Aria, M. & Cuccurullo, C. (2017). bibliometrix: An R-tool for comprehensive science mapping analysis. *Journal of Informatics*, 11(4), 959-975. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2017.08.007>
8. Aria, M., & Cuccurullo, C. (2026). *Science Mapping Analysis: A Primer with Biblioshiny*. McGraw-Hill, New York, NY, USA. ISBN: 978-88-386-2297-7.
9. Van Eck, N. J., & Waltman, L. (2010).

- Software survey: VOSviewer, a computer program for bibliometric mapping. *Scientometrics*, 84(2), 523-538. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-009-0146-3>
10. Cobo, M. J., Lopez-Herrera, A. G., Herrera-Viedma, E., & Herrera, F. (2011). An approach for detecting, quantifying, and visualizing the evolution of a research field. *Journal of Informetrics*, 5(1), 146-166. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2010.10.002>
 11. Aria, M. & Cuccurullo, C. (2017). Bibliometrix: An R-tool for comprehensive science mapping analysis. *Journal of Informetrics*, 11(4), 959-975. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2017.08.007>
 12. Aria, M., & Cuccurullo, C. (2026). *Science Mapping Analysis: A Primer with Biblioshiny*. McGraw-Hill, New York, NY, USA. ISBN: 978-88-386-2297-7.
 13. Cobo, M. J., Lopez-Herrera, A. G., Herrera-Viedma, E., & Herrera, F. (2011). An approach for detecting, quantifying, and visualizing the evolution of a research field. *Journal of Informetrics*, 5(1), 146-166. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2010.10.002>
 14. Noyons, E. C. M., Moed, H. F., & van Raan, A. F. J. (1999). Integrating research performance analysis and science mapping. *Scientometrics*, 46(3), 591-604. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02459614>