

## HERITAGE TOURISM RESEARCH: A BIBLIOMETRIC OVERVIEW

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### Abstract

The heritage tourism sector has experienced significant growth over the last decades. This phenomenon has also been reflected in the tourism literature, wherein a substantial amount of research has been devoted to the subject of heritage tourism. Given the increasing prevalence of this trend, it is imperative to conduct a comprehensive literature review study in order to assess the attained outcomes and identify any remaining deficiencies. Thus, this study utilizes a bibliometric approach to clarify the evolution of heritage tourism scholarly research during the last three decades. The bibliometric analysis was conducted with 1675 English articles retrieved from journals indexed in the Scopus database. By using the VOSviewer software, the author performed three main data analysis techniques, namely co-authorship, co-citation, and co-occurrence analysis of the bibliographic information. The results revealed the leading authors, countries, and publications with the most impact. The study also highlights the change in research topics over time and provides insightful suggestions for future heritage tourism research. This is the latest review study of heritage tourism research. It provides updates and enhances comprehension of the existing knowledge structure in this topic. The results of this study hold great importance for both scholars and practitioners when dealing with heritage tourism issues.

*Keywords:* heritage tourism, bibliometric review, VOSviewer, Scopus, knowledge structure.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Heritage is commonly viewed as “an inheritance from the past that is valued and utilized today, and what we hope to pass on to future generations” (Timothy, 2018, p. 25). Throughout history, heritage resources have always been an important part of the tourism industry (Poria et al., 2003). In fact, destination managers utilize a range of valuable resources, including historic and archeological sites, as well as intangible legacy elements such as festivals, traditional customs, and language, to effectively promote their heritage image (Farooq et al., 2021; Gallaga et al., 2022). Timothy (2011) stated that over 80 percent of international trips were focused on the purpose of visiting and immersing oneself in the cultural and heritage values of the location. According to a recent report by Historic England (2023), 3 out of 5 adults in the UK reported having visited a heritage site over the previous 12 months. This form of tourism has a substantial impact on the economy, creating employment opportunities and facilitating the expansion of the tourism infrastructure (Timothy, 2011). Therefore, heritage tourism has garnered growing scholarly interest in recent decades, not just among commercial practitioners (Timothy, 2018). Prior research (Kumar et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022) has documented a significant surge in the study of heritage tourism, with a remarkable increase in both the quantity and quality of published works. Many novel research topics, concepts, and approaches to heritage tourism have been explored. Nevertheless, this exponential expansion might result in adverse consequences. Researchers may struggle to keep up with the latest developments in research initiatives and unintentionally ignore practical difficulties that need to be addressed. Hence, it is necessary to do theoretical research in order to assess a comprehensive understanding of a subject matter by examining published literature (Paul & Criado, 2020).

Bibliometric approaches enable the assessment of the knowledge structure of a particular topic (Van Eck and Waltman, 2023). Therefore, this method aids researchers in obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the domain and emerging topics leading the field (Donthu et al., 2021). The heritage tourism research community has conducted several scholarly bibliometric studies. Nevertheless, all of those investigations possess specific limitations. Zhang et al. (2023) exclusively focus on cultural heritage tourism, while Zhang et al. (2022) solely examine research trends related to world heritage. Chen et al. (2022) restrictedly assess research pertaining to Chinese intangible cultural heritage. In their study, Kumar et al. (2020) restricted the data scope to a single tourism journal, namely the Journal of Heritage Tourism. To the author’s best knowledge, Bhowmik (2021) has yet to undertake a thorough bibliometric evaluation of research pertaining