

Illuminating rural tourism: A bibliometric approach



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Abstract During the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, rural tourism in developed nations provided an exhilarating and pioneering field to delve into, whether one was a scholarly researcher or a visitor immersing oneself in the countryside environment. This type of tourism emerged as a novel and distinctive option, challenging the traditional and, in some cases, rapidly expanding beach and coastal resorts that dominated the tourism industry after the Second World War. Rural tourism was not a completely new occurrence in advanced countries during that period. It had already been set up, for example, in many distinguished and charming areas throughout Europe and North America since the end of the 19th century. The research examines the responses to the growth and transformation of rural tourism by analyzing articles published in Scopus, specifically exploring the subject categories and geographic distribution of these publications. By identifying patterns and making predictions based on these articles, this study aims to classify and investigate key research advancements and divisions in rural tourism. Additionally, it explores the research gaps in this field and synthesizes the findings to establish a solid framework for future investigations. The study also delves into the marketing research aspect of rural tourism and rural locations, highlighting the value of rural tourism journals for businesses and examining the emerging research trends and future opportunities in tourism organizations, as well as critical indicators for business performance. Finally, the article suggests that the capability framework can be utilized to identify new avenues for marketing research in the area.

Keywords: tourism, tourism development, rural tourism, bibliometric analysis

1. Introduction

During the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, rural tourism in developed nations provided an exhilarating and pioneering field to delve into, whether one was a scholarly researcher or a visitor immersing oneself in the countryside environment. This type of tourism emerged as a novel and distinctive option, challenging the traditional and, in some cases, rapidly expanding beach and coastal resorts that dominated the tourism industry after the Second World War. Rural tourism was not a completely new occurrence in advanced countries during that period. It had already been set up, for example, in many distinguished and charming areas throughout Europe and North America since the end of the 19th century. This movement was propelled by a deep fascination with the picturesque rural landscapes and the extension of railway networks into remote rural areas (Saravanan, 2024; Runte, 1990; Ravi & Rajasekaran, 2023). Rural tourism has effectively navigated the uncertainties expressed by specific government officials during OECD meetings, and it seems to have experienced consistent growth over the previous 25 years, transforming into a worldwide sensation. This expansion can be attributed to evolving market preferences, which are influenced by the increasing trend of micromobility, alterations in lifestyle choices, and the introduction of fashionable outdoor recreational activities. Unintentionally, numerous enterprises involved in this sector have enjoyed the advantages of the ascent of what scholars presently refer to as the encounter-driven society or the encounter-driven economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999; Schulze, 1996). The evolution of rural tourism led to a transition away from the traditional and conventional appreciation of beautiful natural views during the late 19th century. This earlier form of tourism primarily focused on the admiration of picturesque landscapes. In terms of provision, advancements have derived from the acceptance of tourism as a viable means of economic involvement by the rural populace. Similarly, a multitude of protected areas of scenic splendors have instigated meticulously planned rural tourism endeavors, instead of opposing tourism on account of concerns regarding its adverse impacts. The notion of rural tourism has been present in the realms of tourism literature and sociology since the late nineteenth century (Lane & Kastenholtz, 2015). Over the past three decades, rural tourism has undergone two significant phases, both of which have resulted in a rise in market share (Lane & Kastenholtz, 2015). In contrast to numerous other well-established sectors, the field of tourism research has experienced significant and rapid expansion throughout the years. Nevertheless, few studies have systematically appraised the existing body of literature to furnish scholars and professionals with a comprehensive understanding of its development and prospective trajectory (Chang & Katrichis, 2016). A rural tourism initiative that collaborates with a nearby community must focus its efforts on both preserving the environment and promoting local economic growth (De Boer & Van Dijk, 2016). The viewpoints of the host community regarding the advancement of tourism hold great significance for any



government or industry-driven developmental initiative. It is imperative to have a well-coordinated endeavor aimed at providing empowerment, education, and inclusion to local communities and stakeholder groups to revive the tourism sector and ensure its long-term sustainability. This can be achieved through the implementation of an inventive approach to community-based tourism (Tichaawa & Moyo, 2017). The promotion of sustainable tourism development in rural areas can serve as a valuable instrument for fostering regional development in a developing nation. This endeavour can play a crucial role in mitigating regional disparities, particularly those observed between urban centers and remote locations (Alpheaus & Potgieter, 2021). In acknowledging the pivotal role played by the travel industry in the economic recovery of many countries, particularly in rural areas, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) designated 2020 the "Year of Tourism and Rural Development." The COVID-19 pandemic has led travelers to travel to less crowded destinations and engage in outdoor activities, thus heightening the significance of the travel industry for transportation. Rural areas possess the capacity to significantly profit from the prospects offered by the tourism industry. It is crucial to recognize the substantial impact that coronavirus has had on research pertaining to rural travel (Rosalina et al., 2021). As the world has experienced one of the most formidable crises in history, there is an urgent need to explore innovative strategies that harness the potential of tourism to uplift rural communities and promote local development (UNWTO, 2020). Presently, numerous regions are embarking on the third phase. Rural tourism is regarded as an economic endeavor that entails transformation to foster local development. Rural communities perceive the growth of tourism as an opportunity to stimulate their economies and rejuvenate businesses that would otherwise succumb to market forces (Ivona, 2021).

The purpose of this investigation is to conduct a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of articles pertaining to rural tourism, also known as RT. Given the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, rural tourism has emerged as a popular choice for regions with limited or no access to the internet or mobile phone services. Furthermore, the interconnections between health, well-being, telecommuting, and tourism have assumed even greater significance. Our examination focused on the studies on rural tourism that were included in the SCOPUS primary scientific database. In addition to the phrase "rural tourism," the aforementioned terms were the primary descriptors utilized. This is the organizational structure of the study. After elucidating the theoretical foundations of the concepts employed in the research on technological disconnection, recreation, and tourism in rural areas, subsequent research inquiries are addressed.

1. This study aims to ascertain the number of scholarly papers pertaining to rural tourism, including an examination of the authors, sources, connections, and countries that exhibit the highest publication rates in this domain.

2. This analysis aims to examine the thematic content and interrelationships among research publications focused on rural tourism.

3. Examine the intellectual framework of research on rural tourism.

4. The social structure of rural tourism studies should be explored.

In the subsequent section, the methodology employed in this investigation is described. Subsequently, the outcomes are provided and deliberated upon, along with the research's conclusions and recommendations for prospective avenues of investigation being offered in the denouement.

2. Background of the study

Due to the dynamic nature of the rural tourism research field, it is crucial for researchers in this field to possess knowledge pertaining to key areas of interest, their development over time, new research trends, and prominent research collaborations. Review articles are widely acknowledged as valuable academic works for presenting the current state of knowledge in the field of tourism and its related studies (Güzeller & Çeliker, 2019; Köseoglu, 2016; Tribe & Xiao, 2011). (Grant & Booth, 2009) proposed a comprehensive framework for categorizing review articles, that encompasses four key components: search, appraisal, synthesis, and analysis. According to their suggestion, systematic reviews hold a pivotal position in the realm of scientific exploration, as they not only allow for a thorough investigation of relevant sources but also aid in the identification of existing knowledge and the identification of research gaps within a specific area of study. Ruhanen et al. (2015) have further established a systematic literature review as a methodological approach that is both scientifically grounded and pragmatic in the field of tourism studies. Building upon this foundation, these scholars highlight the significance of conducting systematic literature reviews to advance the understanding of tourism phenomena. Similarly, in a study conducted by Zeng and Ryan (2012), a systematic review was undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of tourism in reducing poverty in China. This rigorous review not only identified specific research trends and patterns but also shed light on well-explored themes and areas that require further investigation within the domain of pro-poor tourism. Moreover, Singh (2015) conducted a systematic review to examine the state of tourism research in India. Notably, bibliometric and metadata analyses are two widely accepted approaches in the field of tourism research, that can provide valuable insights into the research landscape and facilitate the identification of research themes and gaps. Thus, these approaches serve as essential tools for researchers in the field of tourism studies. These approaches, while similar in nature, differ significantly in their methodology and objectives. According to Köseoglu (2016), bibliometrics involves the application of statistical methods to analyze the evolution of scientific disciplines by examining publication performance, mapping the structure and dynamics of fields, and utilizing data obtained from various written publications such as books, journals, proceedings, and articles. On the

other hand, meta-analysis refers to the statistical methods used to synthesize and integrate results from individual studies (Jiménez-García et al., 2020). In the context of systematic reviews, the bibliometric approach is often employed to investigate temporal patterns in tourism research (Ruhanen et al., 2015), identify the most influential countries, institutions, and authors (Güzeller & Çeliker, 2019), and explore aspects of authorship and collaboration (Köseoglu, 2016). Conversely, a meta-data analysis or meta-analysis, which is a statistical technique used to combine data from multiple studies, is commonly employed as an integral component of the systematic review process to thoroughly investigate and evaluate various aspects, such as the progression of concepts, the methodologies employed in the research, and the different types of experiments conducted (Nunkoo & Prayag, 2018).

In contrast to the vast number of scholarly articles that have been written on the subject of rural tourism, only a handful of researchers have attempted to conduct a comprehensive review of the research trends in this field since its inception. This has resulted in a significant dearth of systematic review studies that can effectively evaluate the scientific progress made in this particular area of study. Bird (2007) meticulously and comprehensively expounded upon the intricate concept of scientific progress, specifically within the confines of a distinct realm of science or research, while placing a particular emphasis on the development of theories and the accumulation of knowledge. The analysis of progress is undertaken through the lens of three distinct approaches: the epistemic approach, the semantic approach, and the functional-internalist approach. The epistemic approach to progress primarily concentrates on the gradual accumulation of knowledge, with an inherent focus on the acquisition and dissemination of information. Conversely, the semantic approach delineates progress by virtue of verisimilitude, which pertains to the probability of uncovering the truth or approximating its veracity within a particular research domain. On the other end of the spectrum, the functional-internalist approach accentuates the discovery of novel facets of research, with the ultimate objective of tackling existing problems or offering innovative solutions. This approach delves deeper into exploring uncharted territories within the realm of research, thereby facilitating the identification and resolution of pressing issues.

The primary objective of the current study is to explore the trajectory of knowledge accumulation in the realm of rural tourism research over multiple decades. This investigation aims to shed light on the patterns and trends that have emerged over time, offering valuable insights into the evolution of this field. Moreover, subsequent research inquiries have sought to delve deeper into the advancements made in rural tourism, specifically focusing on the emergence of novel areas of theory development. These areas have gained increasing significance and prominence over time, emphasizing the need for further exploration and understanding. These areas of theory development are explored through the lens of various contexts, themes, and subthemes, all of which contribute to the provision of solutions for the real-time functionalities of rural tourism in a broader sense. A review article on rural tourism that delves into the definition of rural tourism and the variations in these definitions between developed and developing economies was published by Nair et al. (2015). However, the authors did not specify a specific time period for their review, and their content analysis was limited to papers that included a definitional context of rural tourism in both the main body and the title. As a result, this methodology falls short in providing a comprehensive comprehension of the advancements made in rural tourism research. Conducted Gabor (2017) a thorough examination of 215 complete articles on rural tourism from 15 distinguished journals. This comprehensive study covered a time period ranging from 1991 to 2010. The researchers employed content analysis as a method to categorize the articles according to major themes, including subject areas addressed by the journals, years of publication, nature of research (conceptual or empirical), and regional focus. It is worth noting that this particular study stands out as the sole existing one that has utilized a quasi-systematic review of the rural tourism literature to date. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the scope of this study is somewhat limited in terms of the parameters considered, particularly compared to a more extensive bibliometric analysis. Furthermore, the study period, spanning from 1991 to 2010, excludes the rural tourism context of developing nations such as India, which only began to gain significant momentum after the 2000s; therefore, there may be relevant articles published even after 2010 that are not accounted for in Michalko's study. The study conducted by Lane and Kastenholz (2015) fails to document articles that provide a comprehensive account of the initial and subsequent phases of rural tourism and its development during the 1970s and 1980s. In an attempt to shed light on trends in rural tourism development, Streimikiene and Bilan (2015) conducted a literature review that focused on supply and demand factors. However, their approach lacked systematic and bibliometric elements. In contrast, Lane and Kastenholz (2015) aimed to uncover the evolution of rural tourism and its development research through a temporal classification of the literature, identifying key themes along the way. Unfortunately, they overlooked the potential research areas that have yet to be addressed, while emphasizing the importance of integrity among researchers in contributing to the future of rural tourism development. Moreover, the authors' discursive approach to the discussion not only failed to take into account the crucial parameters of systematic bibliometric research, but also overlooked the significance of these parameters in evaluating the progress and development of rural tourism. In contrast, (Sasu & Epuran, 2016) directed their review toward the exploration of new trends in the type, creativity, and authenticity features of rural tourism, yet they neglected to consider the overall advancements in the broader field of tourism research. This oversight is particularly problematic considering the evolving nature of rurality, rural tourism, welfare, and business management, as scholars argue that it is imperative to continually review the nature of research to incorporate new concepts and research themes (Gabor, 2017; Saxena & Ilbery, 2008).

Consequently, the existing reviews pertaining to rural tourism not only fail to capture the full extent of progress made in this field, but also fall short in revealing the advancements made in rural tourism research, thus highlighting the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach. The existing reviews pertaining to rural tourism fall short in revealing the advancements made in rural tourism research.

Considering the aforementioned circumstances, it is crucial to undertake a comprehensive evaluative bibliometric examination of the existing body of literature pertaining to rural tourism to obtain a thorough understanding of the subject matter. This exercise would not only provide a systematic and objective analysis, but also shed light on the development of the conceptual framework, authorship patterns, productivity of specific institutions, spatial distribution of study areas, key themes, and potential future research directions related to rural tourism. In light of this pressing need, the present study aims to conduct a meticulous bibliometric analysis of the extensive collection of rural tourism literature published in renowned tourism journals indexed in the SCOPUS database. The search terms used for this analysis were "TITLE-ABS-KEY ("rural tourism") AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "BUSI") AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "AR") AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English") AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE, "j") AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE, "final"))". By employing this search strategy, the primary objective of this analysis is to shed light on the overall progress made in the field of rural tourism, by examining the various aspects mentioned earlier. Consequently, this comprehensive analysis will contribute significantly to the body of knowledge on rural tourism, and provide valuable insights for researchers, and practitioners.

3. Research question

RQ1. Who are the leading authors, institutions, and publications in the scientific literature on possible solutions to rural tourism?

RQ2. What main topics do the published papers consider?

4. Methodology

Advancements in the realm of information and documentation science have given rise to a multitude of databases that can be effortlessly accessed by users. Nevertheless, it has been definitively established that these databases house extensive and disjointed amounts of information and scientific literature across a wide array of domains. Thus, it is essential to utilize appropriate tools for managing data and facilitating the comparison and organization of research documents. In practical terms, the field of bibliometrics serves to fulfill this objective and has garnered widespread application in a myriad of disciplines, such as agriculture, therapy, gastronomy, technologies, and the workplace.

Researchers in the field of tourism are showing increasing interest in conducting descriptive bibliometric studies. These studies are employed to assess the quality of research by applying specific criteria. To obtain bibliometric data, the researchers opted to utilize the renowned Scopus Databases (Elsevier) as their primary sources of information. The researchers formed a Boolean string, "Rural Tourism," to combine the relevant search phrases for all English-language articles. A total of 926 publications, obtained from the Scopus files, were collected to complement the comprehensive bibliographic evaluation conducted. This evaluation involved the implementation of a search method that filtered the data based on pertinent criteria (Okumus, 2020).

The statistical program R-studio is employed in this inquiry to execute the Bibliometrix package, which is founded on a scientometric methodology, as well as the Biblioshiny application. This methodology delineates the stages of database identification, the curation of records and filters for articles satisfying the criteria, and the discernment of the research's structural and dynamic constituents.

Using the databases mentioned above and applying specific search criteria, a comprehensive collection of scholarly papers related to rural tourism was identified. These papers were considered highly relevant to the present study due to their inclusion of the necessary keywords in their titles, summaries, or metadata. After eliminating any instances of duplication, a final count of 926 articles was established. Moreover, to evaluate the content of these articles and their associated documents in a manner that adhered to rigorous guidelines, an additional four exclusion parameters or limitation rules were implemented. These rules involved screening the articles using selection criteria such as "Business, management, and accounting" and "social sciences". Manuscripts that did not fall into the category of research or scientific review articles were excluded from the analysis. Additionally, articles that were not written in English were also excluded. Finally, book chapters, conference papers, review articles, notes, and letters were excluded from the study.

To maintain consistency across data sources, the Scopus database provides the option to export data in the universally recognized bibliographic BibTeX format. The resulting data were managed in compliance with the guidelines outlined in the references. Using the Comprehensive R Archive Network, you can access this file created by the authors.

5. Results

The process of scientific analysis and standardization was completed subsequent to the search for information in these notable databases. Detailed information pertaining to studies on rural tourism conducted from 1986 to 2024 has been

provided (Figure 2). According to the findings of the investigation, there has been a consistent increase in the number of publications relating to rural tourism over the years, particularly between 2006 and 2023. Furthermore, an average publication reference highlights the interest in rural tourism. By utilizing the acquired data, structured files were generated to categorize articles based on journals, time periods, authors, institutions, nations, and study themes, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive comprehension of rural tourism phenomena by academics (Figure 1).

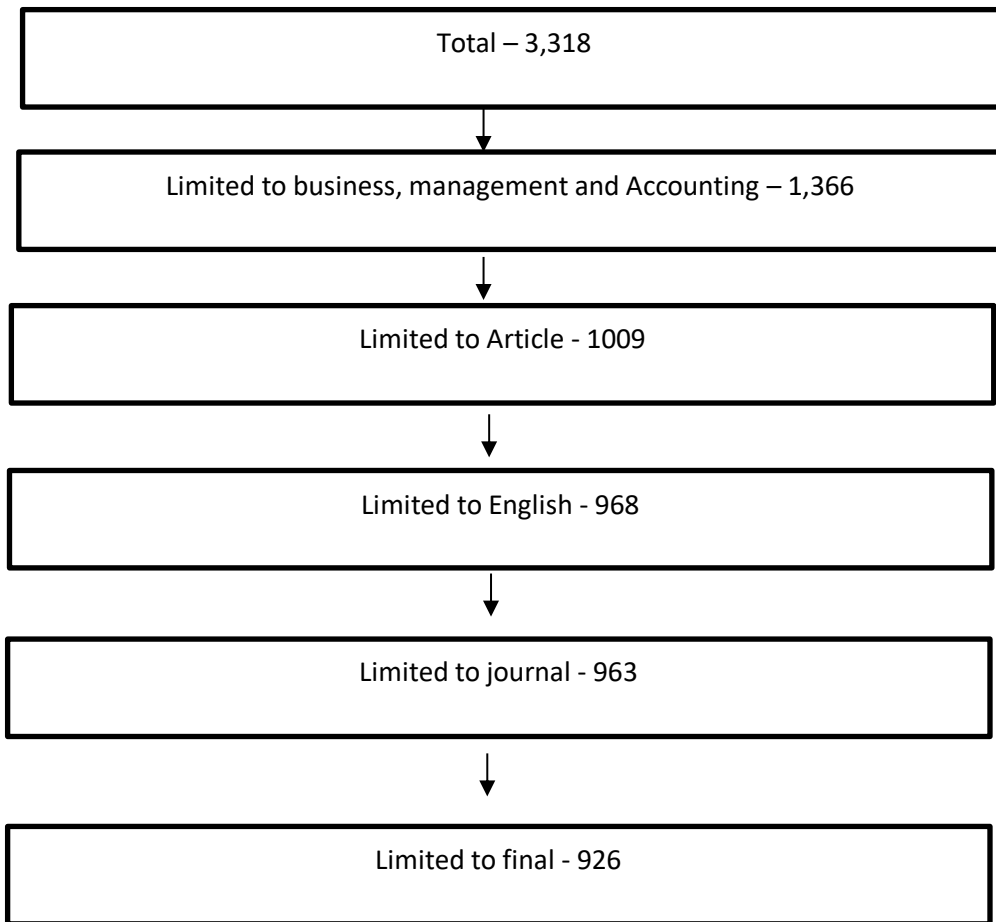


Figure 1 PRISMA.

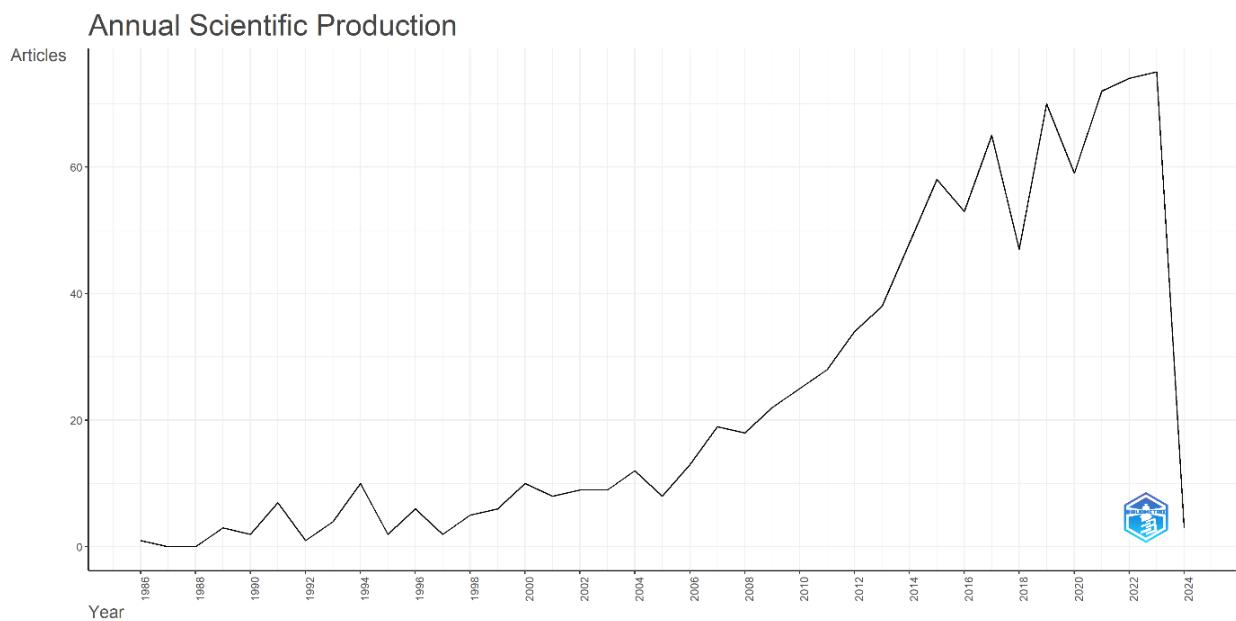


Figure 2 Annual scientific production.



5.1. The Most Productive Rural Tourism Publications

The examination of 926 documents yielded research findings, wherein documents in languages other than English, book chapters, conference papers, reviews, notes, and letters were excluded. The tabulated data obtained from these papers provided insights into the most productive journals and the specific time period in which they were published. The greatest number of articles regarding rural tourism were published in the field of tourism management, highlighting the necessity of conducting research on this subject. This pattern reveals a dedication to disseminating the outcomes of distinctive tourist endeavors and their impact on rural communities. In terms of the quantity of published work, the Journal of Sustainable Tourism ranked second (Figure 3).

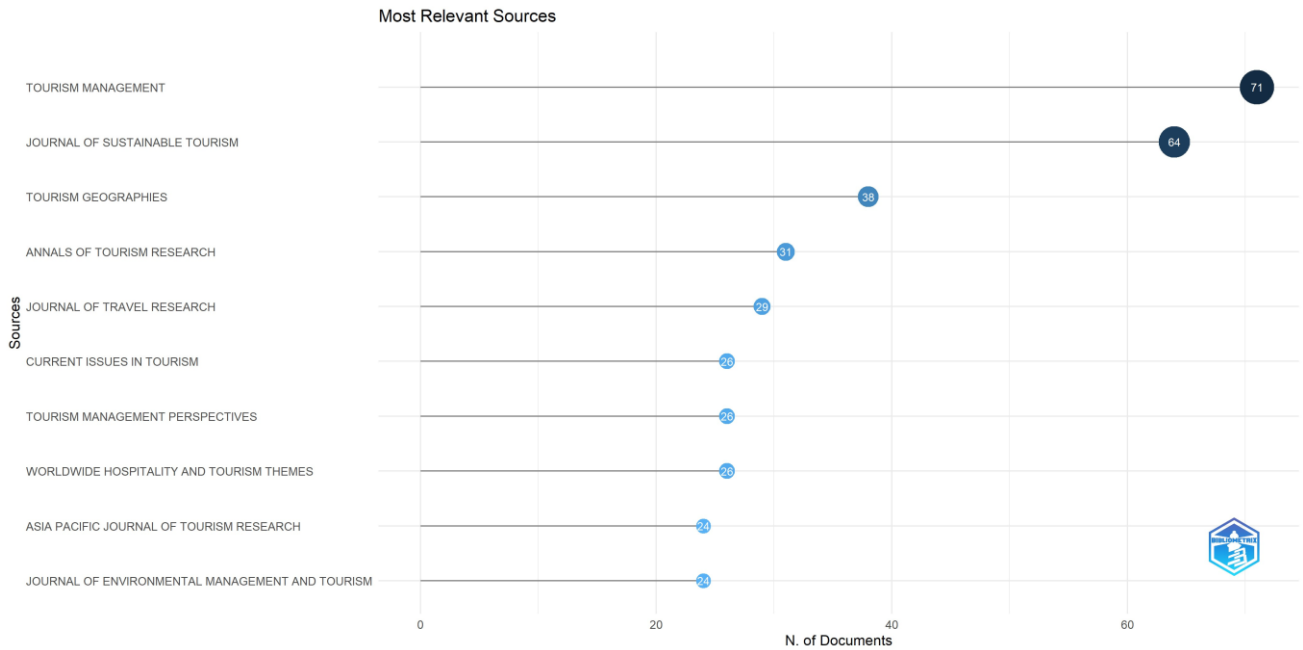


Figure 3 Most relevant sources.

5.2. Distribution of the Authors

The figure presents a compilation of authors who have composed at least one publication regarding rural tourism. Kastenholtz E, Lo M-C, Carneiro MJ, Park D-B, Giannetto C, Hernandez-Maestro RM, Jaafar M, Lanfranchi M, Nair V, and Polo Penaai have published more than five articles. These authors have demonstrated exceptional productivity and extensive recognition within the sphere of rural tourism. However, the occurrence of coauthorship was frequently limited to two or three writers per publication, and no study involved more than five authors. According to the impact index, these authors have received the greatest number of citations (Figure 4).

Authors	Articles	Articles Fractionalized
KASTENHOLTZ E	21	9.34
LO M-C	10	3.62
CARNEIRO MJ	9	2.51
PARK D-B	8	3.25
GIANNETTO C	7	2.25
HERNÁNDEZ-MAESTRO RM	7	3.33
JAAFAR M	7	1.78
LANFRANCHI M	7	2.25
NAIR V	7	2.33
POLO PEÑAAI	7	2.17

Figure 4 Distribution of the author.



5.3. Results Ordered by Country and Institution

During the period of the analyzed research, numerous scholars affiliated with esteemed universities across various scientific disciplines consistently disseminated articles, effectively altering the established patterns of dominance among these institutions. Evidently, there is a growing fascination surrounding the proliferation of scholarly articles and the expansion of collaborative networks, particularly in regard to the alluring subject of rural tourism within the scientific community. Unquestionably, the COVID-19 pandemic has had discernible repercussions on the tourism industry, encompassing economic, sociocultural, political, and environmental effects, with the potential to significantly impact the academic realm as well. Nevertheless, the response of the academic community, specifically those engaged in the study of tourism, to the long-term ramifications of this pandemic remains uncertain, leaving the future of this research field in a state of ambiguity. The accompanying figure aptly depicts the countries that have produced the greatest number of publications, as determined by the quantity of authors who have contributed to research on the phenomenon of rural tourism. Remarkably, China, Spain, the USA, Malaysia, the UK, Portugal, Australia, Indonesia, Italy, and Canada have emerged as the leading contributors within this domain. Conversely, the remaining nations offer a relatively smaller but steadily increasing contribution (Figure 5).

region	Freq
CHINA	310
SPAIN	271
USA	257
MALAYSIA	153
UK	141
PORTUGAL	105
AUSTRALIA	81
INDONESIA	74
ITALY	72
CANADA	60

Figure 5 Most contributed countries.

Figure 6 is a collective representation of a global map that visually depicts the data provided in the aforementioned table. The countries that are emphasized in a deep shade of blue have exhibited the highest level of research output pertaining to the domain of rural tourism to date.

Country Collaboration Map

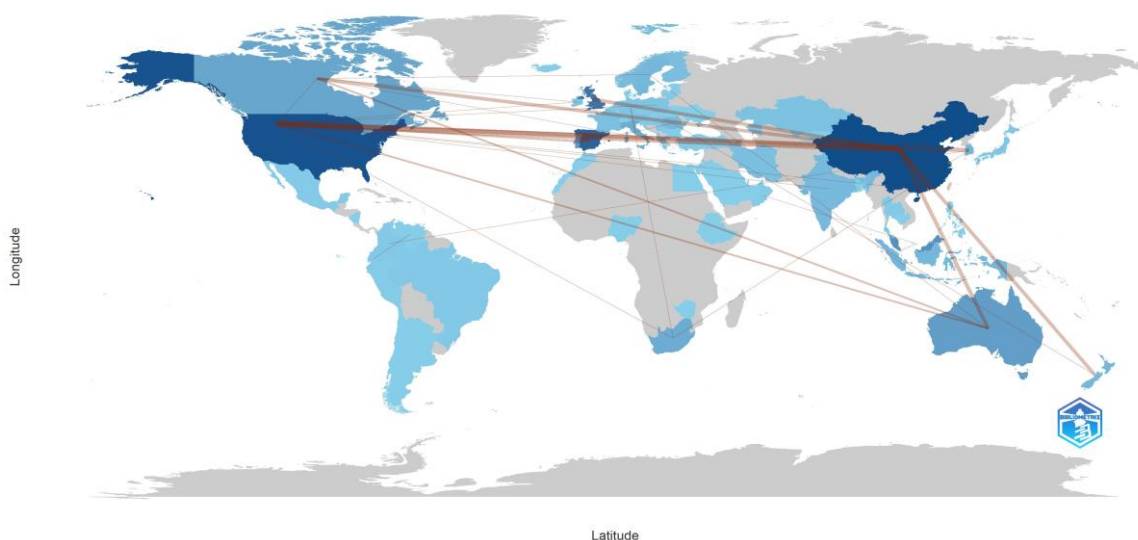


Figure 6 Country collaboration map.



The Figure 7 presents a comprehensive overview of the research conducted on rural tourism, which has been disseminated by esteemed universities and institutes worldwide. A meticulous analysis of the publications reveals that approximately ten eminent institutions from diverse nations have made significant contributions to this body of work. Notably, the University of Aveiro has emerged as the leading publisher with the greatest number of articles, closely followed by the University of Malaysia Sarawak, the University of Granada, Nankai University, Zhejiang University, the University of Sains Malaysia, Purdue University, West Virginia University, North Carolina State University, and the University of Extremadura.

Affiliation	Articles
UNIVERSITY OF AVEIRO	36
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK	33
UNIVERSITY OF GRANADA	32
NANKAI UNIVERSITY	25
ZHEJIANG UNIVERSITY	21
UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA	18
PURDUE UNIVERSITY	15
WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY	14
NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY	13
UNIVERSITY OF EXTREMADURA	13

Figure 7 Most contributed universities.

The largest number of affiliations in the articles in this research were with the University of Aveiro, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, University of Granada, Nankai University, and Zhejiang University.

5.4. Main Research Topics in the Articles

The figure 8 presented below illustrates the quantity of publications that have been released pertaining to different aspects of the subject matter under study. The aforementioned data were collected through a comprehensive examination of relevant articles within several specialized fields, namely, tourism development, rural areas, and tourist destinations. These subfields act as key terms in the context of rural tourism. The analysis of these key terms is an invaluable method that provides significant insights into research patterns and prevailing themes. It is worth noting that the most frequently utilized keywords include at least one of the following concepts: tourist, digital free, trends, or economics (Cai & McKenna, 2023). This clearly demonstrates the wide-ranging scope of this discipline, although only a limited number of publications explicitly delve into the primary theme.

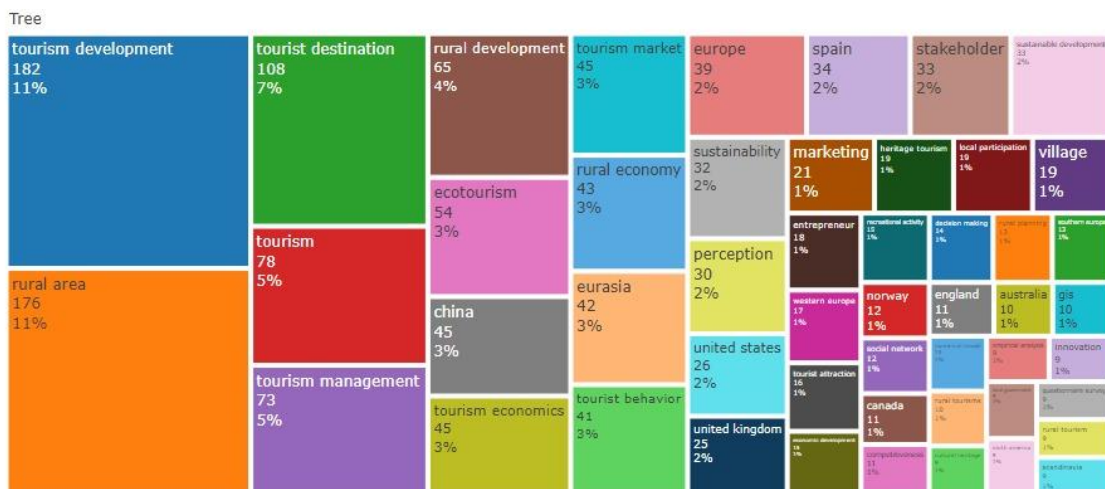


Figure 8 Tree map.



5.5. Results of science mapping and visualization

The Figure 9 portrays the most significant terminologies. The diagram indicates that the phrases "tourism development," "rural area," and "tourist destination" are highly prevalent in the selected domain. According to the treemap showcased in Figure, the term "tourism development" constitutes 11% of the overall instances, while "rural area" and "tourist destination" account for 11% and 7% of the total occurrences, respectively. The graph depicted in the figure exemplifies the evolution of terminologies. The graph reveals that expressions such as "tourism development," "rural area," and "tourist destination" are progressively gaining prominence. A trend topic analysis was conducted to ascertain the top three trending terms in the domain over the course of the last decade. The analysis focused on "Author's Keywords" and employed a five-word frequency threshold (Figure 11). Similarly, the figure 10 resembles the graph depicting the increase in term usage. The recent phase of study has witnessed a surge in the utilization of keywords due to the growing significance of tourist development and rural regions. Within this field of research, conceptual frameworks such as "development", "tourism," "COVID-19," "rural area," and "tourism resources" have been employed.

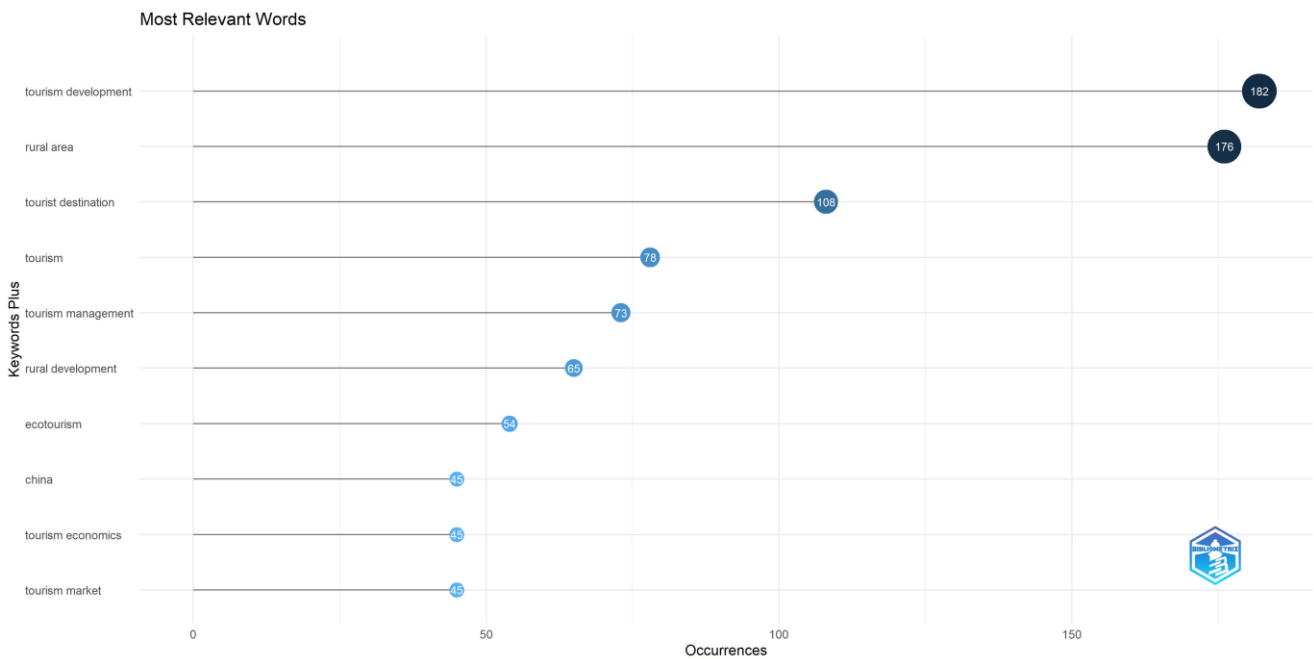


Figure 9 Most relevant words.

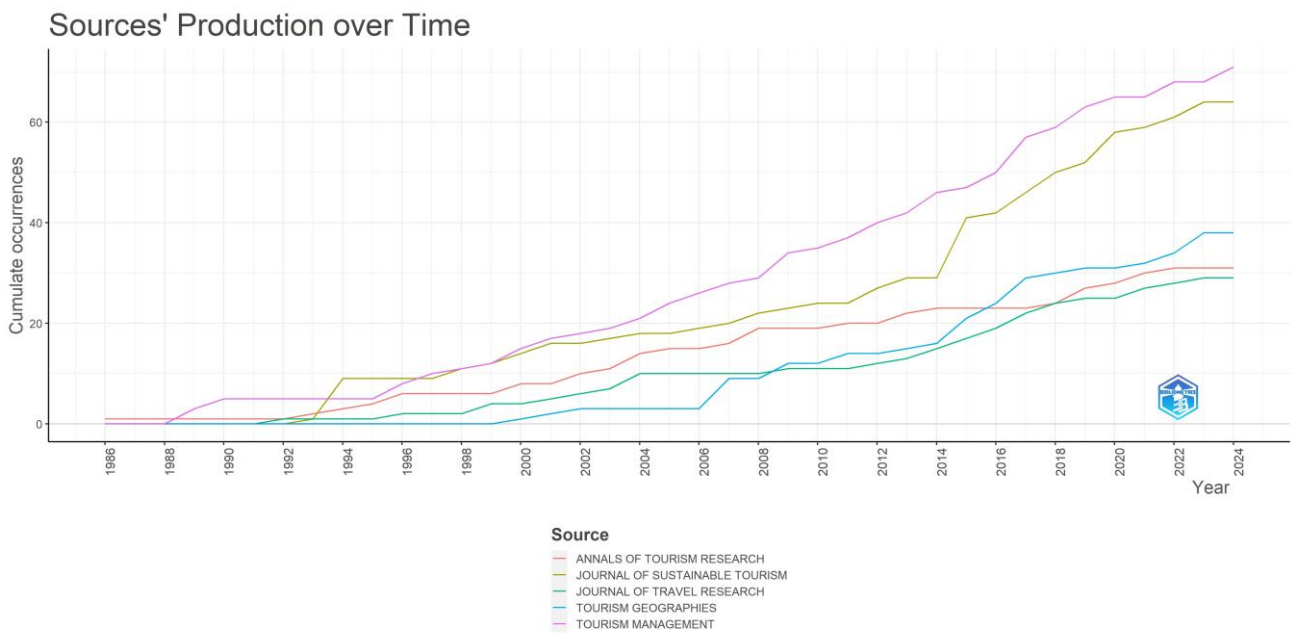


Figure 10 Sources production over time.



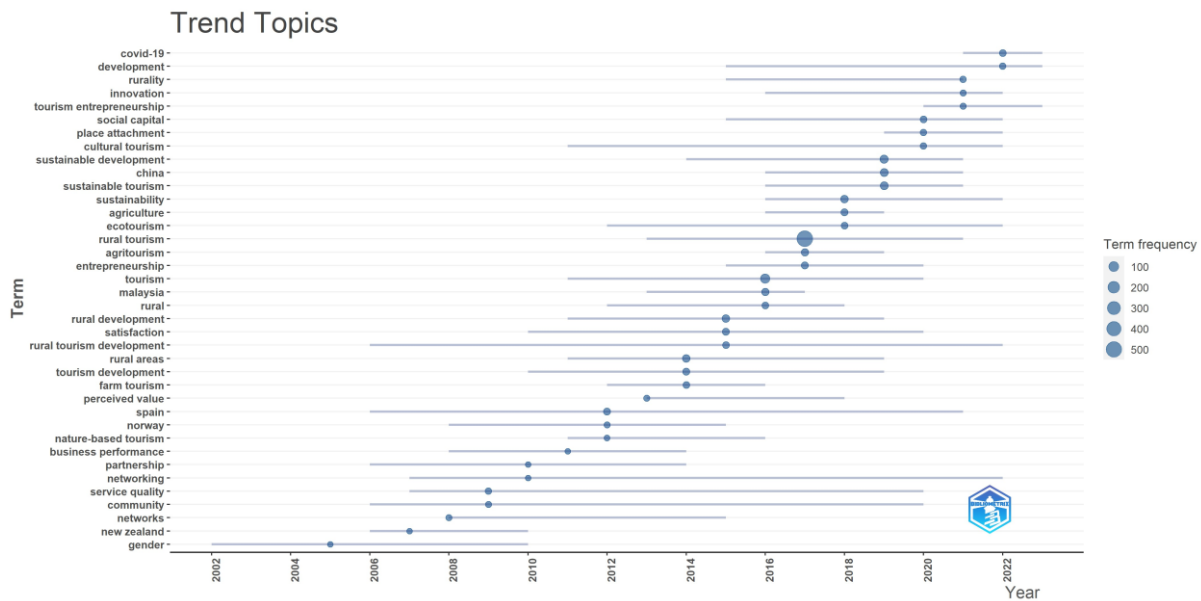


Figure 11 Trend topics.

6. Discussion

Rural tourism has had a substantial impact on global economies in the contemporary era. The employment of sizeable information pertaining to rural tourism has been facilitated by a multitude of social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, thereby engaging a vast number of users. In the present investigation, a meticulous assessment of research trends' historical progression and existing dynamics is provided. This study commences with a rudimentary analysis, tracing the expansion of rural tourism within the realm of academic research articles. The primary endeavor is to identify the most prolific contributors to the field of rural tourism, along with the salient research topics associated with interactive rural tourism, in conjunction with their coauthors. The principal aim of this examination was to provide a comprehensive overview of the present body of research on the utilization of rural tourism by tourists. This investigation employed bibliometric analysis as a methodological instrument to deeply examine the conceptual framework of rural tourism. By utilizing scholarly references from the Scopus database, this analysis demonstrated the significance of rural tourism analytics as a research subject in rural regions. The number of scholarly studies on this topic is progressively increasing on an annual basis. This upward trend signifies a growing inclination toward utilizing information derived from scientific publications. It is vital to expand the scope of study to support the advancement of knowledge on a specific subject, enabling further exploration and fostering the generation of original perspectives and imaginative ideas. Consequently, by evaluating influential authors, nations/regions, organizations, journals, collaboration, and co-occurrence within the field of study, the present inquiry aimed to identify active areas of research and uncover emerging patterns. The findings of this study reveal that professionals engaged in the investigation of rural tourism analytics have redirected their focus toward less developed countries.

An increasing number of studies are being conducted in China, Spain, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia. The visualization of keyword density reveals that academic research is actively investigating topics such as "development of tourism," "rural regions," and "tourism destinations." The data unequivocally demonstrate that rural areas possessed the largest quantity of content related to tourism in the year 2024. Additionally, this particular year witnessed the greatest number of citations, indicating a growing interest among experts and a heightened significance of the subject matter.

The results additionally reveal that there was a noteworthy increase in the quantity of scholarly articles and references in the year 2017. Furthermore, the investigation incorporated a compilation of the top ten authors who generated the greatest number of academic articles pertaining to the particular subject matter. The individuals included in the aforementioned list were Kastenholz E, Lo M-C, Carneiro MJ, Park D-B, Giannetto C, Hernandez-Maestro RM, Jaafar M, Lanfranchi M, Nair V, and Polo Penaai. The findings also establish the renowned preeminent authors for their noteworthy contributions to the discussion on rural tourism. The geographical research of the publications encompasses the United States of America, China, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and Spain. According to the examination of scholarly journals, the journal "Tourism Management" ranked first in terms of the number of papers published, followed by the "Journal of Sustainable Tourism" and "Tourism Geographies," which also made significant contributions to the discourse on this subject matter. The findings provide evidence of the diverse facets of the impact of tourism on the economic and societal aspects of rural regions.



7. Final Considerations

It has been contended that rural tourism began its exploration as a novel form of tourism product in Europe around the time when a methodically organized and scientifically administered bibliometric analysis was conducted on 926 articles extracted from the Scopus database (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). It was recognized that rural tourism could be a significant area of study within tourism studies that motivated this endeavor. This study provides an overview of the growth trajectory of rural tourism research over the past few decades, the methodology used to conduct it, the distribution of contributions, and the contextual themes prevalent therein, while heeding (Butler, 1999) advised that we look back to the past before we embark on a new journey.

This study strongly aligns with previous bibliometric research in the tourist area, both in terms of methodological techniques and discussion section arrangement. Notably, the works of Khanra et al. (2020); Köseoglu (2016); Niñerola et al. (2019); Rauniyar et al. (2020); Ruhanen et al. (2015) have contributed significantly to shaping the methodology and structure of the current study. In the context of prior literature reviews, the current study's line of inquiry has identified several recurring subthemes, including economic effects, environmental impacts, and the marketing and administration of rural tourism. These themes have been extensively explored by Lane and Kastenholz (2015); Gabor (2017); Sasu and Epuran (2016). However, despite the presence of extensive prior literature, the findings of this study have shed light on new avenues for knowledge improvement in the field of rural tourist research. These findings have paved the way for further exploration and understanding of this important area of research. The current study and earlier research can be distinguished in two main ways. One notable distinction lies in the methodology employed in the study, which significantly differs from the bibliometric research on rural tourism that was previously accessible. This divergence is particularly evident in the study's incorporation of a multitude of novel bibliometric factors. These factors encompass various aspects, such as the institutional affiliations of the authors, the contributions stemming from other fields or themes, and the inclusion of a wide range of research works. In sharp contrast to prior research endeavours, this study undertakes the crucial step of regarding rural tourism as a distinct research entity. The purpose behind this differentiation is to meticulously examine the evolution of knowledge creation regarding rural tourism over the course of time. Conversely, an equally important contribution of this study lies in its identification of a host of recently developed themes and subthemes within the domain of rural tourism research. Remarkably, these emerging topics have hitherto received little or no attention in the literature.

8. Limitations and future directions

The present study acknowledges its limitations while also establishing the foundation for future inquiry. One particular constraint pertains to the extensive number of articles utilized in the bibliometric analysis. The extensive collection of scholarly literature encompasses a diverse array of disciplines and concerns, but it also yields an overwhelming abundance of knowledge and information. Subsequent meta-analytic research addressing this matter could narrow the focus to specific domains and concentrate on a more limited assortment of disciplines and subject areas, enabling a more comprehensive and precise assessment. A key limitation inherent in bibliometric evaluations is their tendency to prioritize affiliations and nations over theories and frameworks. Despite our comprehensive evaluation encompassing a broad range of topics over time and providing author and reference details, the evaluation of theoretical and conceptual frameworks may be overshadowed by the emphasis placed on connections and nations, as per available information.

One potential limitation of our research is the absence of connections, more profound connections, moderators, and mediators among the identified categories of issues. Consequently, forthcoming investigations could explore the connections between coauthorships, thematic patterns, and more significant substantial associations. Thus, it is recommended that future research incorporate these specific data. The utilization of the Scopus database as the primary data source hindered our analysis. The overemphasis on the bibliometric analysis approach in the current study is a weakness, as it overlooks the identification of potential avenues for future research. We encountered difficulties in adapting our proposal of an emerging conceptual framework, as we prioritized conveying an extensive historical perspective.

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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