

Dissecting the post-pandemic Hospitality and Tourism Literature: a bibliometric analysis

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ABSTRACT

Reflecting on the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars in hospitality and tourism (H&T) shifted their conceptual attention, resources, and efforts toward relevant topics. Hundreds of articles have been published in the discipline's journals, investigating the pandemic's impact from various perspectives using a plethora of methodological designs. Transitioning to the post-pandemic era, scholars strived to re-establish their research agendas, publication strategies, and conceptual paths; nevertheless, the discipline's conceptual evolution characteristics are still unknown. Addressing this gap, this study maps the discipline's post-pandemic conceptual landscape, via bibliometric analysis, with particular emphasis on current and emerging research themes. Following a structured methodological procedure, 8270 articles were retrieved from the Scopus database, whereas VOSviewer was used to visualize the relevant scientific landscapes and construct co-occurrence networks. Findings revealed that scholars' conceptual interests are slowly shifting away from COVID-19 toward technology adoption and innovation, with a particular emphasis on artificial intelligence and other relevant technologies. Furthermore, and of importance to scholars, results provide an overview of the post-pandemic thematic areas and publication trends that may define the future of H&T literature and stimulate further endeavors.

1. Introduction

Shocked by the pandemic's magnitude, hospitality and tourism (H&T) scholars either adjusted or transformed their publication strategies to investigate pertinent topics. Whether the shift was a conscious move toward new themes or simply an opportunistic 'citation-grabbing' tactic driven by the well-known 'publish or perish' culture remains a matter of debate; however, hundreds of articles were published in H&T outlets during that period (Filep et al., 2024; Sampaio et al., 2023). For nearly three years, studies have examined the impact of COVID-19 from various consumer and managerial perspectives, using a range of methodological approaches, with findings aimed at advancing both industry practices and the discipline's theoretical landscape (Wong et al., 2023; Zopiatis et al., 2021).

Multiple investigations (e.g., Huang & Wang, 2023; Li et al., 2023; Utkarsh & Sigala, 2021; Zopiatis et al., 2021) have used bibliometrics or systematic literature reviews to explore the creation of new knowledge. Their findings confirm the pandemic's impact on the discipline's conceptual landscape, although whether it is transformational or transitional remains debatable. Specifically, Huang and Wang (2023)

highlight the pandemic's impact on consumer behavior, response and recovery strategies, and the industry's human resources management practices, whereas Li et al. (2023, pp. 2301–2302) divided the relevant topics into seven distinct clusters: "... individuals' (tourists, employees, and residents) mentality and behaviors, responses of the travel suppliers (the government and tourism enterprises), economic impact and demand forecasting, social issues of human rights and racism, and reflection on tourism and its transformation." Similarly, Utkarsh & Sigala (2021) identify four major thematic areas relevant to the pandemic's impact: a) on tourists' decision-making and well-being, destination marketing, and technology adoption; b) on the future of the discipline in the post-pandemic era; c) on managing change; and d) on industry stakeholders. Lastly, consistent with the above, Zopiatis et al. (2021) categorize COVID-19 studies into three groups: the pandemic's impact on the industry, the specifics of the post-pandemic period, and the effects of tourists' behavior.

Indicatively, a quick foray into the suggestions for future studies sections of these investigations, most conducted between 2021 and 2023, revealed a wide range of potential thematic areas. These areas cover the entire spectrum of possible H&T themes, including micro-

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operational and macro-strategic topics. In general, the pandemic was viewed at the time as a transformational event that could lead to conscious change and significant improvements for the discipline and industry; however, its actual impact remains unclear. Echoing this in a broader perspective, [Filep et al. \(2024, p. 429\)](#) criticize the opportunistic and speculative nature of research during that period by suggesting that “... evidence is widespread that attempts to capture this moment have been conducted in haste,” while the recommended actions and predictions seem unlikely to come true. Along the same lines, numerous scholars highlight the challenges posed by the trend-driven ‘over-production’ of knowledge during that era and the growing tension between quality and quantity ([Utgarsh & Sigala, 2021](#); [Zopiatis et al., 2021](#)). Regarding the latter, [You et al. \(2024\)](#) argue that the explosion of COVID-19-related studies has inflated citation metrics (e.g., journals' impact factors) and other relevant patterns, thus endangering the misinterpretation of quantity as quality; an element that causes a disservice to scholars' publication strategies and tactics.

Reflecting on the above and given the lack of longitudinal studies and systematic or bibliometric reviews, this endeavor aims to fill a gap by investigating the discipline's post-pandemic conceptual landscape, analyzing authorship patterns, collaboration tactics, and the evolution of emerging themes. Through a critical evaluation, the study seeks to inform the ongoing debate over the future of the discipline's conceptual evolution, emphasizing the creation of sustainable cumulative knowledge rather than mere proliferation of numerical productivity. Findings are of particular interest to both junior faculty members striving to develop their own research agendas and publication strategies, and to other stakeholders envisioning a H&T conceptual landscape that enhances the discipline's conceptual depth and transcends its operational idiosyncrasies.

2. Methodology

The primary purpose of this research note is to analyze and visualize, using quantitative bibliometrics, the post-pandemic H&T conceptual landscape. It focuses on examining authorship details and highlighting emerging research themes. Specifically, the study aims to a) analyze scholars' publication strategies related to authorship, countries involved, collaborations, and productivity patterns, and b) identify the emergence and evolving trends of H&T themes in the post-pandemic era. Furthermore, the study seeks to clarify how H&T research conducted during the pandemic has influenced the discipline's current and future conceptual framework.

Reflecting the study's aims, the Scopus database was utilized to collect data using a structured process recommended by [Petticrew and Roberts \(2006\)](#) and adopted by other researchers studying similar topics (see [Luna-Cortés et al., 2022](#)). It is important to note that the process used is aligned with the PRISMA (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses*) principles, the most widely used framework for conducting transparent systematic reviews and bibliometric studies ([Page et al., 2021](#)). Using a deductive approach, specific keywords, timeframes, publication sources, and other exclusion criteria were applied to select the final articles for bibliometric analysis. As shown in [Table 1](#), the initial search (using the keywords “Hospitality” or “Tourism”) yielded approximately 200,000 documents, a number that is very challenging to manage and interpret in a bibliometric analysis. Following the implementation of a specific timeframe (2021–04/2025) and limiting the selection to only English-language articles published in twenty specific H&T outlets, the final selection included 8270 documents (*Final and Articles in Press*).

The twenty H&T journals were selected based on the Scientific Journal Rankings (SJR). SJR is a reputable and established organization that produces rankings using information from the Scopus database. Specifically, the [2024 Scimago Journal Rankings \(Subject Area: Business, Management, and Accounting; Subject Category: Tourism, Leisure, and Hospitality Management\)](#) listed 149 relevant journals, of which the top 20

Table 1
Bibliometric review: Steps, Process, Purpose and Results.

| Step | Process | Purpose | Results (as of May 1st, 2025) |
|------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. Source/ Keywords | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scopus Keywords: <i>Hospitality OR Tourism</i> | Initial search | 197,710 Documents |
| 2. Search method/ timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where: <i>Title, Abstract and Keywords</i> Period 01/2021-04/2025 | Study-specific time frame | 76,439 Documents |
| 3. Exclusion parameters/ Filtering | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journal Articles only (<i>Final and Articles in Press</i>) English language only 20 selected H&T publication journals | Refining the eligibility of the sources | 8270 Journal Articles |
| 4. Final Article Selection | | Articles included in the analysis | 8270 Journal Articles |

were selected. It is important to note that, after an initial review, three publications — specifically, *Journal of Service Management*, *Applied Geography*, and *Cities*, all part of SJR's top twenty — were excluded from further analysis due to their limited relevance to hospitality and tourism. These journals were replaced in the ranking order by *Tourism Geographies*, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, and *Journal of Tourism Futures*.

Espousing the principles of bibliometrics, which is defined as the use of quantitative statistical and mathematical methods to analyze bibliographic data ([Pritchard, 1969](#)), the VOSviewer software tool (created by Nees Jan van Eck and Ludo Waltman from Leiden University, Netherlands) was employed to visualize relevant scientific landscapes and build networks based on specific parameters. Bibliometrics has garnered significant attention from academia, particularly since the pandemic, due to its rigorous methods and ability to analyze large volumes of scientific data. It is essential to acknowledge that, like all quantitative approaches, bibliometrics has inherent limitations, despite its innovative nature, widespread acceptance, and frequent application in research exploration and assessment. In his lucid critique, [Korstanje \(2022\)](#) emphasizes the risks associated with the ‘culture’ of metrics, where quantitative measures may overshadow crucial qualitative aspects, while [José de Oliveira \(2024\)](#) points out other issues such as citation data bias, opportunities for metrics manipulation, and challenges related to document indexing in proprietary citation-tracking databases.

Finally, for clarity purposes, it is essential to distinguish between systematic reviews and bibliometric analyses. [Linnenluecke et al. \(2019, pp. 178–179\)](#) explain that systematic reviews involve “... an exhaustive search of designated databases ... additional literature that might not be available through these databases and require a thorough process for analyzing and synthesizing relevant information.” This process centers on the crucial stage of analyzing and synthesizing relevant material through a qualitative examination of individual studies. In contrast, bibliometric reviews, which are often considered a subset of systematic reviews, aim to map the scientific landscape quantitatively through visualization, identifying trends, tracking patterns or themes, and measuring productivity ([De Bellis, 2009](#)). According to [Öztürk et al. \(2024\)](#), bibliometrics can achieve three specific goals: a) demonstrate social connections, such as analyzing co-authors, b) understand concepts, like analyzing co-words, and c) explore intellectual frameworks, including co-citation analysis and bibliographic coupling.

3. Findings

Investigating publication strategies is essential because they have

significant implications, especially for the newest generation of individuals envisioning long-term and sustainable academic careers. Joubert and Rogers (2015) define a publication strategy as a roadmap that outlines what, when, where, with whom, and how research will be published. Following conscious self-reflection, scholars develop their publication strategies and plans based on their expertise, idiosyncrasies, and personal interests, a notion supported by Macdonald and Kam (2007, p. 650), who state that "... academic publishing has always been ridden with self-interest." Ideally, such planning should help clarify, through reasoning and inference, the topics to be explored, the likely publication outlets based on relevance and impact factors, potential collaborations, timelines, ethical issues, and dissemination venues. The following is a review of H&T scholars' post-pandemic publication strategies, based on authorship and collaborations, countries studied, productivity (of both authors and institutions), post-pandemic themes, and timelines.

3.1. Authorship

A key aspect of scholars' publication strategies involves single- or multi-authorship. Findings indicated that H&T scholars adopted a collaborative publishing approach in the post-pandemic era, with only 8.9 % (n = 733) of the articles being single-authored. As shown in Fig. 1, 22.2 % (n = 1829) are co-authored by two scholars, 31.6 % (n = 2605) by three, 23.2 % (n = 1909) by four, 10.2 % (n = 838) by five, and 2.7 % (n = 219) by six. Unlike other disciplines, only 1.3 % (n = 108) are co-authored by seven or more scholars. Overall, there is an overwhelming prevalence of multi-authored publications across all countries; nevertheless, some countries (e.g., Canada, Germany, Israel, Netherlands, Sweden) are comparatively associated with higher levels of single-authored publications. In contrast, the United States and China, the two most prolific national contributors, experience steady increases in multi-authorships. This result supports studies (see Nunkoo et al., 2020; Zopiatis et al., 2015) that observe a steady decline in single-authored publications within the field, challenging the traditional view that emphasizes the importance and necessity of pursuing such a route to demonstrate originality and verify autonomous research ability. Clearly, the academic community must revisit the pursuit of single authorship as the universal 'gold standard' of scholarly excellence, since the complexity, intensity, and interdisciplinarity of contemporary H&T research seem to favor collaborations.

Echoing the above, the study sets out to investigate the specificities of interdisciplinary versus monodisciplinary collaborations. Interdisciplinary collaborations refer to cases in which scholars from two or more distinct academic disciplines interact and integrate to create new knowledge; in our case, by working on the same publication. Findings revealed a steady growth in interdisciplinary collaborations in the post-pandemic era, especially in 2024, with nearly 75 % of articles falling into that category. More precisely, and as exhibited in Table 2, based on a six-discipline framework (Hospitality and Tourism (H&T); Business, Economic and Management (BEM); Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH); Engineering, Technology and Data Sciences (ETDS); Environmental and Geographical Sciences (EGS); and Health and Life Sciences (HLS)), most HT collaborations exist with BEM and SSH, whereas integration with HLS remains limited despite a post-pandemic increase. Notably, 52.2 % of interdisciplinary collaborations are international, whereas 93 % involve multiple institutions. Moreover, there is an increase in publications by scholars not formally affiliated with H&T, thus confirming the discipline's theoretical expansion into other domains. Overall, findings confirm that H&T research is influenced, either through genuine synthesis or superficial accumulation, by an amalgamation of concepts from various disciplines. On the one hand, this provides a unique context in which theoretical insights can be translated into real-world applications; on the other hand, it also raises critical questions about the discipline's boundary maintenance and identity.

Table 2
Interdisciplinary collaborations co-occurrences.

| | HT | BEM | SSH | ETDS | EGS | HLS |
|--|-------|-------|-----|------|-----|-----|
| Hospitality & Tourism (HT) | – | | | | | |
| Business, Economics & Management (BEM) | 3,835 | | | | | |
| Social Sciences & Humanities (SSH) | 2,534 | 3,455 | | | | |
| Engineering, Technology & Data Sciences (ETDS) | 810 | 1,266 | 912 | | | |
| Environmental & Geographical Sciences (EGS) | 726 | 758 | 684 | 503 | | |
| Health & Life Sciences (HLS) | 111 | 224 | 271 | 312 | 198 | – |

Note: Discipline inferred from author affiliations; not all 8270 articles could be classified.

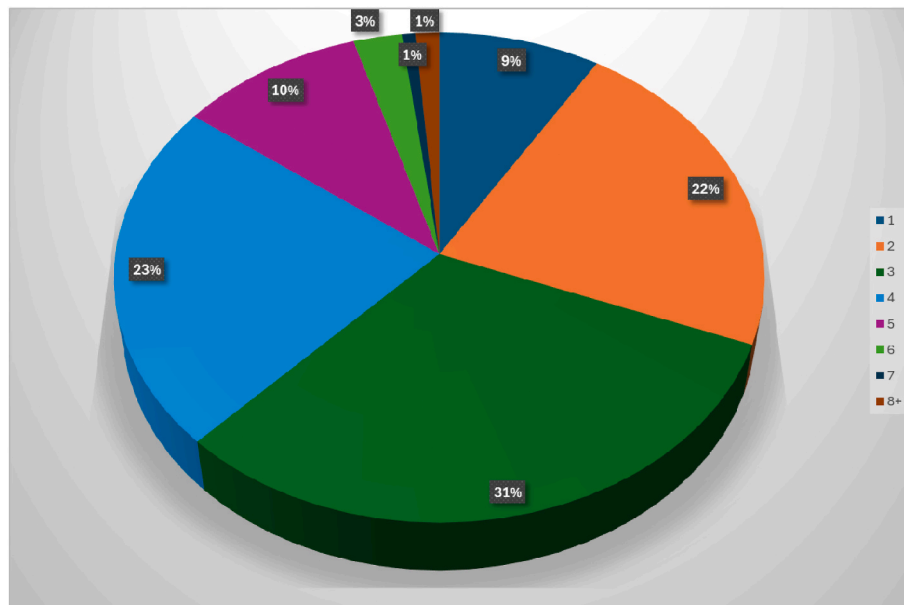


Fig. 1. Authorship specifics.

3.2. Countries investigated

In the early days of the discipline, H&T literature mainly focused on Anglo-Western contexts, with most studies conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom. The growth of H&T education in Asia over recent decades has shifted the focus, bringing in new cultural perspectives and leading to research that mirrors the region's development. It is essential to acknowledge that theories developed in Western countries, with highly developed hospitality and tourism industries, often overlook the distinct social, political, economic, and cultural characteristics of developing destinations, particularly in Asia (Winter, 2009). Findings indicate that, beyond the traditional leaders (the USA, China, the UK, Australia, and the Hong Kong SAR), H&T research in the post-pandemic era has expanded to include countries such as Spain, South Korea, Macau, Italy, New Zealand, and Turkey. More precisely, as shown in Fig. 2, more than 29,000 author affiliations from 108 countries or regions (e.g., Hong Kong, Macau) are identified, thus confirming the discipline's global nature, expansion, and reach. It is important to note that using the authors_with_affiliations variable, rather than just affiliations, is ideal for exploring author-institution-country affiliations; however, this might inflate numbers, as the same institution/country may appear multiple times in a single document if several authors share it or if authors have multiple affiliations.

3.3. Productivity (authors and institutions)

The most productive H&T scholars in the post-pandemic era are the discipline's 'usual suspects,' namely Law, R. (88 publications), Han, H. (74 publications), Wong, I.K.A. (57 publications), Hall, C.M. (44 publications), and Li, Z. (42 publications). Regarding institutions, the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at Hong Kong Polytechnic (China SAR) is the most productive, with 573 affiliated publications, followed by the schools at Sun Yat-Sen University, China (313 publications), the University of Surrey, U.K. (261 publications), Griffith University, Australia (234 publications), the University of Johannesburg, South Africa (233 publications), the University of Central Florida, U.S. (200 publications), and the University of Macau, China P.R.C. (200

publications). It is important to note that citation and co-citation analyses of authors or organizations were not conducted, as such studies might overlook more recent publications. Nonetheless, for indicative purposes, the most cited paper in the post-pandemic era was co-authored by Kock et al. (2021) titled "Understanding and managing the threat of common method bias: Detection, prevention and control," with 771 citations, followed by Sharma et al. (2021) with the paper titled "Reviving tourism industry post-COVID-19: A resilience-based framework," which received 619 citations.

3.4. H&T post-pandemic themes

Selecting the 'right' topic has long been a contentious issue among scholars, with two prevailing arguments. The first 'traditional' argument proposes that scholars should publish within the boundaries of their discipline, primarily reflecting their formal higher education. Conversely, the second, more 'contemporary' view supports interdisciplinary collaborations as the ideal mode for conducting research (Jacobs, 2013). Numerous studies (see Zopiatis et al., 2015) suggest that, in H&T, unlike other disciplines, very few scholars remain loyal to a single research theme, as the narrative and context of each era often influence the selection of a particular topic.

Developing a successful research agenda has been at the forefront of scholars' publication strategies, as it impacts other factors, such as resources, methods, publication outlets, and timelines. Ideally, selecting a topic depends on scholars' interests and curiosity as they aim to fill a research gap and expand or develop collective knowledge. Conceptual influences and stimuli, whether endogenous or exogenous, heavily influence scholarly decisions and shape research efforts. Endogenous influences originate from the H&T industry itself, such as new trends and developments, changes in standard operating procedures (SOPs), addressing industry-specific strategic and managerial challenges (e.g., turnover, seasonality, etc.), and the evolution of specialized forms of tourism and accommodation (e.g., ecotourism, Airbnb, etc.). Conversely, exogenous influences arise from external stimuli, events, and developments beyond the industry's narrow scope. Examples include the COVID-19 pandemic, the social media revolution, the global

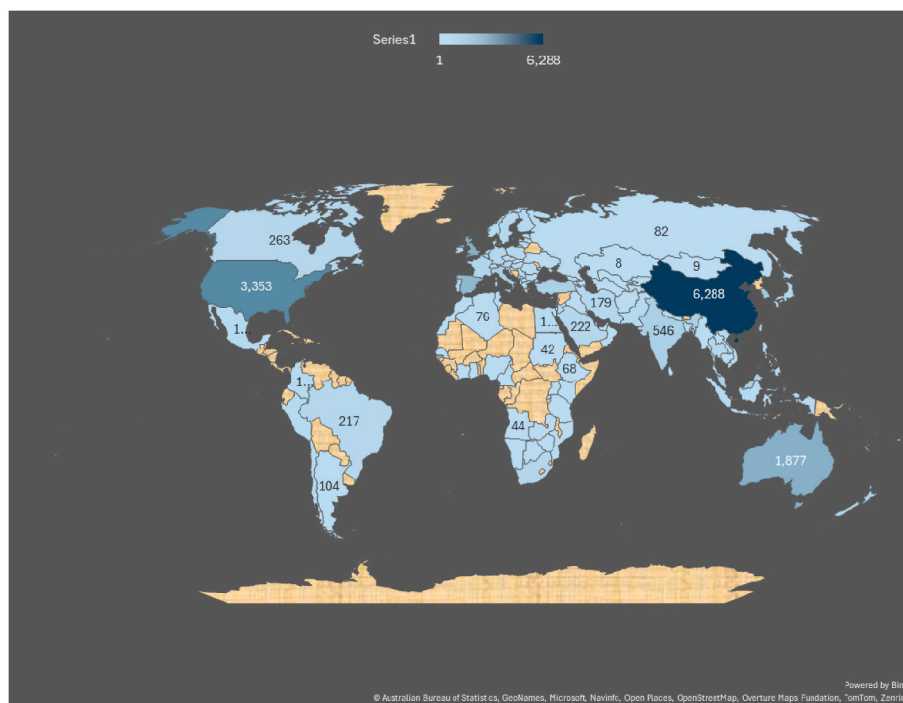


Fig. 2. Author(s) affiliation by country.

financial crisis, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, advancements in technology-enabled education, progress in other disciplines, and artificial intelligence (AI).

To explore the post-pandemic themes that emerged in H&T literature, a network map of term co-occurrence (*author and index keywords*) was developed and displayed in Fig. 3. Each node corresponds to a specific term, with its size indicating how often it appears in the 8270 articles analyzed. The curved links between nodes indicate co-occurrences; their thickness highlights the strength of the relationship, whereas the distance between them shows the relatedness of the links. The generated color-coded clusters indicate nodes with common attributes, thus highlighting distinct conceptual (sub)fields.

Network visualization revealed four distinct clusters in the post-pandemic era. The first cluster, shown in red, focuses on technological developments, the sharing economy, the pandemic, and innovation, with the most frequent keywords (excluding the generic search terms of Hospitality and Tourism) being “artificial intelligence,” “COVID-19,” “crisis management,” “innovation,” and “tourism economics.” The second cluster, colored in green, includes topics related to tourism marketing such as “consumption behavior,” “marketing,” “perception,” “tourist behavior,” “tourism market,” “social media,” and “travel behavior.” The third cluster, displayed in blue, revolves around themes related to “sustainability,” “ecotourism,” “rural tourism,” and “climate change.” Highlighted in yellow, the fourth cluster pertains to methodological issues, with terms such as “conceptual framework,” “empirical analysis,” “qualitative analysis,” and “theoretical study.”

Further analysis reveals differences among the four thematic clusters across regions. In particular, as shown in Fig. 4, the third and fourth clusters (sustainability and methods/theory) are prevalent in Europe and Oceania, whereas in Asia, scholarship is dominated by the first and second clusters, which are relevant to technology and marketing/behavior. Studies affiliated with North America emphasize the first and fourth clusters (technology and methods/theory), whereas studies in the second and third clusters (sustainability and marketing/behavior) are more prevalent in South America. Finally, studies affiliated with the African region mainly focus on sustainability and technology (the first and third clusters).

Regional Distribution Across Thematic Clusters

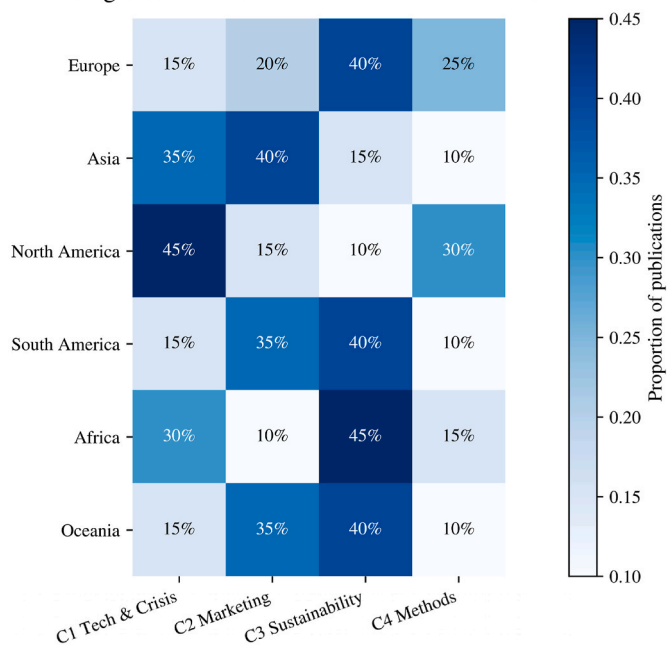


Fig. 4. Thematic cluster structure per region.

3.5. Temporal evolution (2021-04/2025)

To examine the literature's post-pandemic temporal evolution, an overlay visualization map (see Fig. 5) of term co-occurrence was developed. It is essential to note that the distance between two circles indicates their correlation, while the size of the circles reflects the frequency of the term's appearance. The overlay color indicates the average publication year of the articles that include the specific words. The terms in yellow represent more recent publication dates, while the blue ones indicate earlier studies.

The map clearly illustrates the discipline's evolving post-pandemic

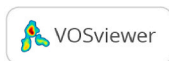
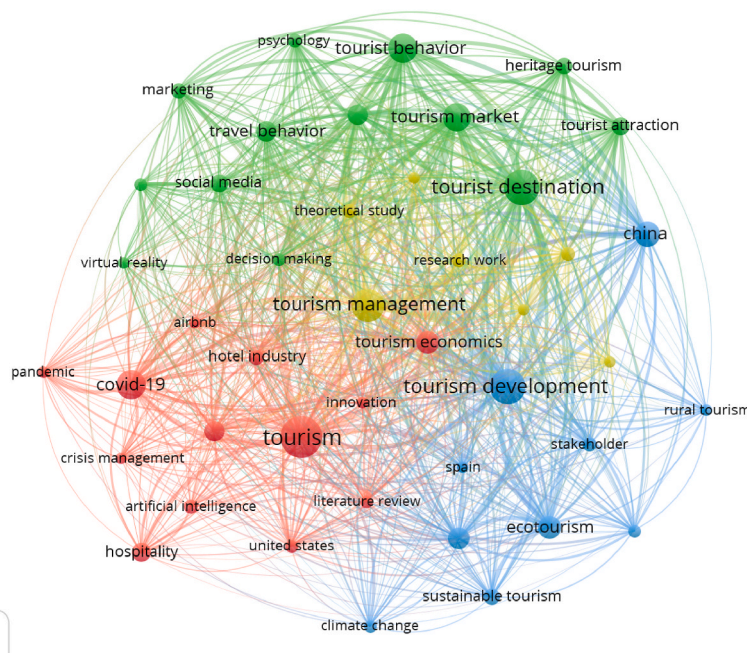


Fig. 3. Network visualization 2021-04/2025.

Note: Co-occurrence, all words, minimum number of occurrences 100 (43 keywords met this threshold).

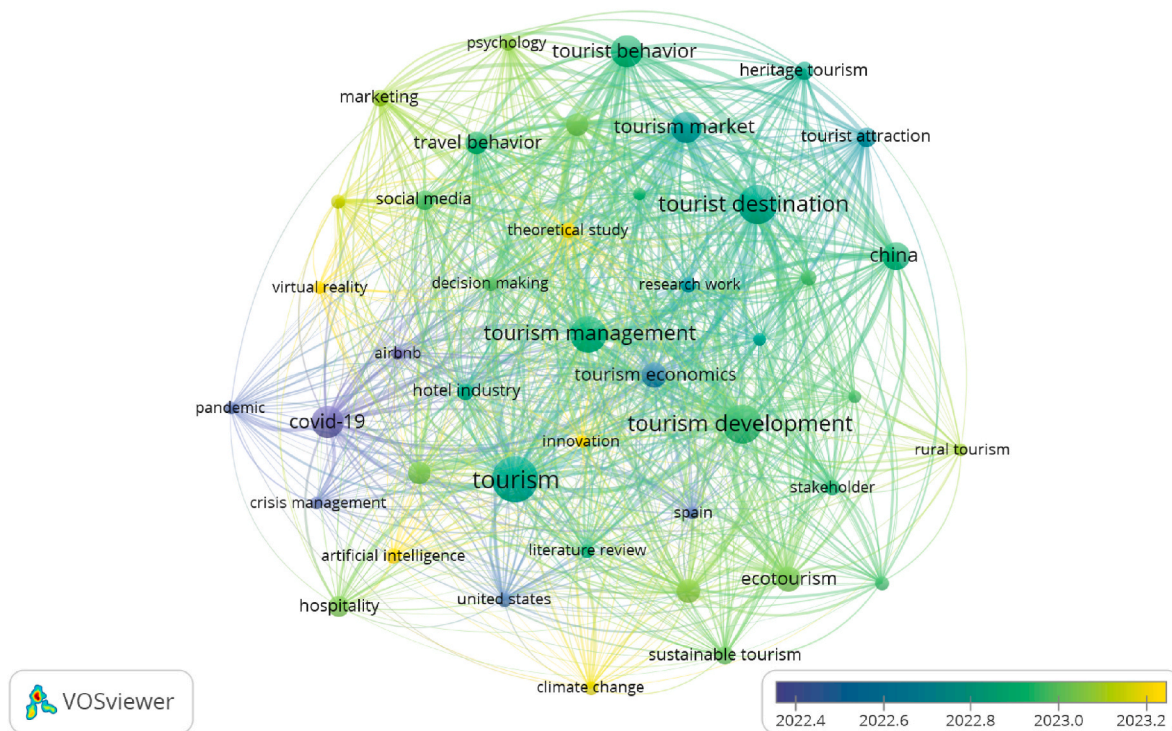


Fig. 5. Overlay visualization – temporal evolution.
 Note: Co-occurrence, all words, minimum number of occurrences 100 – Years 2021-04/2025 (43 keywords met this threshold).

landscape, with early studies focusing on COVID-19, crisis management, the sharing economy (Airbnb), tourism economics, and more recent research on innovation, artificial intelligence, climate change, virtual reality, marketing, and consumer behavior. Between these two periods, terms such as “tourist behavior,” “ecotourism,” “travel behavior,” “tourism market,” “tourist destination,” and “tourism development” emerged. Undoubtedly, recent advances in technology, especially artificial intelligence and virtual reality, have garnered significant attention from H&T scholars. To better understand current trends in H&T publications, a subsequent analysis of articles published after 2024 revealed notable co-occurrence relationships among AI, ChatGPT, the metaverse, bibliometric analysis, and technology adoption. To enhance the visualization of theme evolution in the post-pandemic era, Fig. 6 presents the relevant word clouds.

4. Conclusion and future research agenda

Reflecting on the revealed conceptual structure of the post-pandemic H&T literature, a notable decline in coverage of once-popular topics is

evident. More precisely, scholars’ conceptual interests are slowly shifting away from COVID-19, the sharing economy (e.g., Airbnb), and crisis management to technology adoption and innovation, with a particular emphasis on AI and other relevant technologies (e.g., the metaverse, ChatGPT). Such trendy themes tend to be topical, popular, and research-worthy—traits that perceptually can lead to publication success. Likewise, marketing, especially topics associated with tourism markets, travel and tourist behavior, as well as consumption behavior, still enjoys a considerable level of popularity, in addition to the traditional macro-level themes of tourism management and development. Moreover, there is a notable increase in theoretical and systematic literature reviews, as well as in endeavors investigating sustainable practices and climate change.

One goal of bibliometric studies is to propose an agenda for future research. Similar studies (Huang & Wang, 2023; Li et al., 2023; Utkarsh & Sigala, 2021; Zopiatis et al., 2021) conducted during the pandemic pursued such a route by recommending a plethora of potential research avenues, covering almost all aspects of contemporary H&T. Indicatively, all studies identified AI as a potential future topic to some extent;



Fig. 6. Timeline of most frequent terms in the post-pandemic era
 Note: Wordclouds were developed using a free online software tool at <https://www.wordclouds.com>.

however, none predicted its full magnitude. Therefore, by carefully and thoughtfully reflecting on past experiences, this study resists the temptation to propose a broad research agenda and instead focuses on three likely directions: AI and technology adoption, marketing, and human resources. It would be an oversight not to acknowledge the speculative nature of such recommendations, as future directions will be heavily influenced, for example, by advances in AI technology (e.g., Chain of Thought (CoT) development; autonomous AI; multimodal AI; AI-augmented workforce; edge AI and federated learning; explainable AI; free intelligence, etc.) rather than just industry developments.

This bibliometric study highlights a remarkable surge in AI research, primarily in marketing-related topics, technology adoption, ChatGPT, and the metaverse. As expected, scholars examined AI in H&T to develop an agenda for future research. Kim et al. (2025) encapsulate the probable future of AI research in four distinct thematic avenues, namely customer interaction, organizational decision-making, organizational implications, and other managerial issues, whereas Gursoy and Cai (2025, p. 13) highlight trends related to "... tourism customer decision making, service experience creation and delivery, service failure and recovery, human resources and organizational behavior." Similarly, Bakir et al. (2025) emphasized the potential of utilizing AI to enhance human resource practices in the industry, while Mattila et al. (2025) recommended that future research focus on narrowing the fundamental quality gaps to improve the industry's service management practices. It is apparent that AI will continue to capture the attention of H&T scholars; however, future efforts must extend beyond just marketing and customer service. Moreover, this gradual reorientation of the discipline's theoretical foundation towards technology-infused frameworks may necessitate a conceptual expansion that considers the new technological developments.

In contrast to AI and marketing, other topics such as human resources, industry finances, daily operational issues, corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethics, and education received only moderate attention in the post-pandemic era. Concerning human resources, scholars should aim to maximize benefits and minimize challenges by exploring the potential of adopting AI technologies in areas such as performance evaluation, upskilling, recruitment, decision-making, legal compliance, training, and development. Research studies should also address employee concerns related to job replacement and insecurity, since automation is expected to replace jobs involving repetitive or routine tasks—characteristics common in H&T. In line with the above, Bill Gates, the co-founder of Microsoft, warned in a recent interview with Nikhil Kamath (see <https://youtu.be/YY7J1pHfSY?si=W1uL1Ni1IVezn8K1>) about the potential threat of AI to both white- and blue-collar jobs, which could have significant implications for the industry's workforce. By introducing the term "free intelligence," he made some bold predictions, suggesting that AI and robotics will replace jobs in areas such as healthcare and education, while also helping to reduce labor shortages in industries like transportation and hospitality. Despite his predictions, which have several implications for human resources such as early retirement, remuneration, work-life balance, and shorter workweeks, he indicates that AI will not replace jobs, at least in the foreseeable future, that require creativity, emotional intelligence, complex problem-solving, and genuine human connection.

One of the fundamental questions scholars must address is whether the pandemic had a transformational or transitional effect on the discipline's conceptual landscape. The prevailing view suggests the former; however, evidence may point to the latter as time progresses. Undoubtedly, the pandemic was an anomaly that disrupted the evolution of the H&T body of knowledge; nonetheless, its long-term implications—beyond those related to crisis management—are still unclear. Findings of this study suggest that COVID-19 primarily acted as a transitional accelerator rather than the instigator of a fundamental transformation of the discipline's conceptual foundations. The unprecedented nature of the pandemic temporarily shifted scholarly attention to crisis-related topics; however, as time progressed and uncertainty

diminished, dominant conceptual paradigms relevant to technology, innovation, and sustainability returned to the forefront.

Lastly, the recent trend-driven publications phenomenon, versus the traditional theory-driven, must be critically examined by academia, since, reflecting on the pandemic experience and borrowing a financial term, it might create an unpredictable "paperdemic bubble" characterized by an unsustainable increase in relevant publications and a decline in conceptual value. According to economist Hyman P. Minsky (2008), bubbles have five distinct stages: displacement, boom, euphoria, profit-taking, and bust. In analogous academic terms, displacement occurs when scholars become fascinated by a new concept or phenomenon; boom refers to the explosion of relevant publications; euphoria—the peak of the phenomenon—is associated with the irrational belief that this trend will continue indefinitely; profit-taking involves capitalizing on success (e.g., last-minute additional publications, citations, etc.) but also marks the beginning of the end; and finally, bust or a sudden collapse of interest—and moving on to bigger and better things. One of the leading causes of such a phenomenon is irrational exuberance, or the delusion about the true importance of a phenomenon as a valuable topic of interest.

Shakespeare wrote in his play "The Tempest," "What's past is prologue." Time will tell whether the discipline's conceptual landscape, influenced by external factors, will shift into uncharted territory or whether history will shape the future. Nonetheless, lessons from the COVID-19 era must inform H&T scholars' decisions toward more thoughtful, theory-driven, and balanced publication strategies, a notion also supported by Filep et al. (2024). Undoubtedly, the 'publish or perish' paradigm will remain an academic imperative; nevertheless, its shortcomings, especially those related to 'speed science', trend-driven theorization, the overproduction—borderline superficial—of scholarly work mainly 'inspired' by fashionable and/or opportunistic topics, relevant unethical behaviors, and purposeful 'citation-grabbing' moves that promote numerical superiority and short-term visibility rather than conceptual depth and the genuine advancement of knowledge, must be revisited. As noted by Van Dalen (2021), such negative contextual externalities might prove detrimental to a discipline's future, as they risk producing a generation of ill-equipped scholars who focus on short-term, citation-inflating topics rather than original, rigorous, and transformational research.

4.1. Limitations

It is essential to acknowledge some study-specific limitations beyond the inherent constraints of bibliometrics. First, our sample was drawn from only one proprietary citation-tracking database, Scopus. Second, some might criticize the inclusion of only English-language articles and the exclusion of other publication types for failing to provide a complete view of the discipline's conceptual landscape. Third, selecting only twenty H&T journals based on established ranking criteria may enhance data quality; however, it excludes both non-H&T publications that often cover related topics (e.g., Journal of Business Research), and lower-ranked outlets that might be more specialized (e.g., Tourism Economics, Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education, Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism, etc.), thus causing an underrepresentation of specific terms. Fourth, cross-sectional studies in the H&T literature, especially those conducted during the pandemic, should be viewed with caution, as they fail to capture temporal effects. Unfortunately, despite calls from many scholars (see Bakir et al., 2025), longitudinal studies in H&T remain scarce due to factors such as decreased popularity, attrition, changing conceptual interests and research directions, outdated topics, contextual shifts, and resource limitations. Lastly, the authors acknowledge the subjective nature of interpreting the provided visualization maps, despite their best efforts.

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