

Editorials: Systematic reviews in tourism and hospitality

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1. Introduction

Systematic reviews play a crucial role in providing a “map” of research progress, illustrating how foundational studies shape emerging topics and identifying gaps in knowledge. By employing tools like bibliometric mapping and data visualization, they reveal patterns and relationships that might otherwise remain hidden. These tools enable researchers to explore how different areas of knowledge connect and evolve, offering a broad perspective on the field’s development.

In recent years, tourism and hospitality research has increasingly relied on systematic reviews to synthesize information from diverse studies. These reviews identify trends, address gaps, and uncover practical applications, which drive the growth of the field (Donthu et al., 2021). Their appeal lies in their ability to navigate the complexity of a sector that spans disciplines like sociology, economics, psychology, and technology (Ülker et al., 2023; Snyder, 2019). Advanced techniques such as co-citation and visualization networks further enhance their utility by mapping trends across interconnected topics. This allows for a deeper understanding of dynamic and multifaceted issues, supporting evidence-based practices and translating theoretical insights into actionable strategies.

Building on these methodological advancements, the articles in this special issue highlight how systematic reviews tackle critical challenges in tourism and hospitality. They demonstrate the ability of these reviews to bridge theoretical frameworks with practical applications while addressing global phenomena such as demographic shifts, digital transformation, and globalization (Snyder, 2019). By aligning research insights with industry needs, these reviews drive both academic inquiry and practical innovation. Beyond synthesizing knowledge, they identify gaps and reveal new areas for exploration, offering a strategic direction for future research.

This special issue underscores the progressive nature of systematic reviews, emphasizing their adaptability to global changes and their potential to inspire innovative solutions. As tourism and hospitality continue to evolve, systematic reviews remain essential tools for navigating the

challenges and opportunities in this complex and interconnected landscape. Their role in integrating diverse perspectives and methodologies ensures that research efforts remain relevant and impactful, addressing both theoretical advancements and practical demands.

2. Key Findings

The articles in this special issue collectively demonstrate the ability of systematic reviews to identify research gaps and underexplored areas across diverse contexts in tourism and hospitality. By examining key topics such as senior tourism, tipping behavior, Korean pop culture tourism, and post-Soviet tourism, these studies showcase the versatility of systematic reviews in uncovering trends, highlighting gaps, and informing future research directions.

Tourism among older adults is emerging as a significant focus, driven by increasing travel demand within this demographic due to rising life expectancy (Kim et al., 2025). However, the literature emphasizes the need for more multidisciplinary studies to address the specific health-related service requirements of older tourists. Research on tipping behavior reveals that various sociocultural factors and aspects of consumer psychology influence tipping practices (Yu et al., 2025). Despite this, more cross-national comparative studies are needed to account for the cultural specificity of tipping norms, which often complicates broader generalizations.

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The systematic review of Korean pop culture tourism sheds light on the global impact of the Korean Wave, emphasizing its international reach. However, it also identifies a need for further exploration of lesser-known cultural and experiential aspects of Korean Wave tourism that are not prominently featured in mainstream media (Choi & Lee, 2025). Similarly, studies on post-Soviet tourism highlight disparities between Russian and English-language research on the topic (Odosashvili & Martin, 2025). These differences suggest an opportunity for more comprehensive research that bridges these perspectives and addresses neglected areas, such as the Caucasus region, to enhance understanding of tourism growth in these locations.

Collectively, these findings underline the importance of systematic reviews in identifying research gaps and translating academic insights into actionable strategies for the tourism and hospitality sector. By addressing these gaps, future research can build on these insights to support innovation, enhance traveler experiences, and contribute to the sustainable growth of the industry.

3. Directions for Future Studies

Future research in tourism and hospitality should utilize insights from bibliometric research to shape its agenda by identifying areas that are either extensively studied or underexplored. Bibliometric analyses offer a structured approach to mapping the academic landscape, uncovering topics such as the needs of senior travelers or the intricate dynamics of tipping behavior, which merit deeper exploration. By identifying gaps in the literature, these tools facilitate the development of focused and impactful research that aligns with both academic objectives and industry priorities.

The findings of bibliometric research also highlight the importance of comparative approaches, particularly the examination of specialized tourism and hospitality journals alongside mainstream academic publications. This dual perspective helps clarify where tourism research is progressing in relation to other disciplines and where it lags. For example, while tourism research has made significant strides in areas like cultural tourism and localized phenomena such as the Korean Wave, broader themes like sustainability, resource management, and digital transformation may be more comprehensively addressed in adjacent fields. Recognizing and addressing these disparities ensures that tourism and hospitality research remains relevant and aligns with broader academic and global trends.

Bibliometric tools, such as VOS viewer, provide valuable methods for synthesizing literature and linking academic insights to real-world phenomena. These tools allow researchers to identify patterns, such as shifts in traveler behavior or demand, and connect these trends to industry challenges. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, bibliometric methods contribute to the creation of data-driven strategies that address emerging issues in the tourism and hospitality sector. For instance, identifying gaps in senior tourism research can inform the development of accessible services, while tracking the rise of digital transformation can support innovation in hospitality operations.

4. Concluding Remarks

Systematic reviews play a critical role in advancing tourism and hospitality research by organizing and synthesizing diverse studies into a cohesive framework. These reviews identify recurring themes, address knowledge gaps, and develop broader narratives that guide the field. By integrating academic inquiry with practical applications, systematic reviews align research efforts with the needs of a dynamic and multidisciplinary sector. Topics such as senior tourism, tipping behavior, Korean pop culture tourism, and post-Soviet tourism exemplify how systematic reviews bridge theoretical frameworks with industry priorities, addressing both emerging issues and ongoing challenges.

Looking ahead, systematic reviews and bibliometric research will continue to evolve as essential tools for navigating the increasingly complex landscape of tourism and hospitality. The

integration of advanced technologies, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence, offers exciting opportunities for more sophisticated analyses, enabling researchers to uncover patterns and relationships in ever-growing datasets. Furthermore, as global challenges such as climate change, post-pandemic recovery, and technological disruption reshape the tourism and hospitality industry, systematic reviews and bibliometric tools will be pivotal in guiding research agendas and crafting innovative, data-driven solutions. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and incorporating diverse perspectives, these methods will ensure that tourism and hospitality research remains relevant, forward-thinking, and capable of addressing the pressing issues of the future.

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