



Rural Tourism Development and its Impact on Community Economic Welfare: A Bibliometric Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a bibliometric analysis of rural tourism development and its impact on community economic welfare, drawing insights from research published between 2000 and 2024. Using data from the Web of Science and Scopus databases, we analyzed 1,000 papers to map the intellectual structure of the field, identifying key themes, influential authors, and emerging trends. The results highlight the central role of rural tourism in fostering sustainable development, with significant research attention given to ecotourism, agritourism, and cultural tourism. Moreover, the study reveals a growing focus on the use of advanced technologies such as big data and geographic information systems in enhancing rural tourism management. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders seeking to optimize rural tourism strategies for sustainable community development. This study contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive overview of the trends, challenges, and opportunities in rural tourism research, with a particular focus on economic welfare.

Keywords: Rural tourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, agritourism, bibliometric analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism has emerged as a significant component of the tourism industry, offering an alternative to the overcrowded, urban-centered tourist destinations. It plays a crucial role in the economic diversification and development of rural areas, providing a means to preserve local culture and environment while fostering economic opportunities [1]. In many regions, rural tourism has been instrumental in revitalizing local crafts, promoting traditional practices, and protecting natural landscapes, which are pivotal for attracting tourists seeking authentic experiences [2]. Furthermore, the development of rural tourism is often viewed as a sustainable strategy to combat rural depopulation and economic decline. It can lead to the creation of employment opportunities and stimulate local entrepreneurship by encouraging the provision of tourist facilities and services such as accommodations, food services, and recreational activities [3]. This, in turn, enhances the socio-economic fabric of rural communities, which historically may have relied heavily on declining agricultural sectors [4].

However, the impact of tourism on community economic welfare is multifaceted and can vary widely depending on how it is managed. While there are success stories, there are also instances where tourism has not significantly altered the economic prospects of rural areas, sometimes even

contributing to increased inequality and environmental degradation [5]. This disparity raises questions about the factors that influence the success or failure of rural tourism initiatives in genuinely benefiting local communities economically. The bibliometric analysis approach offers a systematic method to review the existing academic discourse on this topic, identifying key themes, gaps, and trends in research. By analyzing citation patterns, major contributors, and prevalent themes in rural tourism literature, researchers can obtain a macro-view of the field's evolution and its current state [6]. This method provides a robust foundation for understanding how academic discussion aligns with practical outcomes in rural tourism, especially concerning economic welfare in rural communities.

Despite the recognized potential of rural tourism as a catalyst for economic development, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding its actual impacts on the economic welfare of rural communities. Previous studies have often been fragmented, focusing on specific case studies or limited aspects of rural tourism without a holistic synthesis of global research trends. There is a need to integrate these dispersed findings to paint a clearer picture of the dynamics at play. This study addresses the gap by employing a bibliometric analysis to map out the existing research landscape, elucidate the predominant themes and methodologies, and identify where further research is needed. This approach will help in understanding whether the academic literature reflects the on-ground realities of rural tourism and its effectiveness in enhancing community economic welfare.

The purpose of this research is to provide a thorough bibliometric analysis of the literature about rural tourist growth and its effects on community economic welfare. This analysis seeks to delineate the principal research issues, identify the most impactful papers and authors, and ascertain the geographic emphasis of the investigations. This research aims to elucidate the correlation between rural tourist development techniques and their tangible effects on the economic situations of rural communities, offering valuable insights for policymakers, local stakeholders, and future academic investigations. The study will concentrate on examining the correlation between theoretical discourse in academic literature and the practical results evident in rural communities globally.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evolution of Rural Tourism

Rural tourism, an integral part of the broader tourism industry, has evolved significantly over the past few decades. Initially conceptualized as a lever for economic diversification, rural tourism has expanded to include ecological, cultural, and experiential dimensions. According to [3], rural tourism is not merely an economic activity but a complex phenomenon that intertwines with local culture, heritage, and sustainability. The transformative potential of rural tourism for local economies has been widely recognized, with scholars noting its capacity to regenerate local industries and conserve cultural and natural resources [7]. However, the definition and scope of rural tourism remain fluid, influenced by regional specifics and the evolving demands of tourists seeking authentic and personalized experiences [8].

Economic Impacts of Rural Tourism

The economic impacts of rural tourism are diverse and context-dependent. For many rural communities, tourism offers a viable path to economic development, contributing to

employment, entrepreneurship, and even infrastructural improvements. Research by [9] highlights that rural tourism can lead to job creation not only directly within the tourism sector but also indirectly in sectors like agriculture, crafts, and services. Furthermore, [10] discuss the multiplier effect, where increased economic activity from tourism leads to greater circulation of money within the community, thereby enhancing overall economic welfare. However, the extent of these benefits can vary greatly. While some regions experience substantial economic growth and improved living standards due to tourism, others face challenges such as seasonal fluctuations in employment and income, overdependence on tourism, and displacement of traditional livelihoods [3]. The success factors often hinge on effective community involvement in tourism planning and equitable distribution of tourism revenues, ensuring that the benefits permeate through the community rather than being concentrated among a few stakeholders [9].

Community Involvement and Economic Welfare

Community involvement plays a pivotal role in the sustainable development of rural tourism. According to [11], community-based tourism ensures that the development processes are participatory and aligned with the community's needs and values, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility towards tourism initiatives. Studies by [12] suggest that active community participation in tourism planning and decision-making leads to more sustainable outcomes, enhancing the community's capacity to manage tourism in alignment with their economic and social goals. Moreover, the relationship between rural tourism and community economic welfare is mediated by various factors including governance, the regulatory environment, and the level of local engagement. Effective governance structures are crucial in managing the impacts of tourism, preventing environmental degradation, and ensuring that economic benefits are widely distributed within the community [13]. Without adequate governance, the potential economic benefits of rural tourism may not fully materialize, or worse, could lead to negative outcomes such as economic inequality and social discord.

Sustainability of Rural Tourism

Sustainability emerges as a recurring theme in rural tourism literature, emphasizing not only economic but also environmental and social dimensions. [14] introduced the concept of the tourism area life cycle, which has been extensively used to study the sustainability of tourism developments, including rural areas. This model outlines the progression of a tourist area from discovery to potential decline, emphasizing the need for sustainable practices to maintain the viability of tourism without depleting the resources on which it depends. Recent studies have focused on sustainable tourism practices that balance economic objectives with environmental conservation and social equity. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has championed this approach, advocating for tourism that respects both local culture and the environment while contributing economically to communities [15]. The integration of sustainability into rural tourism is seen as essential for its long-term success, promoting resilient economic structures that can adapt to changing environmental and market conditions.

METHODS

This study employs a bibliometric analysis to systematically review and synthesize literature on rural tourism development and its impact on community economic welfare. The primary data for this analysis were sourced from Google Scholar database, chosen for their comprehensive coverage of tourism and economic research publications. The search was conducted using keywords such as "rural tourism," "community economic welfare," and "sustainable tourism," with the time frame set from 2000 to 2024 to capture the most relevant and recent publications. Using VOSviewer software, we conducted co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and keyword co-occurrence analyses to map the intellectual structure of the field and identify the most influential authors, articles, and themes. The analysis was refined through iterative search adjustments based on emerging patterns and trends, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Bibliometric Overview

Table 1. Bibliometric Overview

Publication Years	2000-2024
Citation Years	24 (2000-2024)
Papers	1000
Citations	30251
Cites/Year	916.70
Cites/Paper	302.51
Cites/Author	18362.90
Papers/Author	58.35
Authors/Paper	2.29
h-index	83
g-index	100
hI, norm	66
hI, annual	2.00
hA-index	27
Papers with ACC >= 1,2,5,10,20:	100, 99, 92, 68, 39

Source: Publish or Perish, 2024

Table 1 provides a bibliometric overview of research on rural tourism development and its impact on community economic welfare from 2000 to 2024. This analysis encompasses a total of 1,000 papers, which have collectively garnered 30,251 citations, averaging about 916.70 citations per year and 302.51 citations per paper, indicating a robust interest and engagement within the academic community. The data reveals a high productivity and influence among authors, with an average of 58.35 papers per author and a considerable 18362.90 citations per author. The mean number of authors per paper stands at 2.29, suggesting moderate collaboration levels in this research area. Notably, the h-index for the dataset is 83, and the g-index is 100, both of which reflect significant research impact and depth of contributions. The normalized h-index (hI, norm) is 66 with an annual increment of 2.00 (hI, annual), and the hA-index, which adjusts for multi-author contributions, is 27. Furthermore, the distribution of highly cited papers is also impressive: 100 papers have been cited at least once, 99 papers at least twice, 92 papers at least five times, 68 papers at least ten times, and

39 papers more than twenty times, underscoring the substantial influence and relevance of the work in this field.

Keyword Co-Occurrence

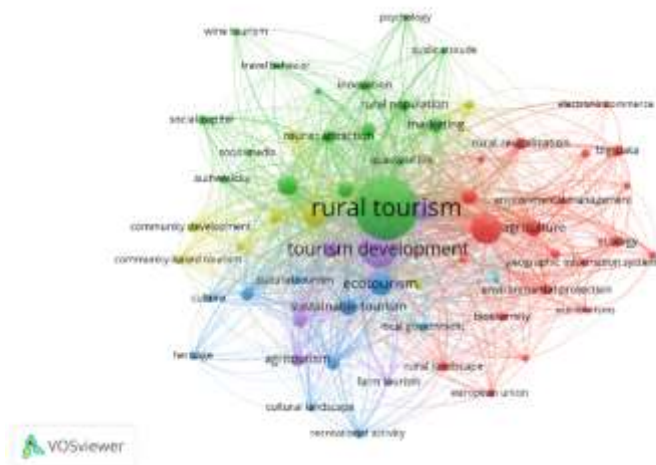


Figure 1. Network Visualization
Source: Data Analysis, 2024

This VOSviewer visualization provides a comprehensive overview of the key themes and relationships within the research on rural tourism development. The network map clusters related terms based on co-occurrence, with each cluster represented by a different color, indicating interconnected topics within the broader domain of rural tourism. The central and largest node, labeled "rural tourism," highlights its pivotal role as the core focus of the analyzed literature. Surrounding it are significant related themes such as "ecotourism," "sustainable tourism," and "agritourism," each forming distinct clusters. These terms are closely linked with "rural tourism" both in size and connectivity, suggesting a strong emphasis on sustainable practices and the integration of agriculture with tourism activities in rural areas. The proximity of these nodes to "rural tourism" underscores the importance of sustainability and environmental considerations in the development of rural tourism sectors.

Adjacent to these sustainability-focused themes are clusters related to "cultural tourism" and "heritage," indicating a strong association between rural tourism and the preservation and promotion of local culture and historical assets. This part of the network connects with terms like "community development" and "authenticity," reflecting the trend towards leveraging unique local attributes as a tourism draw while fostering community engagement and development. The linkages between these nodes suggest that preserving cultural integrity and promoting heritage are seen as vital for the authenticity and attractiveness of rural tourism offerings.

The network also illustrates emerging trends in rural tourism research, highlighted by nodes such as "big data," "geographic information systems," and "electronic commerce." These terms, positioned on the periphery of the network, indicate newer areas of interest and application within the rural tourism context. The presence of "big data" and "GIS" suggests a growing interest in using advanced technologies to enhance tourism management and marketing strategies, while "e-commerce" points to increasing utilization of digital platforms for promoting and distributing rural tourism products. This integration of technology within rural tourism research reflects broader shifts towards digitalization and data-driven decision-making in the sector.

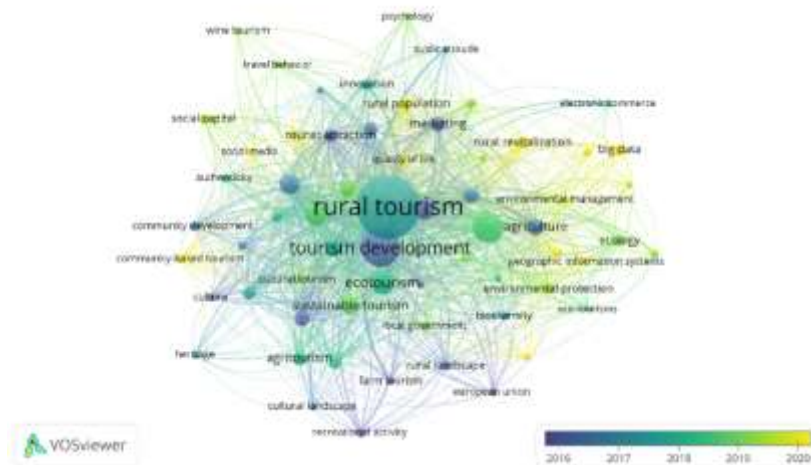


Figure 2. Overlay Visualization

Source: Data Analysis, 2024

The VOSviewer visualization above illustrates the evolution and interconnections of research themes related to rural tourism from 2016 to 2020, using a color gradient to denote the temporal progression of research focus within this period. The color coding, ranging from blue (2016) to yellow (2020), helps identify the shifting priorities and emerging topics in rural tourism research over these five years.

Throughout the network, the central and consistently significant nodes like "rural tourism," "sustainable tourism," and "ecotourism" maintain their prominence, suggesting a steady focus on sustainability aspects within rural tourism development. The consistent size and centrality of these nodes across the timeline indicate a strong and ongoing academic and practical interest in how rural tourism can be developed sustainably to benefit local economies without compromising environmental and social integrity. This is complemented by nodes related to "community development" and "heritage," which are also central, reflecting a continued emphasis on integrating community welfare and cultural preservation with tourism activities.

Towards the later years, around 2019 and 2020, there's a noticeable emergence and strengthening of nodes associated with "big data," "geographic information systems (GIS)," and "electronic commerce." These more technologically oriented themes becoming more pronounced towards yellow hues suggest an integration of digital tools and data-driven approaches in rural tourism research and practice. This shift highlights the increasing relevance of technology in enhancing the efficiency and reach of rural tourism initiatives, possibly as a response to the growing need for more sophisticated marketing, customer engagement, and sustainable management practices in the rural tourism sector.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this bibliometric analysis highlights the evolving and multi-dimensional nature of rural tourism development research, particularly its significant impact on community economic welfare. The analysis reveals a consistent focus on sustainability, ecotourism, and agritourism as central themes, underscoring the importance of environmentally and culturally sensitive approaches to tourism in rural areas. Additionally, the integration of emerging technologies such as big data, geographic information systems, and e-commerce reflects the field's shift towards innovation in managing and promoting rural tourism. While rural tourism has shown great potential in revitalizing local economies, this study also emphasizes the need for continued research on its long-term impacts and the role of digital tools in optimizing tourism strategies. By mapping these trends and gaps, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders aiming to leverage rural tourism for sustainable community development.

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