

BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF THE DIFFERENCES AND RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RELIGIOUS TOURISM AND SPIRITUAL TOURISM

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Received: 01/02/2026 | Revised: 15/02/2026 | Accepted: 03/03/2026 | Published: 09/03/2026

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the research landscape on religious tourism and spiritual tourism within the context of destination management using a bibliometric approach. Data were retrieved from the Scopus database with the keywords “destination management” AND (“spiritual tourism” OR “religious tourism”). After filtering by language, publication stage, and year, a total of 210 documents were analyzed using VOSviewer software. The co-occurrence analysis with a minimum threshold of three occurrences identified 49 keywords that met the criteria and formed four main thematic clusters. The mapping results reveal that religious tourism is primarily examined from the perspectives of destination management, tourism economics, and cultural heritage preservation. In contrast, spiritual tourism focuses more on tourists' psychological and personal experiences. Both themes intersect strongly through issues such as sustainability, cultural heritage, and service quality. These findings highlight the need for a multidisciplinary approach to developing tourism destinations that balance economic and managerial goals with spiritual and social values. Future research is recommended to strengthen the integration between spiritual and managerial dimensions and enhance cross-national collaboration to broaden perspectives in the study of spiritual and religious tourism.

Keywords: *religious tourism, spiritual tourism, destination management, bibliometrics, VOSviewer.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is no longer understood solely as a recreational-based economic activity, but has evolved towards the pursuit of spiritual values and inner balance through travel experiences (Sheldon, 2020). This shift has given rise to two closely related concepts: religious tourism and spiritual tourism, which have evolved along with the growing interest in meaningful travel among tourists (Singh et al., 2025). In this context, mass media plays a role in shaping the perception and image of destinations, not only as a promotional tool but also as a representation of social and spiritual values (Resmi et al., 2024). Religious tourism is generally associated with pilgrimages, visits to holy sites, and worship activities, which are strongly influenced by socio-cultural factors (Aman et al., 2019; Griffin, 2018). Previous studies have often positioned religious tourism within the framework of destination management, religious activity governance, and religious value-based promotional strategies (Korov, 2024; Kartal, 2015; Mirhoseini, 2025). The role of government and local communities is crucial in preserving sacred sites and managing tourist flows through the provision of infrastructure and supporting policies (Korov, 2024; Shinde, 2020; Mohidem & Hashim, 2023).

In contrast, spiritual tourism is more oriented toward personal and reflective experiences aimed at finding meaning in life and inner peace (Halim, 2021; Kujawa, 2017). This experience is subjective and often realized through activities such as meditation, yoga, and spiritual retreats (Doan et al., 2025). Despite their different focuses, both concepts overlap with issues of sustainability, cultural preservation, and the quality of the tourist experience (Aulet & Duda, 2020; Mishra & Maheshwari, 2025). However, studies examining both in an integrated manner are still limited (Choe, 2025; Nguyen, 2024). Based on this gap, this study maps the development of religious and spiritual tourism studies using Scopus-based bibliometric analysis and VOSviewer visualization. The results are expected to clarify the conceptual relationship between the two fields and support the development of sustainable, spiritual-value-based tourism management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Destination Management

Destination management is a key element in sustainable tourism development, requiring collaboration between the government, community, and business actors (Khan et al., 2021; Panić et al., 2019; Altinay et al., 2016). In the context of spiritual and religious tourism, management is not only economically oriented but also maintains the destination's spiritual meaning and atmosphere (Mishra & Maheshwari, 2025). The practice of pilgrimage and spiritual reflection has been shown to strengthen tourists' social identity and inner well-being (Moufahim & Lichrou, 2019; Tutu, 2021). However, excessive commercialization risks diminishing authenticity, necessitating a collaborative and adaptive approach that balances economic objectives with value preservation (Hung et al., 2017; Resmi et al., 2022).

Spiritual Tourism Destinations

Spiritual tourism focuses on personal transformation, self-reflection, and the search for meaning in life, not necessarily associated with formal rituals (Wulandari et al., 2021). This experience is subjective and often associated with self-awareness and mindfulness (Choe, 2025; White et al., 2025). Destination development emphasizes serenity, environmental sustainability, and authenticity of the experience. However, operational models for measuring the quality of spiritual experiences are still limited in the literature.

Religious Tourism Destinations

Religious tourism emphasizes ritual activities such as pilgrimages and religious celebrations aimed at strengthening faith and social solidarity (Seala et al., 2025; Rahman & Anwar, 2022). Previous studies have focused on aspects of destination management, pilgrim services, and alignment with local values (Ali et al., 2019). Issues of operational risk management and human resource professionalism also influence service quality (Kiswanto et al., 2023). When managed sustainably, religious tourism has significant socio-economic impacts on communities (Taneja, 2023). Despite their different focuses, spiritual and religious tourism overlap in terms of sustainability, cultural preservation, and the quality of the tourist experience. However, integration of these two studies is still limited, necessitating research that more systematically maps the interconnectedness of these concepts.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a bibliometric analysis framework to identify and map research developments related to spiritual and religious tourism within the context of destination management. This approach is effective for examining publication trends, conceptual structures, and inter-topic relationships in the tourism literature (Anggraeni, 2023; Handoko, 2020). Bibliometric analysis allows for tracing the distribution of scientific papers, citation frequency, and keyword relevance through a combination of quantitative approaches and qualitative interpretation (Ivasciuc et al., 2024; Paramitra et al., 2024). The research data was obtained from the Scopus database on November 5, 2025, due to its reputation for curating academic literature (Kumar et al., 2020). The search strategy used the keywords "destination management" AND "spiritual tourism" OR "religious tourism") with a restriction to English-language journal articles. The initial search yielded 267 documents, which were then filtered by language (255), publication type (248), and the year range 2020–2025 to obtain 210 documents as the final dataset.

Data selection was carried out systematically by examining titles, abstracts, and keywords to ensure relevance to the research topic. This procedure is crucial to maintain the validity of the bibliometric analysis, as recommended by Donthu et al. (2021). Furthermore, the analysis was conducted using VOSviewer software using the keyword co-occurrence technique and a minimum threshold of three occurrences. Of the 731 identified keywords, 49 met the criteria and were visualized in a thematic cluster map. The use of VOSviewer allows for a more comprehensive mapping of conceptual structures and research development directions (Ding & Yang, 2022). The resulting visualizations not only show topic frequency but also the interrelationships between co-occurring concepts. Therefore, this bibliometric analysis is expected to identify new research opportunities and strengthen the theoretical foundation for future spiritual and religious tourism destination management (Ohlan & Ohlan, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Overview

The search results in the Scopus database yielded 267 initial documents, which after going through a filtering process based on language, publication stage, and year limits (2020–2025), left 210 relevant documents for analysis. The number of publications shows an increasing trend from 2020 to 2024. Based on Figure 1, the year with the

highest number of publications was in 2024 with a total of 46 publications. This indicates that the topics of spiritual tourism and religious tourism are increasingly receiving attention among tourism academics.

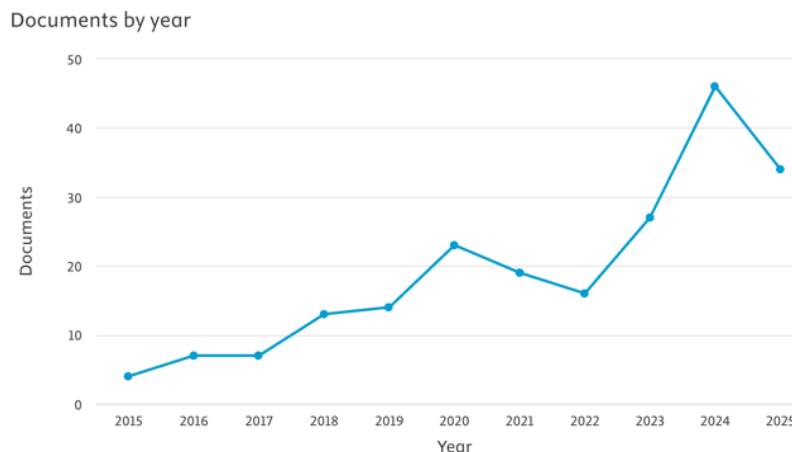


Figure 1. Publication graph from 2015-2025

The types of documents used for analysis are not limited, because we want to look more broadly at documents other than journals and articles.

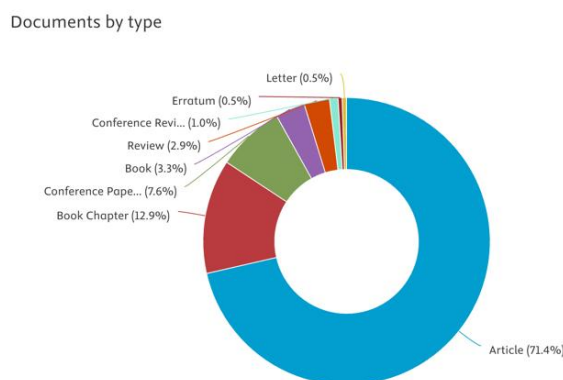


Figure 2. Document Type

Based on Figure 2. The most analyzed document type was articles with a total of 71.4%, but researchers also analyzed other document types such as book chapters 12.9%, conference papers 7.6%, books 3.3%, reviews 2.9%, conference reviews 1.0%, erratum 0.5%, letters 0.5%.

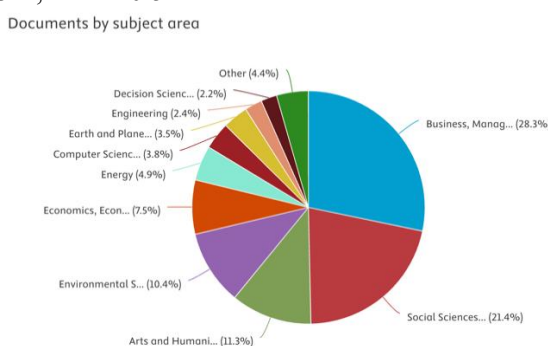


Figure 3. Documents by subject area

Based on Figure 3. The most common subject areas in this document are business management and accounting with a total of 28.3%, then social sciences with 21.4% and the rest are filled by other subjects.

Research Productivity

Research productivity analysis provides an overview of the distribution of scholarly contributions by country, author, and institution. The results indicate that the topics of spiritual and religious tourism have received extensive attention globally, with the highest concentration of research originating from Asia. This finding confirms that

regions with cultural and religious diversity have a high level of interest in the themes of spirituality and religiosity in the context of tourism.

Table 1. 10 countries with the highest number of publications

No	Country/Territory	Number of Publications
1	Indonesia	32
2	India	29
3	China	19
4	Australia	15
5	United Kingdom	13
6	Malaysia	12
7	United States	12
8	Spain	10
9	Taiwan	8
10	Japan	7

Source: Scopus Data, 2025

The distribution of publications by country shows that Indonesia tops the list with 32 publications, followed by India (29 publications) and China (19 publications). Countries such as Australia (15 publications) and the United Kingdom (13 publications) also make significant contributions. The dominance of Asian countries, particularly Indonesia and India, demonstrates the region's significant potential for developing spirituality- and religiosity-based tourism research. Analysis of author productivity shows that Carvache-Franco M., Carvache-Franco O., and Carvache-Franco W. are the authors with the highest contributions, each producing three publications. Other active researchers are Isaac RK, Alshiha AA, and Ballantyne R. with two to three publications.

Table 2. 10 Most Active Authors

No	Author Name	Amount
1	Carvache-Franco, M.	3
2	Carvache-Franco, O.	3
3	Carvache-Franco, W.	3
4	Isaac, RK	3
5	Alshiha, AA	2
6	Ballantyne, R.	2
7	Bhatti, MA	2
8	Camilleri, MA	2
9	Corsale, A.	2
10	Hassan, T.	2

Source: Scopus Data, 2025

Based on the institutional side (Table 3), Diponegoro University (Indonesia) occupies the top position with four publications, followed by several international universities such as the University of Central Florida, King Faisal University, and The University of Queensland, which each produced three publications.

Table 3. Ten Institutions with the Most Publications

No	Institution / University	Amount
1	Diponegoro University	4
2	University of Central Florida	3
3	King Faisal University	3
4	The University of Queensland	3
5	Escuela Superior Politecnica del Litoral Ecuador	3
6	Amity University	3
7	University of Malaysia Terengganu	3
8	Rosen College of Hospitality Management	3
9	Breda University of Applied Sciences	3
10	University of Espiritu Santo	3

Source: Scopus Data, 2025

show that these two forms of tourism do not stand apart, but rather exist on the same spectrum, where religious tourism represents the structural and institutional side, while spiritual tourism represents the personal and reflective side of the spiritual value-based tourism experience.

CONCLUSION

Bibliometric analysis shows that religious tourism and spiritual tourism have different yet overlapping focuses. Religious tourism is predominantly studied from the perspective of destination management, economic development, and cultural preservation, while spiritual tourism emphasizes psychological aspects, motivations, and personal experiences of tourists. However, both are connected through issues of sustainability, cultural heritage, and the quality of the tourist experience. This finding underscores the importance of integrating managerial and spiritual dimensions in sustainable destination development. It is recommended that future research adopt a multidisciplinary approach and strengthen international collaboration to enrich the study's perspective. Strengthening sustainability aspects and local community involvement are also crucial to ensure destination development is not solely economic-oriented but also maintains spiritual and social values. Furthermore, the development of a conceptual model that bridges institutional religious tourism and individual spiritual tourism, as well as further bibliometric analysis, are needed to deepen research directions in this area.

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