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Unveiling the Growth Trajectory: A Bibliometric Analysis of Volunteer Tourism Research from 2000 to 2023

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Abstract: ***Volunteer tourism has emerged as a dynamic area of research within the context of evolving social dynamics. Tourists engaging in volunteer activities are increasingly recognized as agents contributing to societal improvement. This thematic field has garnered significant scholarly attention, particularly in esteemed databases such as Scopus. Through a meticulous examination involving systematic review and bibliometric analysis of 607 documents, this study provides comprehensive insights into prevalent themes and discussions surrounding volunteer tourism. The findings highlight a clear upward trend in volunteer tourism research, as evidenced by increasing publication volumes, appearances in journals, citations, and co-citations. Noteworthy research themes include socio-economic dimensions, global issues, psychological and behavioral aspects of volunteers, sustainable development, and global citizenship. Building upon these findings, the study outlines potential research directions in the realm of volunteer tourism.***

Keywords: Tourism, Volunteer Tourism, Scopus, Bibliometric Analysis, Systematic Review.

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry yields both positive and negative impacts on socio-economic development and the environment [1], [2]. To address adverse effects and amplify the industry's societal contributions, the rise of volunteer tourism (VT) represents a notable trend, particularly relevant amid the escalating needs of marginalized groups in challenging regions [3], [4]. Currently, tourism takes on various forms to meet the diverse experiential desires of travelers. This diversification has led to the creation of different tourism approaches tailored to evolving needs. Moreover, travelers are increasingly aware of the social implications associated with their journeys. There is a growing acknowledgment of the necessity to generate positive outcomes within local communities through tourism endeavors [5]. Consequently, the shift towards participatory travel experiences, such as VT, is gaining momentum within this broader trend.

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VT emerged in scholarly literature in the early 2000s, marking its initial appearance in scientific publications as noted in the Scopus database [3]. Initially, it was understood as the convergence of volunteering with sightseeing and tourism activities in destinations outside one's usual place of residence. Over time, the concept broadened to encompass tourism endeavors aimed at generating positive impacts, whether economic, social, or environmental, for the destination [3].

In the future, VT is poised to expand further as tourism trends increasingly prioritize sustainability, aiming to minimize negative impacts on local communities [5], [6]. Moreover, as economic development progresses, there is heightened attention to social aspects, including fostering a culture of sharing and assisting others. Furthermore, the values of social contribution and community service are gaining traction among various demographics, particularly the youth [7], [8]. VT offers them the chance to immerse themselves in new cultural encounters while actively participating as volunteers, thus contributing to community advancement and positively impacting the lives of those they encounter [8].

Given the sustained interest in researching VT, conducting a systematic review of publications on this subject is imperative. Such a review yields essential insights into prevalent themes and areas of discussion within the literature, thereby pinpointing potential research gaps for future investigation. This study seeks to undertake a systematic review of VT publications within the Scopus database, contributing to the body of research on VT.

2. RELATED WORKS

a. Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism, commonly referred to as “voluntourism”, has garnered increasing attention in academic research over recent years [3]. This interest primarily stems from the growing recognition of the significant social responsibility that travelers can exhibit through their voluntary engagements [3], [9].

Recent trends in VT research have shifted towards examining the social responsibilities of tourists [3]. This encompasses the ethical implications of volunteer activities, the sustainability of such initiatives, and the long-term impacts on both the volunteers and the host communities. Researchers have emphasized the need for responsible VT practices that ensure mutual benefits and minimize potential harms to local communities [4]. One of the key trends in the field is the exploration of how VT aligns with the broader concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Tourists today are increasingly aware of their social and environmental footprint and seek to engage in activities that reflect their personal values. VT offers a platform for travelers to actively participate in socially responsible actions, thereby enhancing their travel experience and contributing to a positive societal impact.

Studies have shown that volunteer tourists are motivated by a variety of factors, including the desire for authentic cultural experiences, personal growth, and the satisfaction of contributing to a worthy cause [3]. This shift in traveler motivations signifies a growing trend where tourists

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seek not only to explore new destinations but also to make a meaningful difference through their actions. As VT grows, destinations are increasingly facing complex issues that require the active involvement of responsible tourists. Problems such as environmental degradation, social inequality, and economic instability call for a collaborative approach where tourists and local communities work together towards sustainable solutions. The responsibility of tourists thus extends beyond mere participation; it involves a commitment to understanding and addressing the challenges faced by the destinations they visit.

b. Bibliometric Analysis

Bibliometric analysis is a modern review method increasingly applied across various fields, including tourism, although its use in this area remains somewhat limited [1]. This method provides a comprehensive literature review of research topics, elucidates the relationships between these topics, and clearly identifies research gaps. Bibliometric analysis involves the systematic analysis of research publications to map the structure and development of a particular field [10]. It uses quantitative methods to analyze the impact and dissemination of research outputs, such as journal articles, conference papers, and other scholarly works.

In the context of tourism, bibliometric analysis offers a panoramic view of the major research themes and trends [1]. By examining citation patterns, co-authorship networks, and keyword co-occurrence, researchers can identify the dominant topics and emerging areas of interest within the field. This approach helps in understanding how different themes evolve over time and how they are interconnected.

3. METHODOLOGY

To investigate the landscape of VT, this study employs an overview approach utilizing descriptive statistics and bibliometric analysis [11]. The Scopus database serves as the primary reference due to its extensive collection of reputable scientific publications, making it an ideal source for high-quality research with broad coverage and regular updates [11]. The review research method is instrumental in exploring prevalent research themes within VT and provides descriptive statistics about these works within the Scopus data system. Review research is fundamental for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the research problem , enabling future studies on the same topic to identify research gaps and enhance their ability to make meaningful scientific contributions.

The study employed the literature review procedure outlined by Templier and Paré (2015), which involves systematic steps for data search and publication selection [12]:

Step 1: Research Search Techniques and Intent

Initially, a descriptive statistic was conducted using the Scopus database, employing keywords such as “volunteer tourism” and “voluntourism” within titles, abstracts, and keywords of publications. The search syntax used was: “volunteer tourism” (Topic) OR “voluntourism” (Topic).

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Step 2: Document Search
The search on the Scopus database yielded 634 relevant publications up until the end of 2023. Additionally, the study conducted a search with the same keywords on the Web of Science (WoS) database, resulting in 560 relevant publications. Upon preliminary comparison, it was observed that these 560 publications largely overlapped with those found on the Scopus database, reinforcing the decision to primarily rely on the Scopus database for its extensive coverage and regular updates.

Step 3: Selection Criteria
Selection criteria were established to eliminate duplicate works, non-research article formats, publications in languages other than English, etc. Following this step, 607 documents were retained for further analysis.

Step 4: Preliminary Assessment of Data Quality
A preliminary assessment of data quality involved reviewing the titles to ascertain the relevance of the documents to the research topic. The findings indicated that the works were indeed pertinent to the study of VT.

Step 5: Data Processing
Basic information of the publications and descriptive statistical data provided by the Scopus system were extracted from the database. The author proceeded to process these results for the overarching research.

Step 6: Data Analysis and Synthesis
The analysis and synthesis of data consisted of two parts: Descriptive statistics of research paper and bibliometric analysis related to VT, based on the 607 filtered documents.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. General Information About Research on Volunteer Tourism
From the year 2000 to 2023, the number of published works concerning VT in the Scopus database has exhibited a generally upward trend, with slight fluctuations. There was a minor decrease in publications around 2017, followed by a subsequent increase in recent years. This trend underscores the sustained interest and relevance of VT as a research topic worldwide. As of the end of 2023, there are 634 papers directly linked to VT on the Scopus database, with 53 papers being added in 2023 alone.

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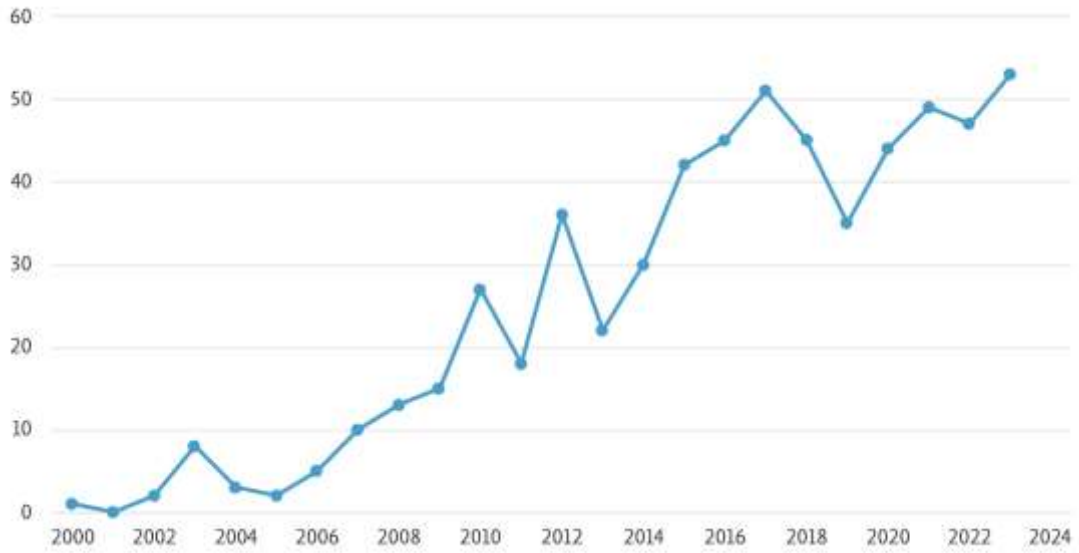


Figure 1: Number of publications related to volunteer tourism on the Scopus database

Source: Compiled by author

On the Scopus database, there are 10 reputable journals with the highest volume of publications concerning VT. These journals have made substantial contributions to the field of VT, covering research and analysis on its current status, trends, theories, and practical applications. Familiarizing oneself with these journals will assist researchers in selecting reliable and fitting outlets and accessing high-quality publications on the subject.

Table 1: List of 10 most published journals related to volunteer tourism on the Scopus database

No	Journal	Number of Publication
1	Tourism Recreation Research	44
2	Journal Of Sustainable Tourism	44
3	Current Issues In Tourism	22
4	Annals Of Tourism Research	21
5	Journal Of Hospitality And Tourism Management	16
6	Tourist Studies	14
7	Tourism Geographies	14
8	Worldwide Hospitality And Tourism Themes	10
9	Tourism Management Perspectives	10
10	Tourism Management	10

Source: author

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Table 2: List of 10 most cited publications related to volunteer tourism on the Scopus database

No	Author	Name	Year	Journal	Citation number
1	Raymond E.M.; Hall C.M.	The development of cross-cultural (mis)understanding through volunteer tourism	2008	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	421
2	Wearing S.; McGehee N.G.	Volunteer tourism: A review	2013	Tourism Management	303
3	Dredge D.; Gyimóthy S.	The collaborative economy and tourism: Critical perspectives, questionable claims and silenced voices	2015	Tourism Recreation Research	299
4	Sin H.L.	Volunteer Tourism "Involve Me And I Will Learn"?	2009	Annals of Tourism Research	279
5	Simpson K.	"Doing development": The gap year, volunteer-tourists and a popular practice of development	2004	Journal of International Development	273
6	Lyons K.; Hanley J.; Wearing S.; Neil J.	Gap year volunteer tourism. Myths of Global Citizenship?	2012	Annals of Tourism Research	271
7	McGehee N.G.; Santos C.A.	Social change, discourse and volunteer tourism	2005	Annals of Tourism Research	264
8	Guttentag D.A.	The possible negative impacts of volunteer tourism	2009	International Journal of Tourism Research	240
9	Brown S.	Travelling with a purpose: Understanding the motives and benefits of volunteer vacationers	2005	Current Issues in Tourism	219
10	Palacios C.M.	Volunteer tourism, development and education in a postcolonial world: Conceiving global connections beyond aid	2010	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	217

Source: author

The publication titled "The development of cross-cultural through volunteer tourism" examines the cultural development and misconceptions within VT [13]. It delves into how VT fosters

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cultural exchange while addressing the challenges of misunderstanding between communities and volunteer tourists. Subsequent research articles such as "Volunteer tourism: A review" and "The possible negative impacts of volunteer tourism" focus on evaluating and researching VT [3], [14]. These publications elucidate the advantages and effects of VT while also delving into its potential negative consequences.

"The collaborative economy and tourism: Critical perspectives, questionable claims and silenced voices" explores the development of the sharing economy and its implications for tourism [15]. This study critically assesses the proposed claims and subjective viewpoints regarding the sharing economy in tourism. Furthermore, publications such as "Volunteer Tourism 'Involve Me And I Will Learn'?" and "Travelling with a purpose: Understanding the motives and benefits of volunteer vacationers" investigate the motives and benefits of volunteer vacationers . They analyze the factors driving tourists to engage in VT and the advantages they derive from participating in volunteer activities.

In summary, the most frequently cited publications on the Scopus database regarding VT cover diverse aspects of this type of tourism. They offer a comprehensive insight into the influence of VT on communities, culture, and social change, thereby contributing to the formulation of more effective VT policies and practices.

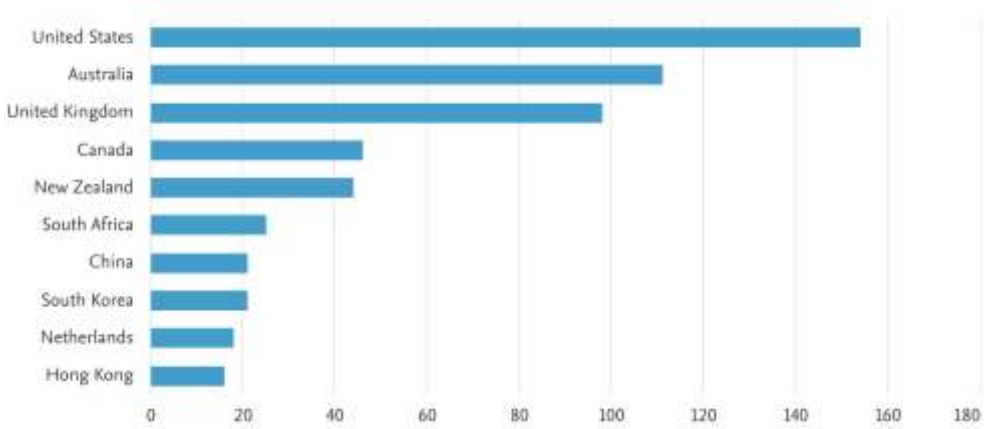


Figure 2: Number by country of publications related to volunteer tourism in the Scopus database

Source: Compiled by author

Research on VT is increasingly garnering attention from the global research community. Data from the Scopus database reveals that the United States leads in publications on VT, with 154 research papers, followed by Australia with 111 papers, and the United Kingdom with 98 papers, showcasing their significant contributions to research in this domain. Canada follows closely with 46 research papers, while New Zealand has 44 research papers, indicating a growing interest in VT within the region.

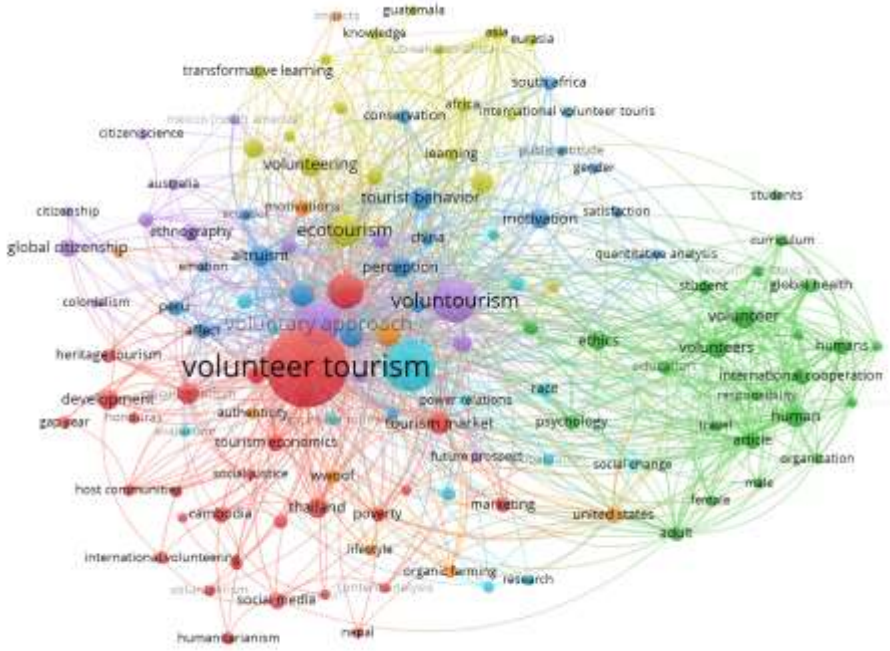
4.2. Bibliometric Analysis

In VT research, bibliometric analysis plays an important role in identifying trends, research directions, and coherence in the field. In this study, Vosviewer software was utilized to analyze

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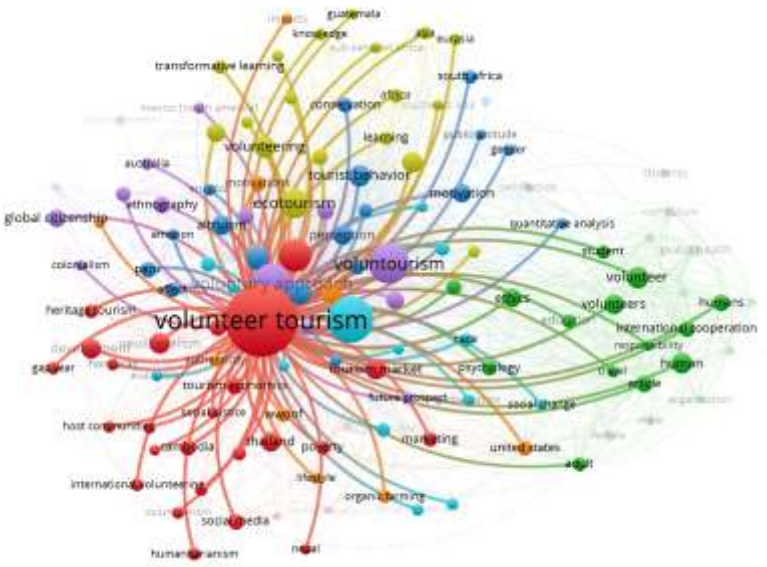
607 publications related to VT from the Scopus database. Results from the software help identify popular keywords, a network diagram illustrates major topics in the field.



Picture 1: Co-occurrence network of keywords in related publications

Source: Author

Cluster 1: Volunteer Tourism, Economics and Social Issues



Main keywords:
development
host humanitarian
communities
India
international
volunteer
marketing
nepal
orphan
poverty
social justice
social media
development tourism
volunteer tourism
volunteerism young

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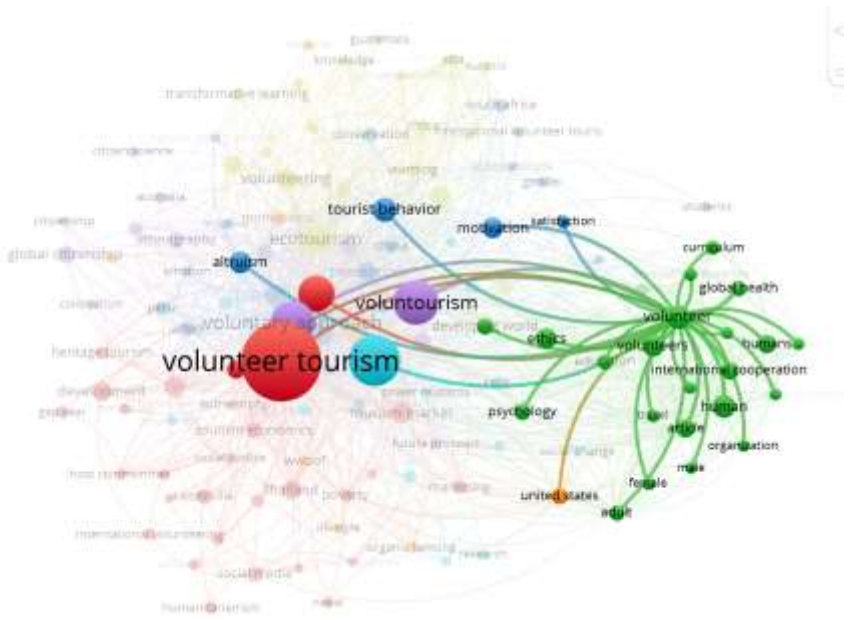
VT encompasses a broad spectrum of activities aimed at connecting volunteer travelers with community service and social development initiatives [6], [16]. Two focal points in VT research are Honduras and India, where volunteer endeavors play pivotal roles, and marketing strategies play crucial roles in attracting volunteer tourists and promoting volunteer travel programs [17], [18].

This thematic cluster also delves into social and economic dynamics such as development, poverty alleviation, and social justice. Additionally, it underscores the influence of VT on cultural preservation, heritage tourism, and the significance of leveraging social media platforms for communication and volunteer outreach [19], [20].

Moreover, the study highlights the involvement and impact of young populations in volunteerism, underscoring adolescents' and young adults' interest and contributions to social and sustainable development through volunteer activities [7], [21].

In summary, this keyword analysis offers insights into various dimensions of VT, spanning community engagement, marketing strategies, utilization of social media technology, and the pivotal role of youth engagement. VT emerges as a burgeoning field that positively influences communities and societies at large.

Cluster 2: Volunteer Tourism and Global Issues



Main keywords:
adult
curriculum
developing countries
education
Ethics
female
global health
humans
international cooperation
male
organization
priority journal
psychology
responsibility
volunteers

Within this cluster, key keywords illuminate research on VT intertwined with global concerns such as health initiatives, international education, human rights, and organizational management for VT activities. Notably, issues of responsibility and ethics are paramount.

Specifically, studies delve into enhancing the adult VT experience, particularly in developing nations, while upholding ethical standards [22]. Concurrently, emphasis is placed on the ethical

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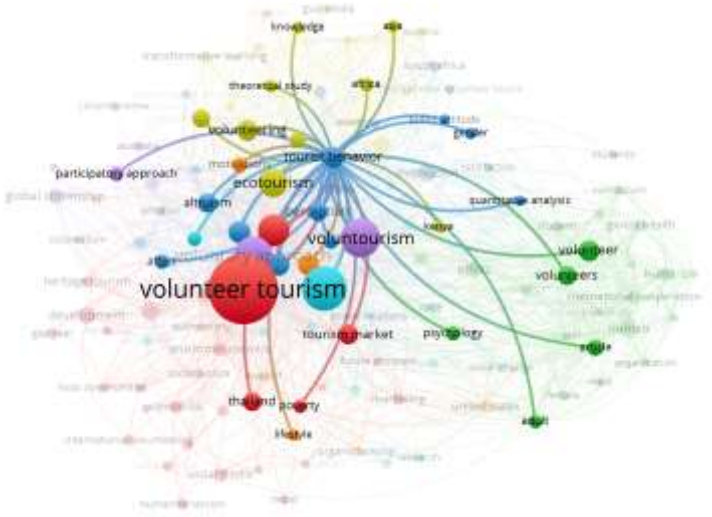
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dimensions and responsibilities associated with volunteer activities [23]. Additionally, research on VT linked with global health and human psychology underscores the necessity for creating positive and sustainable impacts through volunteer schedules [24]. Studies also advocate for international collaboration in developing volunteer programs and orchestrating volunteer activities .

Moreover, gender diversity in VT is addressed to foster an inclusive environment for volunteers regardless of gender [25]. VT emerges as an enriching avenue for youth (students) learning and experience, with an emphasis on sustainable community development and global health priorities.

In essence, research on VT encompasses a spectrum of critical themes and factors including education, ethics, global health, responsibility, and international collaboration. With a focus on adults, gender diversity, and youth, this thematic group holds promise for generating novel insights and contributing positively to sustainable development and volunteerism within the tourism sector.

Cluster 3: Volunteer Tourism and Psychological and Behavioral Issues of Tourists and Research Methods



Main keywords:
affect
altruism
conservation
emotions. emotions
motivation. motivation
perception
attitude
quantitative analysis
questionnaire
survey. survey
satisfaction. satisfaction
tourism management
tourist attraction
tourist behavior
tourist destination

Within this cluster, studies delve into the impact of VT activities on both tourists and the local communities they serve. Research on altruism delves into tourists' motivations and attitudes toward engaging in volunteer activities [26] or contributing to conservation efforts. Moreover, certain studies probe deeper into tourists' emotions and perceptions regarding VT, thereby fostering positive changes in attitudes and behaviors [27].

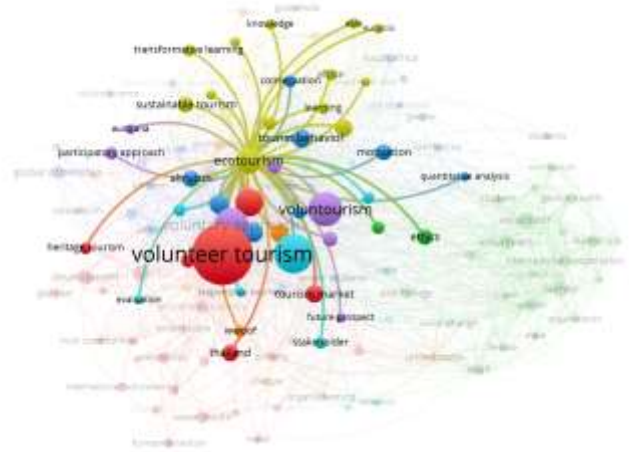
Quantitative analysis methods are prevalent in research on VT, including data collection through questionnaires and surveys to gauge tourists' satisfaction levels with VT programs and the efficacy of tourism management strategies. Factors influencing tourist attractions and behavior are also pivotal areas of study aimed at better comprehending tourists' choices and interactions with tour destinations [28].

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In essence, this body of literature explores the psychological and behavioral dimensions of tourists while identifying the positive effects of VT on local communities. Through quantitative analysis methods and measurement tools, researchers offer comprehensive insights into VT, thereby contributing to the field's development and sustainable management.

Cluster 4: Volunteer Tourism and Sustainable Development

	Main keywords: community development ecotourism knowledge learning. learning sustainable tourism transformative learning nature conservation sustainable development theoretical study volunteering

In this cluster, studies primarily delve into sustainable development and community advancement, highlighting community development as a pivotal aspect of VT aimed at fostering positive impacts on local communities [27]. Some studies also explore VT within the context of ecotourism [29], a tourism model designed to safeguard and conserve the environment while imparting knowledge and appreciation of nature to tourists. Additionally, theoretical inquiries seek to elucidate principles and concepts underpinning VT and sustainable development [30].

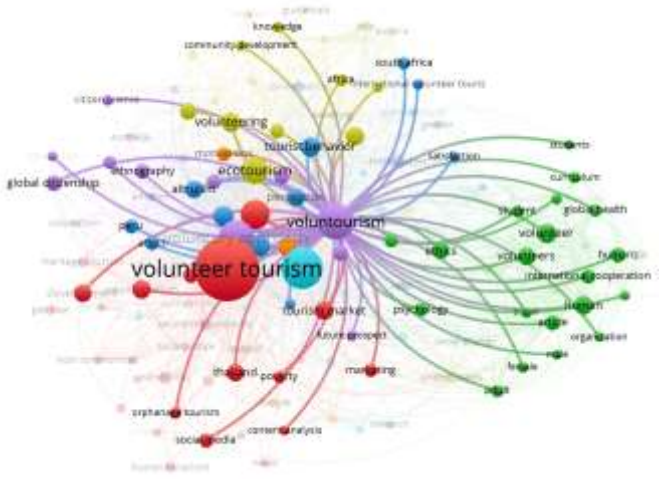
Transformative learning emerges as a significant concept within studies on VT, highlighting its role in altering tourists' consciousness and behaviors, thereby contributing to sustainable tourism development and nature conservation efforts [9]. A prevailing trend among these studies underscores the dual objectives of nature conservation and sustainable development within VT endeavors, aiming to safeguard natural resources and foster balanced, sustainable development for local communities.

Hence, this thematic group examines VT activities aligned with the preservation of the natural environment and the safeguarding of local cultures. Consequently, VT emerges as a vital instrument for promoting sustainable development and conserving natural resources for the benefit of future generations.

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Cluster 5: Analyzing the Potential and Challenges of Volunteer Tourism: An Aspect from Cultural Outreach and Global Citizenship



Main keywords:
voluntourism
citizen science
citizenship
colonialism
ethnography
future prospect
global citizenship
local participation
nongovernmental organization
organizational framework
participatory approach
voluntary approach

In this thematic cluster, studies predominantly delve into the nuanced examination of VT as a distinct form of travel, emphasizing its cultural implications and its influence on the ethos of global citizenship within the contemporary tourism landscape. The findings within this cluster diverge from previous groups due to the subjective nature inherent in civic and ethical considerations.

A consensus among researchers is that VT represents a fusion of engaging in volunteer activities while exploring novel destinations, reflecting a growing trend of interest and development within both the tourist community and non-governmental organizations [31]. Nevertheless, certain studies suggest that VT presents numerous management and ethical challenges, along with adverse impacts on local communities [32]. Addressing these challenges necessitates proactive and participatory approaches from NGOs and organizational frameworks in managing VT activities [33].

Furthermore, some studies have scrutinized the impact of VT on the spirit of global citizenship, especially within an increasingly globalized world and the imperative for integration across the international community [34]. It is posited that VT initiatives should foster citizenship and local engagement [35], thereby ensuring sustainability and delivering tangible benefits to both visitors and local communities.

In summary, research within this cluster undertakes a comprehensive analysis of the potentials and challenges inherent in VT from cultural and global citizenship perspectives, offering varied insights. Successful VT initiatives demand local engagement and a proactive organizational framework to guarantee sustainability and meaningful benefits for both visitors and local communities. However, it is acknowledged that VT may also present management and ethical

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quandaries and potentially negative impacts on local communities, necessitating careful consideration and proactive management approaches.

4.3. Future Research Agenda

Based on the growing interest in VT globally, the following research topics are suggested:
VT and economic development/social issues: Investigate the role of VT in areas affected by economic challenges or social issues such as war, ethnic conflicts, religion, or pandemics. Analyze how VT activities can contribute to community development and address social vulnerabilities post-crisis.
Psychological and behavioral aspects of tourists in VT: Explore the unique perceptions and behaviors of tourists engaged in VT compared to conventional tourists. Investigate the motivations, goals, and intentions of tourists participating in VT, considering different demographic groups and their varying perspectives.
VT for sustainable development: Examine how VT initiatives support sustainable tourism development by assisting local communities and mitigating negative environmental and social impacts. Explore the role of VT in green tourism, environmental tourism, eco-tourism, and rural tourism, and analyze tourists' volunteer behavior in these contexts.
Youth engagement and VT: Study the perceptions and behaviors of younger generations, particularly Generation Z, regarding VT. Investigate how international VT programs contribute to youth development, global citizenship, and cross-cultural understanding. Explore ways to promote youth engagement in VT through tourism education initiatives.
These research directions aim to deepen understanding, address challenges, and harness the potential of VT, both globally and within the Vietnamese context. By exploring these topics, researchers can contribute to the sustainable development of VT while fostering positive impacts on communities and society.

5. CONCLUSION

The systematic review and bibliometric analysis of 607 documents related to VT on the Scopus database indicate a growing interest in research on VT. The increasing number of publications, journals, citations, co-citations, and citation indices suggests that discussions surrounding VT are gaining momentum worldwide. Research topics within VT span socio-economic issues, global concerns, psychological and behavioral aspects of tourists, sustainable development, and global citizenship.

Based on these findings, future research directions in VT should expand to include tourists' perceptions and behaviors in various related types of tourism. These may encompass ecotourism, environmental tourism, and green tourism, broadening the scope beyond conventional volunteer activities combined with tourism.
However, the study acknowledges certain limitations. It cannot delve into specific research results or propose concrete research models. Moving forward, addressing these limitations could involve conducting in-depth analyses of specific aspects of VT and developing robust research frameworks to guide future inquiries.

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In summary, the study sheds light on the evolving landscape of VT research and underscores the need for comprehensive investigations into tourists' perceptions and behaviors within broader tourism contexts. It calls for further refinement of research methodologies and the development of specific research models to advance our understanding of VT dynamics.

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