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From “Staged” to “Personalized” Experience, Understanding the Evolution of the Customer Experience in Tourism

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ABSTRACT

The customer experience in tourism has become increasingly advanced and complex, requiring a comprehensive review of its evolution and emerging trends. This study aims to provide a quantitative review of existing research, highlighting the evolution and paradigm shifts over time. To achieve this, bibliometric and visualization techniques were employed to analyze 1,918 papers published between 1982 and 2023 using VOSviewer. The analysis highlights highly cited authors, countries, institutions, and key articles, alongside collaboration patterns identified through co-authorship analysis. Additionally, keyword co-occurrence analysis reveals three distinct periods in the evolution of customer experience. Initially centered on satisfaction and service quality, customer experience has now evolved into an independent construct. The adoption of service-dominant logic has facilitated value co-creation, further enhanced by technological advancements that enable personalized experiences. The findings offer valuable insights for scholars and practitioners, guiding future research and introducing modern approaches for delivering value to customers within the tourism industry.

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in attention to customer experience and its relationship to a firm's success (De Keyser et al., 2020; Shoukat & Ramkissoon, 2022). In highly competitive markets, customer experience is a critical differentiator (Kandampully et al., 2023; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015). Tourism, as a service industry or a composite of various service sectors (Gao et al., 2022; Otto & Ritchie, 1996), primarily offers an experiential product (Quan & Wang, 2004). Therefore, it is essential for tourism enterprises to prioritize the creation of exceptional customer experiences (Hosany et al., 2022; Özgen & Biçakcioğlu-Peynirci, 2020). This focus is crucial not only for increasing the likelihood of revisits but also for generating positive recommendations and fostering customer loyalty (Marzouk et al., 2019). As a result, the pursuit of outstanding customer experiences has become a top strategic priority for tourism and hospitality firms (Bonfanti et al., 2023; Hwang & Seo, 2016).

The growing focus on customer experience has led to a significant increase in scholarly research, inspiring numerous authors to explore this domain. Critical reviews play a pivotal role in academia, offering essential insights and understanding (Linnenluecke et al., 2020; Tranfield et al., 2003). These reviews not only strengthen ongoing discourse by synthesizing existing findings but also bridge distinct streams of literature (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). By providing a comprehensive overview of prior research, review articles identify gaps in the knowledge base, guiding future research directions. Thus, reviews are fundamental for advancing understanding within the field of customer experience and related areas. Qualitative review studies, in particular, are crucial for synthesizing prior research, identifying knowledge gaps, and facilitating future inquiries into the complex landscape of customer experience (Haddaway et al., 2023; Kraus et al., 2023).

In the context of tourism experience, several reviews have been conducted, each focusing on different aspects of customer experience and offering valuable insights. For example, Adhikari and Bhattacharya (2016) delineated the theoretical foundations of customer experience marketing, presenting a conceptual framework that explores the multifaceted dimensions of customer experience within tourism. Packer and Ballantyne (2016) examined the concept of visitor experience, conducting a comprehensive literature analysis to clarify its definition and developing a multidimensional model that encapsulates its key elements. Additionally, Godovykh and Tasci (2020) conducted a detailed analysis of empirical and conceptual literature on the concept of experience in tourism. Their review provided a comprehensive definition of "experience" and proposed an experiential model comprising four primary components: emotional, cognitive, sensorial, and conative aspects.

Despite recent efforts to clarify the definition and dimensions of customer experience, its evolution within tourism remains unclear. The customer experience has undergone profound changes, particularly within the tourism sector, where experience is paramount. Technological advancements have reshaped customer preferences, leading to increased customer empowerment, which necessitates an updated perspective on how businesses meet these evolving needs. The way companies serve customers and compete has also shifted, with the overall customer experience becoming crucial for connecting all actors involved and ensuring survival in the market. Understanding these developments and the current perspective on customer experience is invaluable for practitioners aiming to design and deliver memorable experiences for tourists. Achieving this requires a comprehensive understanding of the holistic tourist experience, including the significance of the customer journey, touchpoints, and the vital contributions of all stakeholders in creating memorable experiences. Additionally, scholars can gain comprehensive insights into this field, enabling them to identify future research trends and focus on areas of high relevance, which is a key contribution of this study. Furthermore, understanding the social structures within this domain can help uncover the origins of various schools of thought, such as the concept of engagement rooted in service-dominant logic. Such studies serve as guides, illuminating the evolution of a scientific field and assisting both practitioners and scholars in their respective areas.

While qualitative studies are valuable for advancing academic fields, quantitative research provides a broader perspective that qualitative methods alone may not capture. Qualitative research often focuses on specific aspects and may be subject to researcher bias. In this context, bibliometric analysis serves as a statistical method for evaluating academic publications, offering quantitative insights into the literature (Benckendorff & Zehrer, 2013; Kholidah et al., 2022). This approach is

particularly useful for tracking the development of a field by analyzing intellectual, social, and conceptual structures. According to Zupic and Čater (2015), bibliometric methods complement traditional literature reviews by providing a more objective assessment of scientific research, whereas qualitative reviews tend to be more subjective. By examining citation data and researcher collaboration networks, bibliometric techniques can uncover patterns and trends that may not be as evident through qualitative analysis alone. This feature is especially valuable in fields with complex and interconnected topics, where achieving a comprehensive overview can be challenging (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

Despite the value of bibliometric analysis, there is a gap in the literature concerning a thorough examination of the evolution of customer experience within the tourism field. While some bibliometric studies address customer experience or tourism, they differ in scope. For example, Kumar et al. (2023) analyzed customer experience in general; Goyal et al. (2022) focused on online tourism experiences; Arici et al. (2022) examined the service industry; Dahanayake, et al. (2023) investigated memorable tourism experiences in wellness tourism; and Rehman et al. (2022) used distinct analytical methods and keywords to examine customer experience, resulting in a different scope without detailing the field's evolution.

Therefore, the proposed study aims to conduct a bibliometric analysis to thoroughly explore the evolution of this field. The study is designed to achieve three key objectives: (1) to trace the evolution of customer experience in tourism; (2) to assess current collaboration among nations and institutions on this topic; and (3) to outline the conceptual framework and emerging trends while identifying potential avenues for future research through keyword analysis. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide an updated perspective on the field of customer experience in tourism, contributing to its ongoing development.

Literature review

Overview of Customer experience in tourism

The concept of experience has been explored from various perspectives, resulting in a multifaceted nature that encompasses different titles and interpretations (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Packer & Ballantyne, 2016). The diversity of views on the nature of experience and the lack of consensus on its constituent elements create ambiguity and hinder a unified understanding, which in turn challenges the generalizability of findings and complicates theory development (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). In tourism, numerous studies have been conducted under titles such as "customer experience in tourism" (e.g., Adhikari & Bhattacharya, 2016; Hwang & Seo, 2016; Kandampully et al., 2018), "service experience" (e.g., Otto & Ritchie, 1996), or "tourist experience" (e.g., Quan & Wang, 2004; Uriely, 2005). Despite the differences in these titles, they all trace their origins to seminal works, particularly in experiential marketing (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) and the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), which laid the foundations for the concept and introduced various sub-concepts.

The concept of experience has been defined in multiple ways, reflecting different perspectives. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) define experience as a flow of fantasies, fun, and feelings, emphasizing the hedonic and emotional aspects of consumption, in contrast to the rational focus that was dominant at the time (Alexander & Kent, 2022). Pine and Gilmore (1999) described experience as an internal response resulting from emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual engagement. They argue that the ultimate business product is an experience created through memorable events, viewing tourist experience as a staged offering (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Similarly, Shaw and Ivens (2002), focusing on emotional phenomena, contend that experience is an evoked emotion. Larsen (2007) interprets experiences as psychological phenomena, emphasizing their memorability and capacity to be stored in long-term memory. In contrast to the emotional view, Carbone and Haeckel (1994) highlight the cognitive nature of experience, defining it as customer perception and arguing that people develop a "multidimensional impression" in response to encounters with services or products. Scholars also debate how experiences are created. Meyer and Schwager (2007) emphasize the subjective nature of experience, viewing it as an internal response to any interaction with a firm. Brakus and Smith (2009) underscore the role of stimuli surrounding services or products in eliciting a response.

Building on Service-Dominant (SD) logic, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) focus on the role of customers in experience creation, suggesting that experience results from cooperation between customers and firms. Carù and Cova (2015) further advocate for co-creation involving all stakeholders in forming the experience. To integrate these perspectives, some scholars, such as Becker and Jaakkola (2020), have sought consensus by defining experience as "an individual's immediate or ongoing, subjective, and personal response to an activity, setting, or event outside of their usual environment" (p. 133) and as "non-deliberate, spontaneous responses and reactions to particular stimuli" (p. 9). In the context of tourism, Packer and Ballantyne (2016) elucidate the definition of visitor experiences through four dimensions: 1) personal, internal, and subjective; 2) evoked in response to external stimuli; 3) constrained by time and space; and 4) significant yet distinct to tourists. Given the various perspectives on customer or tourist experience, it is imperative to examine the literature on customer experience in tourism to provide scholars and practitioners with a comprehensive understanding of its evolution and the diverse viewpoints regarding experience in the tourism context.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, utilizing bibliometric analysis—a quantitative method recognized for its effectiveness in evaluating the research landscape of a specific field (Ayavoo, et al. 2026). The visualization and presentation of various structural aspects of a research topic or field significantly contribute to this analytical process (Liu et al., 2023).

Data Collection

Before data collection began, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure the data's relevance and quality. The Web of Science database, including all its subsets, was selected for data retrieval because of its reliability and recognized standard in bibliometric research (Meho & Yang, 2007; Pahrudin et al., 2022). An extensive literature review and analysis of existing qualitative reviews were conducted to identify appropriate keywords for studying customer experience in tourism. To achieve a comprehensive and holistic examination, prevalent keywords with relevant meanings in the literature were chosen. Following preliminary searches, the definitive search began in October, coinciding with the empirical study on customer experience in tourism.

The selected keywords included "Customer experience" AND "Tourism," "Tourist experience" OR "Traveler experience," "Service experience" AND "Tourism," and "Visitor experience." These keywords were used to locate relevant papers within titles, abstracts, and keywords, resulting in a substantial number of publications. To ensure the process's reliability and data quality, a systematic framework and specific filters were applied. Only journal articles and review papers were included to maintain quality, as they are subject to rigorous peer review (e.g., Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004). To uphold an international scope, only English-language papers were considered, while non-English publications were excluded. Additionally, a temporal filter was applied, setting 1982 as the starting point to mark the introduction of key theories, and 2022 as the endpoint to ensure the study's relevance (see Table 1). For a visual overview of the research design employed in this study, refer to Figure 1.

Table 1. Criteria for inclusion and Exclusion in the Study

| parameter | Exclusion | Inclusion |
|------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Language | Non English | English |
| Time span | Before 1982 | Since 1982 till October 30th |
| Type of studies | All, except article, review | Article and review |

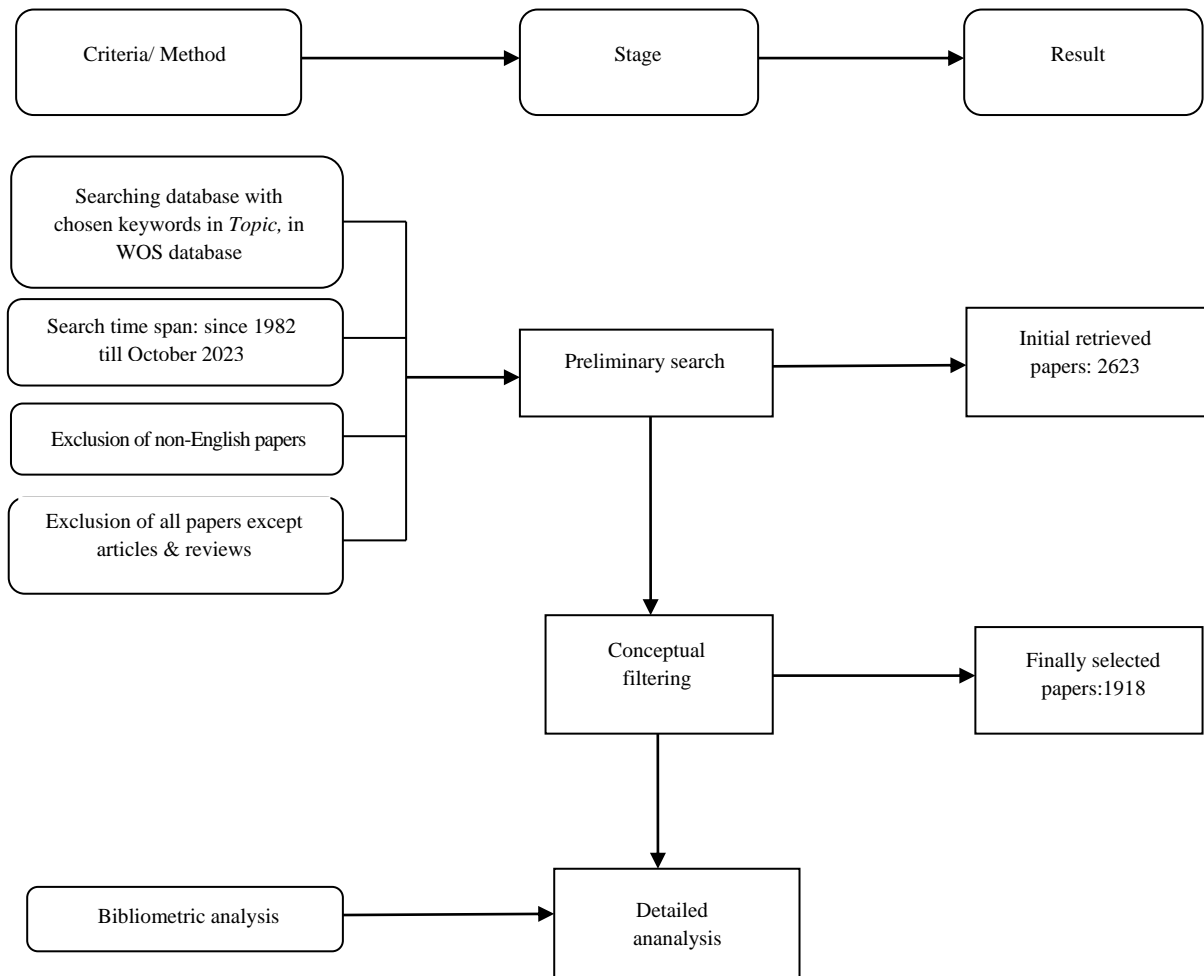


Fig. 1. Design of This Study (Source: Adapted from Yu et al., 2019)

Data Analysis

Data were subsequently retrieved and saved as a CSV file, capturing all relevant information, including titles, abstracts, organizational affiliations, sources, citations, references, summaries, and more. The dataset was then analyzed using VOSviewer software, a tool well-suited for visualizing bibliometric data and widely used in research (Van Eck et al., 2014). VOSviewer enables graphical visualization of networks, where the size of nodes and the connections between them represent the strength of relationships (Donthu et al., 2021). For this analysis, all thresholds were set to the software's default values, with no modifications applied except for the use of a thesaurus file. The findings are presented in two parts: first, descriptive or performance analyses offer quantitative insights into the development of publications over time, identifying highly cited authors, influential journals, participating countries, and collaborating institutions. Second, mapping or visualization analyses depict the field of study in its entirety, providing a comprehensive overview. Two visualization methods were employed: (1) keyword co-occurrence analysis, which reveals the conceptual structure and foundational themes of the specialized field, identifying ongoing trends and potential areas for future research (Bajaj et al., 2022; Koseoglu et al., 2022); and (2) co-authorship analysis, which illustrates collaborative efforts among authors, institutions, countries, and universities, clarifying social structures and partnerships within the field (Koseoglu et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2022). These analytical approaches have been applied in numerous studies and are regarded as both valid and valuable tools (e.g., Bajaj et al., 2022; Benckendorff & Zehrer, 2013; Ciasullo et al., 2022; Koseoglu et al., 2016). To prevent redundancy in the co-occurrence analysis, a thesaurus file was used to consolidate similar terms (Gutiérrez-Salcedo et al., 2018). For instance, terms such as "Experience," "Experiences," "Tourists experience," and "Tourist experience" were merged to eliminate duplication.

Result

Distribution of Published Papers

In the first phase of the findings, which focuses on descriptive or performance analysis, a total of 1,918 papers were selected, generating 28,283 citations, as illustrated in Figure 2. This figure demonstrates the temporal growth in publications related to customer experience in tourism. The publication trend is divided into three phases. Prior to 2004, there was minimal interest in this topic. From 2004 onwards, a gradual increase in publications is observed, continuing until 2018 with some fluctuations. However, after 2019, there is a dramatic rise followed by steady growth, reaching its peak in 2021 with 255 papers published. Despite the growing interest in customer experience in tourism research, Leong et al. (2020) identified two key factors contributing to the sharp increase in tourism-related publications: first, a quantitative rise in the number of authors, and second, the development of technology and the internet, which facilitated global collaboration among scholars. Unfortunately, this upward trend did not persist beyond 2021, as the number of publications has declined since then, likely due to the impact of COVID-19 on tourism. Figure 2 illustrates the quantitative trend of publications related to customer experience in tourism.

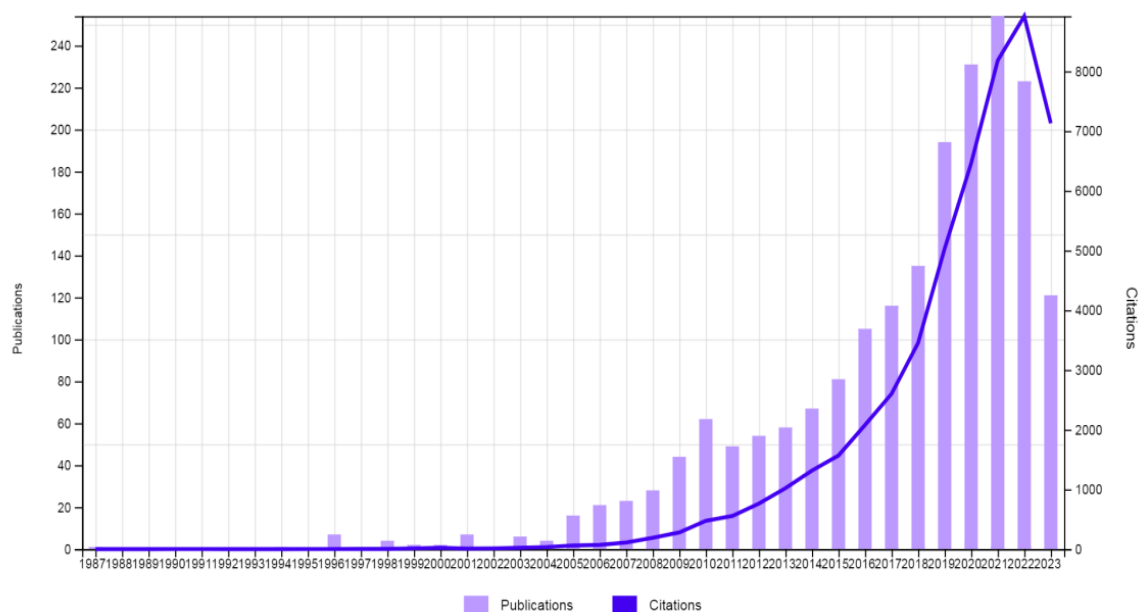


Fig 2. Quantitative Trend of Publications of Customer Experience in Tourism

Highly Cited Articles

Table 2 illustrates top 15 highly cited articles in customer experience in tourism. Based on our findings, the highly cited article is “Experience Quality, Perceived Value, Satisfaction and Behavioral Intentions for Heritage Tourists” which is written by Chen and Chen in 2010, and published in *Tourism Management* with 1298 citations, 99.84 per year.

Highly Cited Authors

Table 3 presents the prominent scholars based on citations and the calculation of link strength. According to this analysis, the top five authors in customer experience in tourism are Chen with 1,385 citations across 3 papers, F. Chen with 1,298 citations (1 paper), Ritchie with 1,125 citations (4 papers), Fesenmaier with 880 citations (3 papers), and finally, Wang and Quan with 865 citations across 2 papers. An interesting point to note is the high citations with relatively few articles, indicating the influence of these articles in understanding tourist experience (e.g., Wang).

Table 2. Highly Cited Papers Based on Citation Counts

| Rank | Author | Paper | Source | Total Citation | Average per year |
|------|--------------------------|---|---|----------------|------------------|
| 1 | Chen & Chen (2010) | Experience quality, perceived value, satisfaction and behavioral intentions for heritage tourists | Tourism Management | 1298 | 99.84 |
| 2 | Quan & Wang (2004) | Towards a structural model of the tourist experience: An illustration from food experiences in Tourism | Tourism Management | 865 | 42.52 |
| 3 | Gallarza & Saura (2006) | Value dimensions, perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty: An investigation of university students' travel behavior | Tourism Management | 756 | 44.47 |
| 4 | Sims (2009) | Food, place and authenticity: Local food and the sustainable Tourism experience | Journal of Sustainable Tourism | 694 | 49.57 |
| 5 | Otto & Ritchie (1996) | The service experience in tourism | Tourism Management | 676 | 24.14 |
| 6 | Uriely (2005) | The tourist experience- Conceptual developments | Annals of Tourism Research | 518 | 28.77 |
| 7 | Richards & Wilson (2006) | Developing creativity in tourist experiences: A solution to the serial reproduction of culture? | Tourism Management | 490 | 28.82 |
| 8 | Hosany & Witham (2010) | Dimensions of cruisers' experiences, satisfaction, and intention to recommend | Journal of Travel Research | 442 | 31.57 |
| 9 | Kim et al. (2012) | Development of a scale to measure memorable Tourism experiences | Journal of Travel Research | 392 | 35.63 |
| 10 | Mossberg (2007) | A marketing approach to the tourist experience | Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality And Tourism | 379 | 23.68 |
| 11 | Flavián et al. (2019) | The impact of virtual, augmented and mixed reality technologies on the customer experience | Journal of Business Research | 375 | 93.75 |
| 12 | Bornhorst et al. (2010) | Determinants of tourism success for DMOs & destinations: An empirical examination of stakeholders' perspectives | Tourism Management | 373 | 28.69 |
| 13 | Tussyadiah et al. (2009) | Mediating tourist experiences: Access to places via shared videos | Annals of Tourism Research | 367 | 26.21 |
| 14 | Larsen (2007) | Aspects of a psychology of the tourist experience | Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality And Tourism | 342 | 21.37 |
| 15 | Prayag et al. (2013) | The role of tourists' emotional experiences and satisfaction in understanding behavioral intentions | Journal of Destination Marketing And Management | 307 | 30.7 |

Table 3. Highly Cited Authors

| Authors | Number of articles | citations | Total link strength |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Chen, ching-fu | 3 | 1385 | 305 |
| Chen, fu-shian | 1 | 1298 | 275 |
| Ritchie, j. R. Brent | 4 | 1125 | 256 |
| Fesenmaier, daniel r. | 3 | 880 | 155 |
| Wang, n | 1 | 865 | 230 |
| Quan, s | 1 | 865 | 230 |
| Buhalis, dimitrios | 5 | 789 | 116 |
| Saura, ig | 1 | 756 | 59 |
| Gallarza, mg | 1 | 756 | 59 |
| Hosany, sameer | 2 | 749 | 310 |
| Wang, dan | 5 | 742 | 140 |
| Sims, rebecca | 1 | 694 | 30 |
| Ritchie, jrb | 1 | 676 | 268 |
| Otto, je | 1 | 676 | 268 |
| Richards, greg | 5 | 648 | 165 |

Highly Cited Journals

Among journals publishing papers on customer experience in tourism, Tourism Management leads as the most highly cited journal, with 8,435 citations across 73 papers. Following closely is Annals of Tourism Research, with 4,883 citations (54 papers), and Journal of Travel Research, with 2,494 citations (34 papers). The Journal of Destination Marketing and Management, with 2,389 citations (38 papers), and the Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing, with 1,926 citations (36 papers), round out the top five highly cited journals. Table 4 presents detailed information on the top ten journals in terms of citations. Total Link Strength calculates the overall strength of the links of one item with other items (Leong, et al., 2020).

Table 4. Highly Cited Journals

| Journal | Number of articles | Citations | Total link strength |
|--|--------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Tourism Management | 73 | 8435 | 961 |
| Annals of Tourism Research | 54 | 4883 | 537 |
| Journal of Travel Research | 34 | 2494 | 363 |
| Journal of Destination Marketing & Management | 38 | 2389 | 378 |
| Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing | 36 | 1926 | 306 |
| Current Issues in Tourism | 66 | 1575 | 407 |
| Journal of Sustainable Tourism | 26 | 1527 | 102 |
| International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management | 33 | 1450 | 190 |
| Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism | 14 | 1212 | 283 |
| International Journal of Hospitality Management | 22 | 1183 | 193 |
| Tourism Management Perspectives | 41 | 1183 | 308 |
| International Journal of Tourism Research | 34 | 1156 | 174 |
| Journal of Heritage Tourism | 48 | 850 | 199 |
| Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management | 18 | 750 | 163 |
| Journal of Business Research | 13 | 702 | 62 |

Highly Cited Institutions and Universities

In terms of the number of articles, Hong Kong Polytechnic University is ranked first with 2,653 citations across 60 articles, followed by Bournemouth University in the second rank, with 2,653 citations and 33 papers. National Cheng Kung University, with 1,531 citations (4 articles), Nanhua University, with 1,298 citations (1 article), and finally, the University of Calgary, with 6 papers, are the top 5 institutions in customer experience in tourism, as presented in Table 5. An interesting observation is the active role of Chinese universities in contributing to the field of customer experience in tourism.

Table 5. Highly Cited Institutions and Universities

| Universities | Number of articles | Citations | Total Link strength |
|---|--------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Hong kong polytech university | 60 | 2653 | 725 |
| Bournemouth university | 33 | 1817 | 335 |
| National cheng kung university | 4 | 1531 | 323 |
| Nanhua university | 1 | 1298 | 264 |
| University of calgary | 6 | 1146 | 245 |
| Ben gurion university of negev | 15 | 1118 | 345 |
| Manchester metropolitan university | 20 | 1071 | 230 |
| University of valencia | 15 | 999 | 262 |
| University of queensland | 24 | 995 | 271 |
| University of central florida | 25 | 975 | 433 |
| University of illinois | 7 | 920 | 255 |
| Griffith university | 29 | 906 | 250 |
| James cook university | 28 | 834 | 242 |
| Colorado state university | 18 | 778 | 235 |
| Estudios - Facultad de Economía y Empresa | 1 | 756 | 72 |

Highly Cited Countries

Among published papers, the United States ranked first, with 12,045 citations across 384 papers, followed by the United Kingdom, with 7,881 citations (221 papers), Australia, with 6,722 citations

(240 papers), China, with 6,493 citations (280 papers), and Spain, with 3,606 citations (138 papers), as the top five countries in terms of citations. Table 6 presents the top 10 leading countries regarding the number of publications.

Table 6. Highly Cited Countries

| Country | Number of documents | Citation | Total link strength |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|
| USA | 384 | 12045 | 2196 |
| England | 221 | 7881 | 1281 |
| Australia | 240 | 6722 | 1213 |
| Peoples republic of China | 280 | 6493 | 1646 |
| Spain | 138 | 3606 | 901 |
| Taiwan | 76 | 3256 | 751 |
| Canada | 85 | 3186 | 529 |
| New Zealand | 72 | 2872 | 574 |
| Israel | 32 | 1574 | 321 |
| Portugal | 75 | 1552 | 533 |
| South Korea | 50 | 1512 | 452 |
| Norway | 31 | 1500 | 476 |
| Italy | 82 | 1385 | 464 |
| Netherlands | 52 | 1328 | 322 |
| France | 45 | 1209 | 326 |

Scholarly Co-Authorship Analysis

In the mapping analysis, co-authorship analysis reveals the relationships among authors, institutions, or countries (Jiang et al., 2019). Specifically, it illustrates the social structure of the field and the connections that emerge when authors collaborate on papers, thereby highlighting the social bonds among them (Zupic & Čater, 2015). As shown in Figure 3, with a threshold of five collaborations, 57 countries met the criteria, resulting in the identification of 56 nodes and 351 links. Each node represents a country, while the links denote the relationships between these countries. The analysis reveals that the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia are the top three nodes, collectively accounting for 113 links. Furthermore, the United States has the strongest connection, with 45 links.

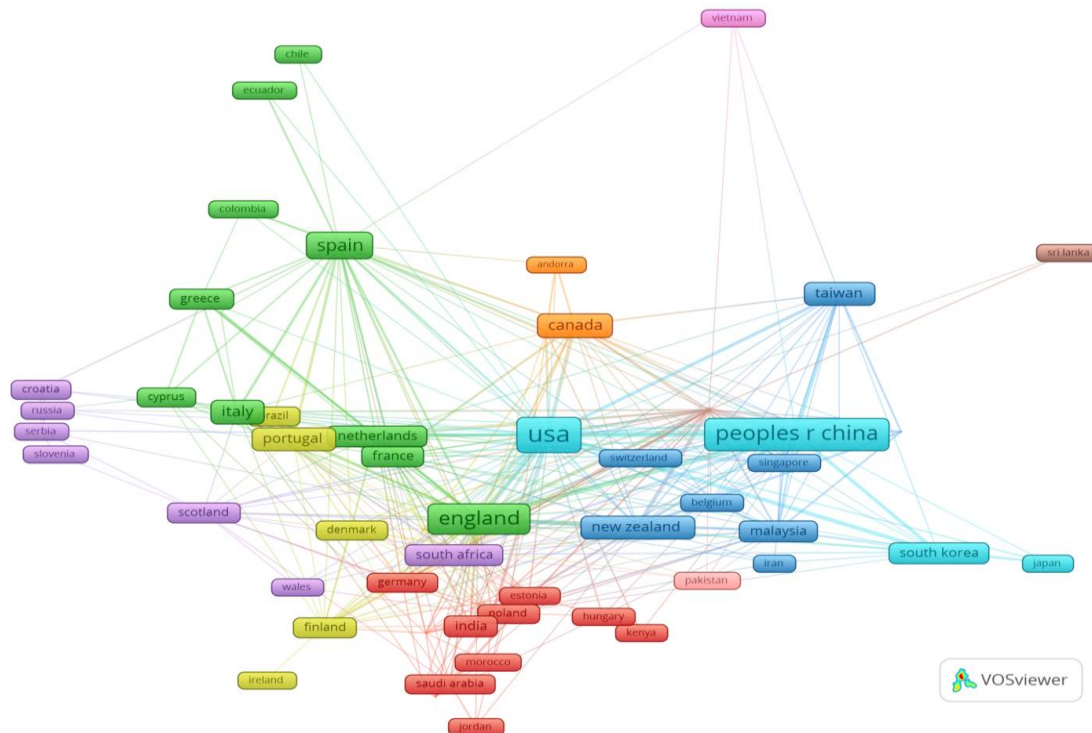


Fig. 3. Co-Authorship Analysis Among Countries

Experience as "Staged": Equivalent to Satisfaction and Service Quality

The initial perspective on customer experience was largely influenced by the concept of "staged" experiences, as proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1992). Traditionally, these staged experiences were designed to satisfy customer needs, with consumers perceived as passive recipients rather than active participants in value creation (Volo, 2009). For instance, during the 1970s and 1980s, the "gaze paradigm" in visitor experiences framed tourists as mere observers, with minimal engagement in the process (Campos et al., 2018). Within this framework, experiences were pre-planned, focusing primarily on the quality of the experience, with tourists positioned as passive recipients who might perceive the experience as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. The primary objective was to deliver satisfactory services or products, without necessarily involving customers in the value creation process (Volo, 2009). As a result, measuring service quality and customer satisfaction became the main criteria for understanding the experiences of tourists or customers in various tourism sectors. Scholars have extensively investigated factors influencing satisfaction, whether in a destination (e.g., Eusébio & Vieira, 2013) or in a restaurant setting (e.g., Kala, 2020). In line with this, the SERVQUAL framework, introduced by Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988), became a widely used tool for assessing service quality. Research on "service encounters" often depicted these interactions as static and confined to the trip and purchase phases (Campos et al., 2018). Consequently, marketing managers prioritized service design as a key task to enhance service quality and customer satisfaction (Andreassen et al., 2016). However, this approach had significant limitations. It conceptualized experience as something solely provided by the service provider, neglecting the role of other contributors in the creation of value and experience. Over time, it became evident that while this view was essential for achieving tourist satisfaction, it was insufficient for fostering loyalty or encouraging repeat visits. Competitors could offer experiences of higher quality, rendering satisfaction alone inadequate for long-term success.

To foster repeat visits, tourism firms needed to create memorable or extraordinary experiences, which could not be achieved solely through satisfaction or service quality measurements. The recognition of multiple actors contributing to the creation of an experience, and the realization that experiences are not limited to the during-trip stage, highlighted the importance of considering the entire customer journey. For instance, pre-trip emotions or destination images shaped by social media or other sources can significantly influence the tourist experience during travel and even post-trip experiences, leading to destination attachment (Cao et al., 2023). Similarly, the role of all stakeholders, such as peer tourists, is crucial in shaping the experience for tourists (Pang et al., 2024). Despite this shift in perspective, the traditional approach is still employed by many scholars to measure satisfaction or service quality. Ultimately, these evolving views have led to the advent of service-dominant logic, giving rise to new concepts such as value co-creation and customer engagement.

Experience as a Co-created Phenomenon: The Emergence of SD Logic

The introduction of service-dominant (SD) logic by Vargo and Lusch (2004, 2008) marked a transformative shift in service literature, including tourism (Carvalho & Alves, 2023). SD logic challenges the traditional goods-dominant logic by positing that service, rather than goods, is the fundamental basis of all exchanges. According to this perspective, value is not simply delivered by a provider, but is co-created through interactions between firms and customers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). This paradigm shift significantly influenced the tourism industry, transitioning the focus from "customizing" to "personalizing" experiences, where tourists actively engage in shaping their own experiences. It implies that tourists are no longer passive recipients of pre-planned experiences but are active participants in the creation of their own value. Their involvement in co-creating experiences not only enhances the richness of their experience but also positively impacts post-purchase behaviors such as revisit intentions, word-of-mouth recommendations, and brand loyalty (Shoukat & Ramkissoon, 2022; Uslu & Tosun, 2024). This shift contrasts sharply with earlier notions that experiences should be entirely staged and controlled by service providers, such as the traditionally curated experiences offered at museums (Elvekrok & Gulbrandsøy, 2022).

While the staged experience model remains relevant, today's customers are increasingly regarded as co-producers, transitioning from passive recipients to active narrators and interpreters of their own

experiences (Doyle & Kelliher, 2023). Co-creation in tourism extends across all phases of the travel experience—pre-travel, during travel, and post-travel—allowing customers to influence the design, production, and consumption of their experiences (Eraqi, 2011). For instance, tourists may add value in the post-trip stage by sharing their experiences or photos on social media, which helps other tourists gather information about destinations, travel agencies, and attractions, thereby contributing to the overall value creation process (Lin & Rasoolimanesh, 2024). Similarly, tourists can engage in "tourist citizenship behavior" during their trips by assisting fellow travelers, further enriching the collective experience (Torres-Moraga et al., 2021).

The rise of co-creation is deeply rooted in technological advancements that empower customers and enable firms to recognize them as co-producers of value (Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019). This shift has transformed the traditional dyadic service encounter into a dynamic network of interactions, often referred to as "touchpoints" (Sheth et al., 2023). These touchpoints involve all stakeholders across the entire customer journey, from pre-trip to on-trip to post-trip stages, offering a more holistic understanding of tourist experiences. In sum, the focus from products has shifted into experience and people (De Keyser et al., 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). For instance if we consider visiting a heritage site as a touchpoint, various actors are involved in value creation, such as staff, tour guide, other tourists. In the aftermath of this evolution, new forms of tourism have emerged. Creative tourism, for example, is defined as "tourism which offers tourists the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences characteristic of the destination" (Richards & Raymond, 2000, p. 18). The creative tourist is an interactive traveler who seeks to actively shape their own experience rather than passively observe. This shift has led to the growth of event tourism, where the tourist's role in creating tourism products and attractions is paramount, underscoring the importance for marketers and practitioners to consider tourists as active co-creators in the design and enrichment of tourism experiences (Korez-Vide, 2013). Recent development of event tourism throughout the world is the evidence of this mentality, indicating marketers and practitioners, the significance of considering tourists role in the creation of tourism products and attractions or in enriching the existing ones.

Experience as a “Personalized” Phenomenon: Technology as a Game Changer

In the current competitive landscape, the focus has shifted to providing personalized, co-created experiences tailored to individual customers (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004b; Brakus et al., 2009). As highlighted earlier, the development of technology—particularly social media, big data, and artificial intelligence—has been a major facilitator of this co-creation process. These advancements enable customers to consume tourism services in a more interactive and personalized manner (Huang et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2019). Modern technology-driven customers now expect personalized experiences at every point of interaction (He & Zhang, 2023; Kandampully et al., 2018). For example, personalized tourism recommendation systems provide tourists with tailored services or products, enhancing the overall travel experience (Yang et al., 2024).

This transformation empowers tourists to co-create their experiences through self-service technologies, contributing ideas, preferences, and creativity that result in unique and memorable encounters (Buhalis et al., 2023). Furthermore, stakeholders—particularly destinations and tourism firms—can gather valuable insights into the co-creation process, allowing them to design future customer experiences based on these preferences (Gahler et al., 2023). The evolution of service design in the context of tourism reflects this shift, moving from the "design of service" to "design for service," (Vink et al., 2020) mirroring the transition from staged to personalized experiences.

At the intersection of co-creation and technology lies the sharing economy, characterized as a “collaborative creation and consumption” of resources, built on the digital economy (Chen & Wang, 2019). Peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation is a prime example of this phenomenon, demonstrating significant growth in tourism and hospitality (Zhang et al., 2021). P2P accommodation not only reduces travel costs but also fosters social interactions, creating meaningful touchpoints for travelers (Cheng, 2016).

Interactive and communicative tools, powered by the internet and technology, facilitate co-creational behaviors, including sharing travel stories and experiences (Gretzel et al., 2005). Tourists often share their experiences on social media platforms, influencing potential customers and contributing to the co-

creation of value (Tavakoli & Wijesinghe, 2019). User-generated content (UGC) has become a reliable source of information for other tourists, especially during the decision-making stage, such as selecting a destination ((Choo 2026), 2026). Storytelling through UGC enables tourists to communicate their complex experiences, enhancing the collective understanding of tourism (Gretzel et al., 2006). Additionally, big data derived from UGC and online reviews assists in understanding tourist behavior, mobility patterns, destination image, reputation, and satisfaction (Anagnostopoulou et al., 2020; Marine-Roig & Clavé, 2015). Big data represents a new methodological approach that offers advantages over traditional methods, especially in analyzing tourist experiences through techniques such as sentiment analysis or opinion mining. For instance, deep learning and machine learning can be employed to analyze tourist reviews, providing insights into customer sentiments and preferences (Mehraliyev, Kirilenko et al., 2020; Calderón-Fajardo et al., 2024).

Smart tourism, a concept deeply rooted in technological advancements, represents a significant leap towards sustainability in the tourism industry (Ionescu & Sârbu, 2024). This concept redefines traditional tourism roles through the integration of smart technologies. For example, smart tourism systems offer ubiquitous tour information services, enhancing the overall travel experience (Mehraliyev, Kirilenko et al., 2020). The rapid development of artificial intelligence has further accelerated the personalization of tourism experiences. Technologies, such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), offer unprecedented opportunities for immersive experiences, transforming how travelers engage with tourism attractions (Buhalis et al., 2019). VR enhances tourist interaction with destinations, leading to higher satisfaction and facilitating online shopping for tourism services (Jung et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2015; Tussyadiah et al., 2018). AR, through location-based applications, provides real-time information about unfamiliar places within a destination (Han et al., 2013). For example, AR can be used to enhance visitor learning experiences at heritage sites, adding a layer of information to the physical environment (Tom Dieck et al., 2018). While AR enhances the existing environment by adding information, VR creates immersive simulations, offering travelers real world, virtual experiences (Guerra et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2019). These technologies, ranging from panoramic content to advanced VR headsets, are transforming the tourism landscape (de Lurdes Calisto & Sarkar, 2024). Overall, the goal of smart tourism is threefold: understanding tourist needs, enhancing on-site experiences through tailored services, and fostering communication among tourists to share travel experiences (Gretzel et al., 2015). As technology continues to evolve, it will further personalize and enhance the tourism experience, driving the industry towards more dynamic, interactive, and sustainable models.

Conclusion and Future Research Agenda

This paper aims to delineate customer experience in tourism as a crucial research domain. The findings from the descriptive or performance analysis reveal that the number of articles reached a peak in 2021, with 255 publications. The most highly cited article in this field is conducted by Chen and Chen (2010), titled "Experience Quality, Perceived Value, Satisfaction, and Behavioral Intentions for Heritage Tourists," published in *Tourism Management*. Notably, Chen Ching-Fu is the most cited author, with 1,385 citations; *Tourism Management* is the most cited journal, with 8,435 citations; Hong Kong Polytechnic University leads with 2,653 citations, and the United States has the highest citation count, with 12,045 citations. The mapping analysis also illustrates that the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have the most collaborations with other countries. Additionally, the keyword co-occurrence analysis reveals that the most frequent terms are "tourist experience" (315 occurrences), "visitor experience" (186), and "tourism" (135).

The temporal analysis clarified the conceptual structure and thematic map, highlighting three key stages in the field: 1. "Experience as Staged: Equivalent to Satisfaction and Service Quality" 2. "Experience as a Co-created Phenomenon: The Emergence of Service-Dominant (SD) Logic" 3. "Experience as a "Personalized" Phenomenon: Technology as a Game Changer." The first stage represents the early conceptualization of experience, which was primarily created by service providers without considering the role of tourists in value creation. The second stage recognized the active role of the consumer, adopting a consumer-centric view. The third stage also marked the emergence of new technologies that enhance the experience.

The contributions of this study will assist researchers in the field of customer experience in tourism not only gain a comprehensive overview but also identify and navigate preferred areas of study, particularly emerging topics such as the sharing economy and smart tourism. Furthermore, businesses can benefit from up-to-date information about recent advancements in customer experience in tourism, which has become a crucial tool in market competition. Understanding new trends, such as immersive and personalized experiences, may allow businesses to apply these modern marketing strategies within their own operations.

Bibliometric analysis is needed for each theme and sub-theme to further explore and expand upon each area of this field. Additionally, more studies are required for each type of tourism, offering deeper insights and context-specific details. While bibliometric reviews provide a broad overview of the field, they cannot address specific gaps within individual themes. Therefore, more reviews, particularly qualitative ones, are essential to highlight the exact gaps in the literature and guide scholars' attention to the areas that require further exploration.

However, several areas require further attention from researchers. Firstly, while concepts such as the customer journey and touchpoints are essential, the understanding of tourists' experiences through these frameworks remains insufficient within the tourism context, particularly in the pre-trip stage. Adopting a proactive approach in this area could help practitioners better identify the dynamic nature of tourists' experiences and their actual needs. Moreover, this perspective should be extended across various types of tourism—such as cultural heritage, health, smart, religious, and sports tourism—that have been largely overlooked in previous studies. Notably, investigations into touchpoints, considering their nature, control, and stage across different types of tourism, warrant exploration (Kranzbühler et al., 2018), providing valuable insights into market approaches.

Secondly, despite the development of co-creation studies in tourism, the literature still requires further research on the co-creation of value in tourism, particularly in relation to new technologies. Scholars have emphasized the need for studies that examine the impact of technological systems on customer experience (Adhikari & Bhattacharya, 2016) and the use of technological innovations to improve real-time customer experience (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Garanti, 2023). The applicability and effects of smart tourism, the metaverse, and artificial intelligence on customer experience in tourism remain understudied, despite existing research (Jeong & Shin, 2020).

For example, there is a need for research on the role of AI in understanding tourists' experiences and the co-creation of value in religious tourism (Wang et al., 2024). Recent topics, such as AI-powered touchpoints and the customer journey, deserve attention in various tourism contexts (He & Zhang, 2023). The intersection of co-creation and technology has created new opportunities in tourism, necessitating studies on tourists' experiences in these emerging areas. Moreover, the rise of the sharing economy, characterized as "collaborative consumption" of resources, embodies this integration and requires further exploration (Zhang et al., 2019). Online services based on community-sharing, such as Couchsurfing, peer-to-peer accommodation, and Airbnb, influence tourist interactions with products and services by reducing travel costs and creating social touchpoints (Henrique de Souza et al., 2020; Sevisari & Reichenberger, 2020; Zhang, et al., 2021). These phenomena require more studies on personalized experiences within these evolving sharing economy contexts, with a focus on value co-creation and recognizing the role of tourists (Sevisari & Reichenberger, 2020).

Moreover, advancements in technology, particularly in big data, have significantly enhanced the precision with which customer experiences are understood. Today, data collected throughout the customer journey provides essential insights for companies, enabling them to design seamless service delivery systems (Tueanrat et al., 2021). The application of these infrastructures presents a valuable opportunity for practitioners to gain deeper insights into their customers and their experiences. The growing interest in the metaverse has further spotlighted these technologies, driving much of the enthusiasm surrounding its potential. The metaverse offers the possibility of unique and immersive experiences through augmented and virtual reality (de Lurdes Calisto & Sarkar, 2024). Therefore, scholars should focus on conducting both review and empirical studies to clarify the role of metaverse in tourism.

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