Article

Bibliometric analysis of scientific production on tourism value chain

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Abstract

To develop the tourism potential of a local community, region or tourist destination in general, it is important to identify each of the elements that compose it and how they work. This information is collected and published, mostly, in scientific papers. Therefore, the central objective of this research is to analyze the state of knowledge, through a retrospective bibliometric study, the scientific production that develops, mentions and proposes elements related to the topic of value chains with a tourism focus, highlighting factors such as author, affiliation, country, type of document, among others. The research methodology is based on a documentary review and retrospective bibliometric information on papers related to the topic of tourism value chains. To do this, the Scopus database was consulted by searching for the topic 'tourism value chain' written in the title, abstract or keywords of the paper, resulting in 52 research works carried out between 2010-2020. The consultation of these documents took place between July 20, 2020 and June 25, 2021 on the website www.scopus.com. It is concluded that the studies on tourism value chains of the last ten years are few, where the paper modality predominates and Thailand is the leading country, although there are also Latin American countries that can lay the foundations of this issue and make visible the importance of tourism value chain research to achieve equitable development among all the links in the chain.

Keywords: bibliometric indicators, quality, services, tourism, value chains.

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Introduction

The emphasis given in many cases to tangible goods leads to the ignoring of services, which come to represent the largest and most dynamic sector of many nations. In developed societies they can employ more than 60% of the population, while in poorer countries the population engaged in this sector, especially small businesses, ranges between 10 and 40%. Taking Mexico as a reference, of all the sectors of economic activity, the service sector such as tourism (21.5%), transformation (18.2%) and trade (17.6%) employ the highest percentage of young people aged between 16 and 24 years (Observatorio laboral, 2020).

Service economies are not limited to prevailing in developed countries, in developing countries, most of the working population is often employed in activities as varied as education, trade, administration, finance, private security, transport and tourism, among others (Kotler *et al.*, 2011). The tertiary sector, which is dedicated to offering services necessary for the functioning of the economy, is the most heterogeneous of all economic activity, since it does not produce goods, but services (Serrano, 2011), which makes it a very dynamic and constantly changing sector.

Authors such as Romero and Tejada (2011); Kaplinksy and Morris (2001) refer to the fact that tourism activities are part of the tertiary sector and are made up of different actors, which can be classified into four levels: planners or designers of the basic tourism product, suppliers of products and services, tourism intermediaries and tourists themselves. These are linked to each other to meet the demand in the destinations, so the value chain with a tourism focus (CVT) is a way of organizing the tourism sector, identifying the links that make it up, what are their interrelations to improve communication processes and achieve more equitable benefits among all those directly and indirectly involved in this activity; likewise, it identifies critical points and constraints that need to be addressed.

According to the World Tourism Organization (2015), this sector is the key to the development, prosperity and well-being of a country, so with the data extracted from the Scopus database, an analysis of the state of knowledge is carried out, through a retrospective bibliometric study, of the scientific production that develops, mentions and proposes elements related to the CVT topic, highlighting factors such as author, affiliation, country, type of document, among others. The results of this analysis will make it possible to visualize the importance of this issue for both researchers and local actors involved in decision-making, as well as to identify the investigations that have had the greatest impact among the scientific community as part of an integral development strategy.

Materials and methods

The research is based on a documentary review and retrospective bibliometric information on articles related to the topic of tourism value chains. To do this, the Scopus database was consulted by searching for the topic 'tourism value chain' written in the title, abstract or keywords of the paper, resulting in 52 research works carried out between 2010-2020. These documents were consulted between July 20, 2020 and June 25, 2021 on the website www.scopus.com.

Results and discussion

Tourism is part of the service sector, so the service culture focuses on meeting and satisfying the demands of the client or tourist. Without mentioning a specific company, the service culture and its quality must start from the management or highest position and continue with the rest of the employees who work in the company, as well as the entire productive chain that participates in the provision of the service.

The quality of service is a very important issue in tourism, not only in the finished products or services, but in the quality of the processes and people involved in those products or services. Quality goes through all phases of the company's activity; that is, for all the processes of design, production, sale and maintenance of products or services (Imai, 1998). With respect to the value given to the service, this will depend on whether the consumer recognizes the importance of the benefit offered (González, 2015). However, the research on this topic has basically focused on quality and satisfaction, the value given to the service and all the elements involved in it have not been sufficiently studied so far (Duque, 2005).

It is necessary to specify what the characteristics of the services are. In this regard, Kotler (1997) mentions that a service is 'any activity or benefit that one party offers to another and that is intangible and does not result in the possession of something'. So, tourism has an inherent relationship with the provision of services. The only thing tourists take away from the place visited and prevails for many years is the lived experience that allows them to create memorable memories.

Among the features of the services are

Intangibility

Unlike physical products, services cannot be experienced through the senses before being consumed. Robert *et al.* (1989) mentions that anyone who buys a service can leave empty-handed, but will never leave empty-headed, referring to gaining experiences through the provision of a service.

Inseparability

Both the service provider and the client or tourist must be present for the service to be provided. The inseparable nature of the service means that tourists are an indispensable part of the product.

Variability

The quality of service depends at all times on who, when how and where the service is provided. In this sense, the lack of homogeneity in the product can be the main cause of disappointment in tourists, or on the contrary, it can help to offer services tailored to each visitor.

Perishable nature

The services are not stored or saved to be used later, they are extinguished with their provision, so that unsold stocks cannot be stored.

The tourism services offered by travel agencies, hotels, restaurants, tourist guides, etc., cannot be seen or touched by tourists, despite seeing or touching some of the tangible elements of the tourism product (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2009). These are produced and consumed at the moment, both by the service providers and the tourists themselves, therefore, the satisfaction of the client or tourist is determined by the quality of the services acquired throughout their stay in the destination.

As mentioned above, the quality of service to tourists is the key to achieving success within the competition demanded by this globalized world. Tourists are more informed people with higher education who demand quality in the services offered, therefore, customer loyalty is, perhaps, the best way to measure quality. The ability of a service company to attract and retain customers will depend to a large extent on the added value it offers them (Kotler, 2011).

Now, service quality is closely linked to the value chain, which works as an innovative and useful tool to identify the factors that drive or condition the generation of value in a tourist destination and in each of its links (Pulido and López, 2016). Therefore, it should not be forgotten that behind each tourism service is a technological system that supports it, in addition to having a value chain that is made up of suppliers until reaching the final customer (Izaguirre, 2015).

Regarding the concept of value chain, it was created and disseminated by Porter and Millar (1985), who defined value as the amount that the buyer is willing to pay for a product offered by the company. The value activities for a company, according to Porter, are made up of nine activities, the first five are primary, which involve the physical creation of the product (inbound logistics, operations, outbound logistics, marketing and sales, services) and four support activities which support the primary activities (company infrastructure, human resource management, technological development and procurement) (Porter and Millar, 1985).

In this regard, Alonso (2008) mentions that the value chain proposed by Porter, despite focusing directly on tangible aspects, can be adapted to the provision of services. Continuing with some other definitions, the set of main activities of a company, which are linked through links, is called value chain, as the product goes through each of these activities it adds its value (Kippenberger, 1997).

Under this same perspective, a simple value chain describes the full range of activities that are required to carry a product or service from its conception, through the different phases of production (involving a combination of physical transformation and the contribution of several producer services), delivery to final consumers and final disposal after use. (Kaplinsky and Morris, 2001). The number of links in a value chain depends on the type of industry. These can sometimes be carried out by one company and sometimes by several (Kaplinsky, 2000).

For the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (2006), a value chain is like a network or strategic alliance that is established, formally or informally, between a number of independent business actors participating within one or more production chains. For the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) (2007), a value chain is defined as: 'an economic system made up its operators, providers of operational services and their commercial links at the micro level, and by the providers of support services at the meso level. All operators that add value to a given marketable product, starting with the raw material until reaching the final consumer, are considered part of the value chain'.

This methodological approach of ValueLinks created by the German Agency seeks sectoral economic development at the local, national and global level, through the promotion of value chains for the benefit of the population with fewer economic resources, with a focus on pro-poor growth (CPP). This approach is based on the premise that the economic growth of poor people in markets provides a sustainable solution to the problem of poverty (GTZ, 2007).

In the manual ValueLinks, of the German agency for international cooperation (GTZ for its acronym in German), a distinction of four actors that participate in the value chains is made: in the first place, there are the operators of the value chain formed by the private sector as protagonists of the chain, in the second place, there are the providers of services and support such as chambers and technological institutes, organizations of the academic sector or universities. As a third element is the public administration to create favorable conditions for economic development, and finally there are the development agencies and NGOs to boost, promote, and support the rest of the agents of the value chain (GTZ, 2007).

Therefore, the understanding of value chains with a focus on tourism allows organizing the tourism sector in which the suppliers of all the products and services that are part of the experience that the tourist will live, from the planning of the trip, the permanence in the destination and selection of services, until reaching their place of residence. For researchers and professionals in the sector, it helps to identify those value chains in which local, national and global actors can produce better products and services, increase job creation and in many cases, reduce the poverty experienced in most developing countries. Finally, the research and subsequent implementation of this issue is of vital importance to generate tangible changes and improve the distribution of income and benefits in the communities that participate in tourism activity.

Once the search for scientific papers was carried out, different aspects of them were analyzed, which are detailed below: The interest in the subject of value chains focused on tourism services is shown by Ortíz (2001) when publishing his research Estia-efficient electronic services for tourists in action, so that from that year the writings have been gradually increasing. Considering the 10 retrospective years for this analysis, it is found (Figure 1) that the highest peaks in publications occurred in 2019 and 2020 with seven and nine documents respectively. The health emergency due to the COVID-19 virus has hit the tourism sector hard, so it has become a necessity to do research on how to improve and adapt tourism activity to the 'new normal'.



Figure 1. Number of documents written per year (2010-2020). Elaboration with data from www.scopus.com.

Authors who have publications on related topics related to CVT are broken down in Figure 2. In this a list of 12 authors who have two research papers can be seen, some as the sole author and others in collaboration with other researchers. For example: Adiyia and Vanneste (2015 and 2018) have jointly published works. It is the same case for Casarin *et al.* (2014) by having two collaborative works. Halpern and Mwesiumo (2016 and 2018) collaborated on two papers. Okolo-Obasi and Uduji (2019 and 2020) worked in collaboration with other authors and finally Anderson (2017 and 2018) has an investigation as the sole author in 2018 and another in collaboration in 2017. The only one who has two published contributions as the sole author is Kaewkitipong (2010a) and (2010b), although the title of the research is the same.



Figure 2. Authors of papers on tourism value chains. Elaboration with data from www.scopus.com.

Knowing the affiliation of the published research papers is important, since it allows identifying the educational institution to which the researchers belong, which could be an option for future collaborations regarding CVT topics. In this regard, Figure 3 shows the affiliation of the researchers. First, there is the University of Innsbruck, one of the oldest in Austria, followed by Thammasat University, Bangkok's second oldest university in Thailand. In third place is the Ca'Foscari University, Venice's main university in Italy.



Figure 3. Documents by affiliation. Elaboration with data from www.scopus.com.

On the list there are two Norwegian universities, one of them is Molde University (Høgskolen i Molde) and the other is Kristiania University College, one of the oldest private institutions of higher education located in Oslo. Finally, there is KU Leuven, Belgium's largest and best-positioned university, a leader in research and co-founder of the League of European Research Universities (LERU) and the University of Nigeria in Nsukka, Nigeria.

The leading country on scientific research that addresses topics related to tourism value chains is Thailand, having the largest number of written documents (two in 2010, one in 2015 and recently published two in 2020), followed by China with four investigations (one in 2013, two in 2014 and one in 2019) as well as South Africa (three in 2018 and one in 2019). Denmark has three writings, as well as Italy, Norway and the United States of America published in different years (Figure 4).

It should be noted, in this section, that of the nine contributions made this 2020 with topics related to CVT, these belong to countries such as Colombia, Germany, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, Nigeria and again the countries that are among the top ten in publications are India and Thailand.



Figure 4. Countries with the highest number of investigations on CVT. Elaboration with data from www.scopus.com.

As a special mention, the contribution made by Latin American countries is recognized (Figure 5), since despite being minimal, their scientific production in relation to the CVT topic serves as a reference for future research within the Latin American context. One of them is the one made in Ecuador by Rendón and Bidwell (2015), which is a book chapter entitled 'Success in progress? tourism as a tool for inclusive development in Peru's Colca Valley', with affiliation in the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences in Quito and the Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand.



Figure 5. Latin American countries with studies on CVT. Elaboration with data from www.scopus.com.

It is followed by Argentina with the paper by Castillo *et al.* (2017) title: 'The causal effects of regional industrial policies on employment: a synthetic control approach'. The institutions of affiliation are the observatory of employment and business dynamics, ministry of labor, University of San Andrés and Inter-American Investment Corporation.

Finally, a recent contribution from Colombia is made by González and Husain (2020) with the written work entitled 'Social entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism in Colombia: a baseline study in post-conflict regions'. Affiliation with the La Salle University and University Corporation God's Minute, both in Bogotá Colombia.

With respect to the type of written documents related to CVT, there is a record of 36 scientific papers (71%), followed by seven book chapters (13%), five conference papers (10%) and finally with a book, a note and a paper under review with 2% respectively (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Type of publications related to CVT. Elaboration with data from www.scopus.com.

The thematic area of the writings allows knowing which is the area to which the researchers interested in developing topics related to CVT belong (Figure 7). In this regard, it is shown that the area of business, management and accounting is the most interested, having 41%, which is equivalent to 43 writings. The social sciences registered 30%, which means 31 writings. It is important to highlight this area of knowledge since tourism belongs to it and in which a variety of research has been formulated. Economics, econometrics and finance is another of the areas interested in the subject of CVT, which examined 8%, resulting in nine documents. An area that has developed in this theme is environmental sciences, since it is sought that tourism activities are developed based on the principles of sustainability, so it registered 7% with seven documents. Finally, computer science, arts and humanities, as well as engineering, exact sciences, energy and mathematics register an interest in the subject, although in a smaller percentage.



Figure 7. Documents by thematic area on CVT. Elaboration with data from www.scopus.com.

To conclude with the analysis of graphs, there are the most requested journals to publish topics related to CVT. In this regard, it is shown that the African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure is the most popular, having six documents between 2018 and 2020, followed by Tourism Review with 1 document in 2016 and two in 2017. Development Southern Africa with two documents (2010 and 2018). Although the Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change only has two publications, both are current since they belong to 2019 and 2020. Tourism Planning and Development and Wit Transaction on Information and Communication Technologies have two writings each published between 2010 and 2018 (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Documents published by year and by journal. Elaboration with data from www.scopus.com.

Conclusions

As could be seen throughout this document, the studies on tourism value chains of the last ten years are few, however, they can lay the foundations of this topic and make visible the importance of the research on tourism value chain to achieve equitable development. In this regard, the most productive years in relation to the subject were 2019 and 2020 with seven and nine documents respectively. Among the first four authors are Adiyia, Casarin, Halpern and Kaewkitipong. Regarding affiliation, the University of Innsbruck, one of the oldest in Austria, is in the first place.

According to the International Tourism Ranking (OMT, 2018), Thailand ranked 4th for foreign exchange earnings from tourism and 9th for tourist arrivals, which could explain its interest in the research on tourism value chain since it is the leading country in research on this topic. It is worth mentioning that Latin America has little presence in research on CVT, however, the scientific contributions made by Argentina, Colombia and Ecuador are recognized, which could be a basis for Mexico.

The modality of scientific papers predominates over the writing of book chapters and other writings, in addition to being the area of business, management and accounting the most interested in writing about CVT. The above can be explained since tourism has always been seen as a purely economic activity; however, other sciences such as social and environmental sciences seek to make visible the human side of tourism and its importance to achieve sustainable and equitable development for communities. Finally, the African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure is the most popular among researchers to publish their papers. It presents a CiteScore of 1.1, which is the average number of citations received per document published in the series (Scopus, 2020).

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