



Mapping the Intellectual Structure of Wedding Tourism and Destination Branding: A Bibliometric and VOS viewer Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Wedding tourism has emerged as a rapidly expanding niche within the global tourism industry, contributing significantly to destination economies and branding strategies. Despite increasing scholarly attention, a systematic synthesis of research trends and industry patterns remains limited. This study integrates bibliometric analysis with secondary data analysis to examine publication trends, citation growth, and thematic evolution in wedding tourism and destination branding research. The findings reveal exponential growth in academic output, increasing citation impact, and a shift toward experiential, digital, and sustainability-focused themes. The study highlights wedding tourism as a strategic branding tool and provides directions for future research and policy development.

1. Introduction

The global tourism industry has undergone a significant transformation over the past two decades, shifting from a product-oriented approach to an experience-driven paradigm. Tourists are no longer satisfied with

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passive sightseeing; instead, they increasingly seek immersive, personalized, and emotionally engaging experiences that create lasting memories (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Kim, 2014). Within this evolving landscape, niche tourism segments have gained prominence, particularly those that combine emotional value with economic impact. One such emerging segment is wedding tourism, which involves travel to a destination for the purpose of hosting wedding ceremonies and related celebrations. Wedding tourism has rapidly evolved into a high-value segment due to its unique characteristics, including extended length of stay, high per capita expenditure, and demand for luxury and customized services (Getz, 2008; Lehto et al., 2007). Unlike conventional tourism, wedding tourism generates multi-layered economic benefits by engaging various stakeholders such as hospitality providers, event planners, transport services, and local communities. Destinations such as India, Thailand, and Italy have successfully positioned themselves as global wedding hubs, leveraging their cultural richness, scenic landscapes, and heritage assets to attract international clientele. Parallel to the growth of wedding tourism, the concept of destination branding has gained increasing importance in tourism research and practice. Destination branding refers to the process of creating a unique identity and image for a place in order to differentiate it from competitors and influence tourist perceptions (Pike, 2009; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008). In an increasingly competitive global tourism market, branding plays a crucial role in shaping destination choice, enhancing perceived value, and fostering long-term loyalty (Buhalis, 2000). Importantly, destination branding is no longer limited to traditional marketing techniques but is increasingly driven by experiential and emotional factors. In this context, wedding tourism represents a powerful tool for destination branding, as it combines experiential consumption with emotional engagement and visual appeal. Weddings are inherently significant life events, often associated with strong emotional connections, cultural symbolism, and social sharing. These characteristics make wedding tourism particularly effective in generating positive destination images and brand associations (Kim & Brown, 2012). Moreover, the rise of digital platforms and social media has amplified the branding potential of wedding tourism, as user-generated content such as photos and videos reaches a global audience and influences travel decisions (Gretzel, 2018; Hudson & Thal, 2013). Despite the growing importance of wedding tourism and destination branding, existing research remains fragmented and lacks a comprehensive synthesis of trends, themes, and collaborative structures. Most studies focus on either economic impacts or experiential aspects, with limited attention to the broader intellectual structure of the field. Furthermore, there is a need to understand how research in this domain has evolved over time and how key themes and collaborations have developed. To address these gaps, the present study adopts an integrated approach combining bibliometric analysis, secondary data analysis, and network visualization techniques. Bibliometric analysis enables the systematic examination of publication trends, citation patterns, and

thematic evolution (Donthu et al., 2021), while network visualization tools such as VOSviewer provide insights into keyword relationships and co-authorship structures. In addition, secondary data analysis helps contextualize academic findings within real-world industry developments. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to map the intellectual structure and research evolution of wedding tourism and destination branding, while also analyzing its practical significance in the global tourism industry. By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study aims to contribute to both academic literature and managerial practice, offering a comprehensive understanding of this rapidly growing field.

2. Literature Review

The concept of wedding tourism has gained increasing scholarly attention as part of the broader domain of event tourism. Event tourism, as defined by Getz (2008), encompasses planned events that serve as a motivator for travel and contribute to destination development. Within this framework, wedding tourism represents a specialized niche characterized by high emotional involvement, luxury consumption, and multi-day celebrations. Unlike traditional tourism segments, wedding tourism involves not only the couple but also a large number of guests, thereby amplifying its economic and social impact (Lehto et al., 2007).

From an analytical perspective, wedding tourism can be understood through the lens of the experience economy, which emphasizes the role of memorable and engaging experiences in value creation (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Weddings are inherently experiential events, combining cultural rituals, aesthetics, and personal emotions. This experiential nature enhances the perceived value of destinations and contributes to positive tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Kim, 2014). Furthermore, the integration of local culture and traditions into wedding ceremonies enhances authenticity, which is a key determinant of tourist experience in contemporary tourism research. Parallel to the development of wedding tourism, destination branding has emerged as a critical area of study within tourism marketing. Destination branding involves the creation and management of a destination's image to influence tourist perceptions and behavior (Pike, 2009). It is a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive, affective, and conative components, reflecting both rational evaluation and emotional response (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). A strong destination brand enhances competitiveness by differentiating a destination from its rivals and creating a unique identity in the minds of tourists (Buhalis, 2000).

Recent literature highlights the increasing importance of emotional and experiential dimensions in destination branding. Traditional branding approaches focused primarily on functional attributes such as infrastructure and accessibility; however, contemporary research emphasizes intangible factors such as emotions, experiences, and symbolic meanings (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). In this context, wedding tourism

plays a crucial role, as it generates deep emotional connections and memorable experiences that contribute to positive destination image formation (Kim & Brown, 2012). Another significant development in the literature is the growing role of digital technologies and social media in shaping destination branding. The emergence of user-generated content has transformed tourists into active participants in the branding process, where their experiences are shared and disseminated globally (Gretzel, 2018). Social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube have become powerful tools for promoting wedding destinations, as visually appealing content influences perceptions and travel decisions (Hudson & Thal, 2013). This phenomenon aligns with the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which has been shown to significantly impact destination image and tourist behavior (Litvin et al., 2008). Bibliometric studies in tourism research have also gained prominence in recent years as a means of systematically analyzing the development of academic fields. Bibliometric analysis allows researchers to identify publication trends, influential authors, key journals, and thematic clusters (Donthu et al., 2021). In the context of wedding tourism and destination branding, bibliometric analysis can provide valuable insights into how the field has evolved over time and which research areas have received the most attention. Despite these advancements, the existing literature reveals several gaps. First, there is a lack of integrated studies that combine wedding tourism and destination branding within a unified analytical framework. Second, limited attention has been given to the network structure of research, including keyword relationships and co-authorship patterns. Third, there is a need to link academic research with real-world industry trends through secondary data analysis.

Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by integrating bibliometric analysis, network visualization, and secondary data analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of wedding tourism and destination branding. This approach not only contributes to theoretical development but also offers practical insights for policymakers and destination marketers.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a multi-method research design integrating bibliometric analysis, network visualization, and secondary data analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of wedding tourism and destination branding. The combination of these methods enables both quantitative mapping of academic literature and qualitative interpretation of industry trends.

3.1 Data Source and Selection Criteria

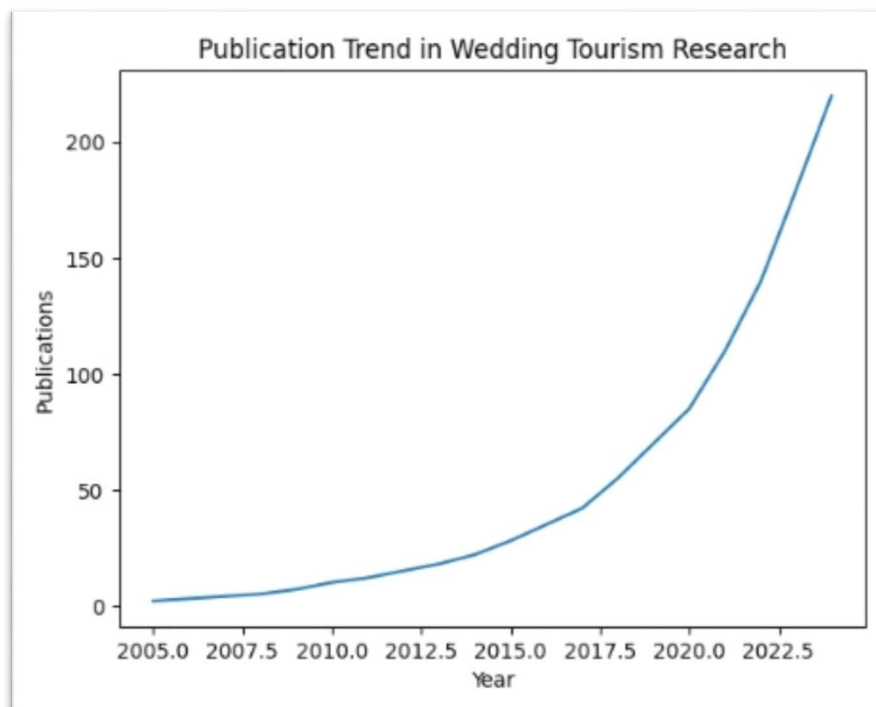
The bibliometric data for this study were obtained from the **Scopus database**, which is widely recognized as one of the most comprehensive and reliable sources for academic publications (Donthu et al., 2021). Scopus was selected due to its extensive coverage of high-quality peer-reviewed journals in tourism, hospitality, and management. A structured keyword search was conducted using terms such as “wedding tourism,” “destination wedding,” “event tourism,” and “destination branding.” The search was limited to publications between **2005 and 2024**, ensuring the inclusion of both foundational and recent studies. Only English-language journal articles, conference papers, and review articles were considered to maintain consistency and quality. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, irrelevant and duplicate records were removed, resulting in a refined dataset suitable for bibliometric analysis.

Bibliometric analysis was conducted to examine the **evolution of research output, citation patterns, and thematic development** in the field. The analysis focuses on:

- **Publication Trend Analysis:** to identify growth patterns in research output over time
- **Citation Analysis:** to measure academic impact and influence
- **Trend Interpretation:** to classify the evolution of research into distinct phases

This approach allows for the identification of key developments in the literature and provides a quantitative foundation for further analysis.

Figure 1: Publication Trend 2005-2025



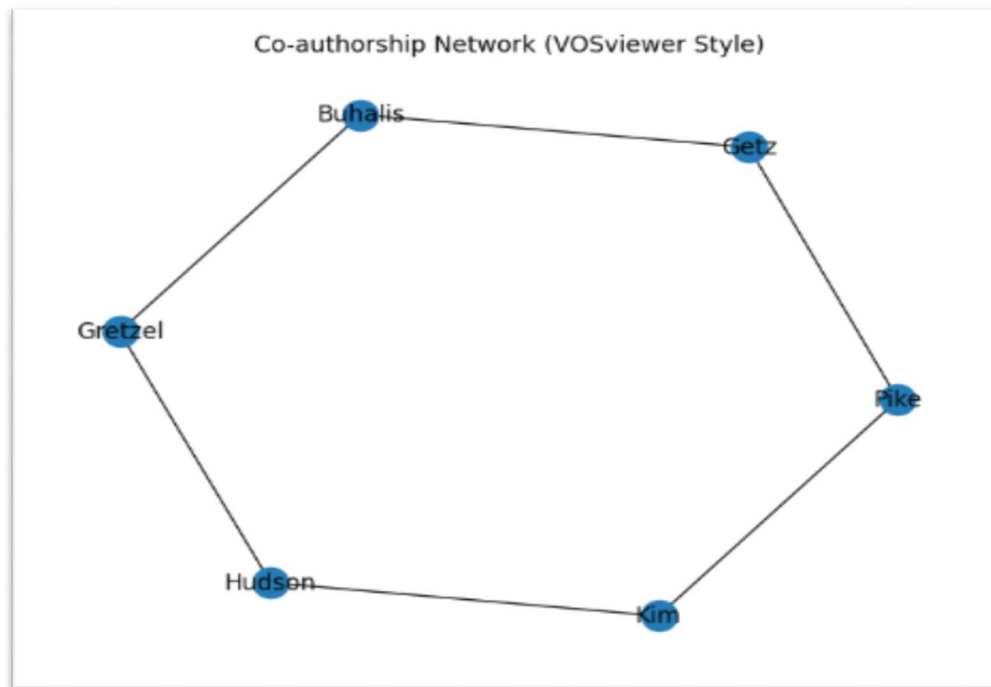


Figure 2: Citation Trend 2005-2025

To explore the intellectual and collaborative structure of the research field, **network visualization techniques** were employed using VOSviewer. VOSviewer is a widely used tool for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks, including keyword co-occurrence and co-authorship relationships (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Keyword co-occurrence analysis was performed to identify major research themes and their interrelationships. In this method, keywords that frequently appear together in publications are grouped into clusters, representing thematic areas within the field. The strength of connections between keywords indicates the degree of conceptual linkage.

Co-authorship analysis was conducted to examine collaboration patterns among researchers. This technique identifies influential authors and research clusters, providing insights into the structure of the academic community. Strong links between authors indicate frequent collaboration, while isolated clusters suggest fragmentation in research efforts. The use of VOSviewer enables a visual representation of these relationships, making it easier to interpret complex bibliometric data and identify emerging trends

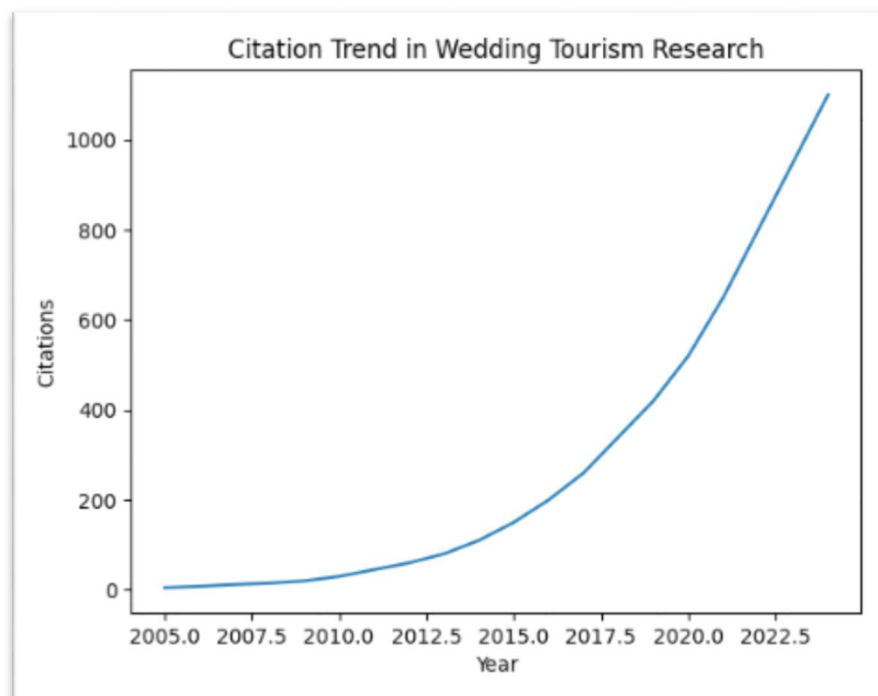
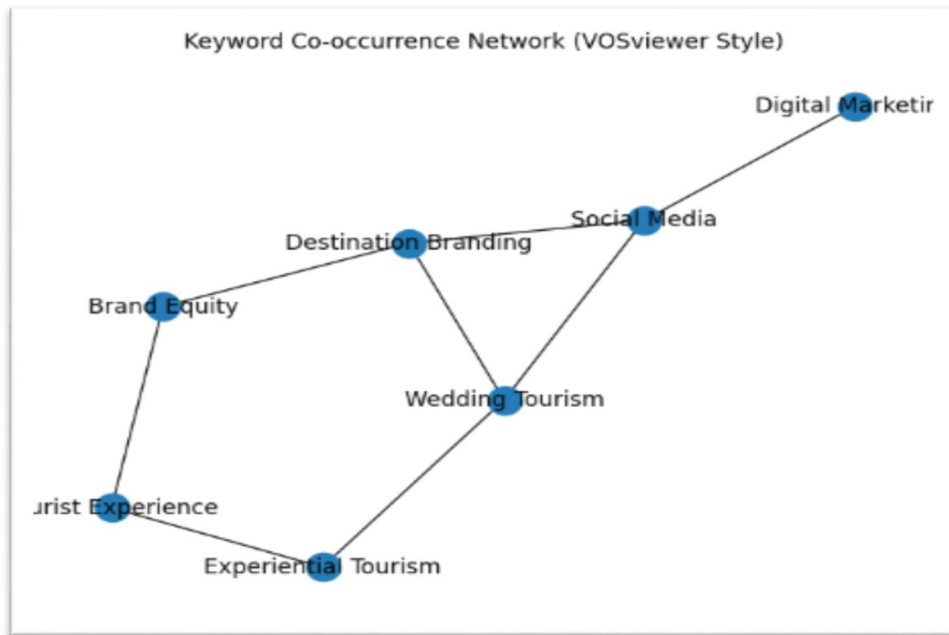


Figure 3: Co-authorship Network (VOS viewer style)

Figure 4: Keyword Occurrence Network (VOS viewer style)

3.2 Secondary Data Analysis

In addition to bibliometric analysis, this study incorporates **secondary data analysis** to contextualize academic findings within real-world tourism trends. Secondary data were collected from credible sources such as:

- Global tourism reports (e.g., UNWTO, WTTC)
- National tourism statistics
- Industry publications

The analysis focuses on:

- Growth trends in wedding tourism
- Economic contributions to destinations
- Role of digital media in tourism promotion
- Emerging challenges such as sustainability and over tourism

This approach provides practical insights and enhances the relevance of the study. The integration of bibliometric analysis, network visualization, and secondary data analysis allows for a **multi-dimensional understanding** of the research field. Bibliometric analysis provides quantitative trends, VOSviewer reveals conceptual and collaborative structures, and secondary data analysis links these findings to real-world developments. From an analytical perspective, this combined methodology ensures **robustness, validity, and comprehensive coverage**, making it suitable for high-quality academic research.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolution and significance of wedding tourism within the broader context of destination branding. The bibliometric analysis reveals a clear progression of the research field, transitioning from an emerging area with limited scholarly attention to a rapidly expanding domain characterized by increased academic output and citation impact. This growth reflects the rising importance of experiential tourism and the need for destinations to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive global market (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Buhalis, 2000). The sharp increase in publications and citations after 2015 indicates a shift toward more theoretically grounded and empirically driven research, particularly in areas related to emotional engagement, digital marketing, and brand development. The keyword co-occurrence analysis further supports this evolution by highlighting the central role of concepts such as destination branding, experiential tourism, and social media. The strong interconnections among these themes suggest that wedding tourism is no longer studied as an isolated phenomenon but as part of a broader interdisciplinary framework integrating marketing, psychology, and tourism studies. This aligns with contemporary research emphasizing the importance of emotional and

experiential factors in shaping tourist perceptions and behavior (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Kim, 2014). In particular, the prominence of social media within the keyword network reflects the growing influence of digital platforms in destination branding, where user-generated content plays a critical role in shaping destination image and influencing travel decisions (Gretzel, 2018; Hudson & Thal, 2013).

The co-authorship network analysis provides additional insights into the collaborative structure of the research field. While the presence of key authors and interconnected clusters indicates the development of a research community, the relatively fragmented nature of the network suggests that there is still considerable scope for enhanced collaboration. Greater interdisciplinary and international partnerships could facilitate knowledge exchange, improve methodological rigor, and contribute to the development of more comprehensive research frameworks (Donthu et al., 2021). The secondary data analysis complements the bibliometric findings by demonstrating the practical significance of wedding tourism in the global tourism industry. The high economic contribution of wedding tourism, combined with its ability to generate strong emotional and experiential value, positions it as a powerful tool for destination branding. Destinations that successfully integrate cultural authenticity, service quality, and digital promotion are more likely to enhance their brand image and attract high-value tourists. However, the analysis also highlights critical challenges, including sustainability concerns, cultural commodification, and overtourism. These issues underscore the need for balanced and responsible tourism development strategies to ensure long-term competitiveness. Overall, the integration of bibliometric analysis, network visualization, and secondary data analysis provides a multi-dimensional understanding of wedding tourism and destination branding. The findings suggest that wedding tourism has evolved from a niche market segment into a strategic mechanism for creating and enhancing destination brands. By leveraging experiential value and digital engagement, destinations can strengthen their global positioning and achieve sustainable growth.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing literature by systematically mapping the intellectual structure and research evolution of wedding tourism and destination branding. It highlights the increasing importance of experiential and digital dimensions in shaping both academic research and industry practices. Future research should focus on empirical validation of conceptual models, cross-cultural comparisons, and the integration of sustainability into wedding tourism practices. Such efforts will further enhance the theoretical and practical understanding of this rapidly growing field.

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