

## Mapping the Human Dimensions of Tour Guide Research: A Bibliometric Analysis (1990-2025)

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to map the development of human dimensions in tour guide research from 1990 to 2025 using a bibliometric approach. Data were collected from 655 Scopus-indexed articles and analyzed using VOSviewer and the PRISMA procedure. The results indicate a significant increase in both publications and citations over time. Network, overlay, and density visualizations identified five major human dimensions: cultural-interpretive, service, destination development, sustainability, and individual-professional dimensions. The literature is predominantly shaped by tourism perspectives, while individual professional dimensions remain relatively underexplored. These findings highlight opportunities for future research integrating Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior perspectives.*

## INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector contributes significantly to economic growth, job creation, and socio-cultural development in various countries. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) positions tourism as a sector capable of driving sustainable development through increased human mobility, cultural exchange, and cross-regional economic activity. Within this system, *tour guides* play a strategic role as a liaison between destinations and tourists through interpretation, communication, education, and assistance during the tour. Cohen (1985) explains that *tour guides* perform instrumental, social, interactional, and communicative functions that help tourists understand the environment they visit. This position places *tour guides* as crucial actors influencing the quality of the tourist experience while supporting the success of tourism activities.

Various studies have explained the contribution of *tour guides* to the success of tourism activities. Ap & Wong, (2001) They identified the role of *tour guides* as group leaders, cultural mediators, educators, and destination representatives to tourists. Zhang & Chow, (2004) They demonstrated that professional *tour guide competence* increases tourist satisfaction, while Huang et al., (2010); Zátori et al., (2018) emphasizing that communication skills, interpretation, and active involvement of *tour guides* strengthen the quality of the

tourism experience. Subsequent research developments expanded the focus of study from tourism service aspects to various *human dimensions* that include behavioral, social, cultural, cognitive, and professional aspects. These developments indicate that (Salazar, 2012; Weiler & Black, 2015) *tour guide* research no longer focuses solely on the operational function of service, but also on the human characteristics that influence the implementation of the role of this profession.

*The tour guide* literature has developed various research themes that represent these human dimensions. Previous research has discussed service quality, tourist satisfaction, tourism experiences, cultural heritage interpretation, cross-cultural communication, ecotourism development, destination sustainability, local community empowerment, professional identity, knowledge management, and relationships with various stakeholders (Moscardo, 1998; Salazar, 2012; Weiler & Black, 2015; Weiler & Ham, 2002). This diversity of themes demonstrates that *tour guide research* has developed across various interrelated human dimensions.

Despite this, most research still positions *tour guides* as part of the tourism service and development system. Research on service quality, tourist experience, cultural interpretation, and destination sustainability sheds light on the contribution of *tour guides* to value creation for both tourists and destinations (Ap & Wong, 2001; Weiler & Ham, 2002; Zhang & Chow, 2004). These perspectives make important contributions to explaining the success of tourism activities. However, Nickson, (2021) emphasizes that the quality of human resources is the primary factor determining the quality of service in the tourism and *hospitality industry*. This perspective suggests that developing the tourism industry requires not only an understanding of tourists and destinations, but also an understanding of the individuals who perform these service tasks.

The Human Resource Management (HRM) and Organizational Behavior (OB) perspectives view *tour guides* as individuals who bring professional identity, work experience, psychological resources, and behavioral characteristics to their work. Ashforth & Kreiner, (1999) explains that professional identity influences how individuals interpret their work, whereas Hobfoll et al., (2018) explains that individuals strive to acquire and maintain their resources when faced with job demands. The HRM and OB perspectives complement the tourism perspective by explaining the individual factors that influence the performance of *the tour guide role*. However, the available literature does not yet provide a comprehensive picture of the distribution of academic attention across these dimensions. This situation makes it difficult for researchers to understand which dimensions are dominant, which are developing, or which still require further academic attention.

The need to understand the distribution of academic attention has become increasingly important as digital transformation, sustainability demands, changes in tourist behavior, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic have impacted the *tour guiding profession*. These changes have prompted the emergence of new research themes related to professional

adaptation, knowledge management, sustainability, and job dynamics in the tourism industry. However, research that comprehensively maps the development of these various dimensions remains relatively limited.

Bibliometric analysis provides a systematic approach to mapping the development of knowledge based on available scientific publications (Donthu et al., 2021). This approach allows researchers to identify publication trends, citation patterns, intellectual structures, and the development of research themes, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of a scientific field. Based on this description, this study aims to map the development of *human dimensions* in *tour guide research* through a bibliometric analysis of Scopus-indexed publications in the period 1990–2025. The results of the study are expected to reveal the distribution of academic attention to various human dimensions in *tour guide literature* and provide a foundation for developing future research agendas, particularly those related to the perspectives of *human resource management* and *organizational behavior*.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a bibliometric approach to map the development of *human dimensions* in *tour guide research* during the period 1990–2025. The bibliometric approach allows researchers to systematically identify research trends, citation patterns, intellectual structures, relationships between concepts, and the development of research themes based on available scientific publications (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015).

This study uses the Scopus database as the primary data source due to its extensive international publication coverage and good metadata quality for bibliometric analysis (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). The search process was conducted in May 2026 using the keywords "*tour guide*", "*tour guides*", "*tour guiding*", "*tourist guide*", "*tourist guides*", and "*tourist guiding*" which were searched in the title, abstract, and keywords of the articles. The search was limited to publications from 1990–2025.

The document selection process refers to *the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses* (PRISMA) guidelines to improve research transparency and reproducibility (Page et al., 2021). This study only includes English-language articles from the fields of *Business, Management and Accounting*, *Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities*, and *Environmental Science*. This study excludes *conference papers, editorials, letters, notes, errata*, and other irrelevant documents. The screening process resulted in 655 articles as the final research dataset, while the document selection flow is presented through a PRISMA diagram.

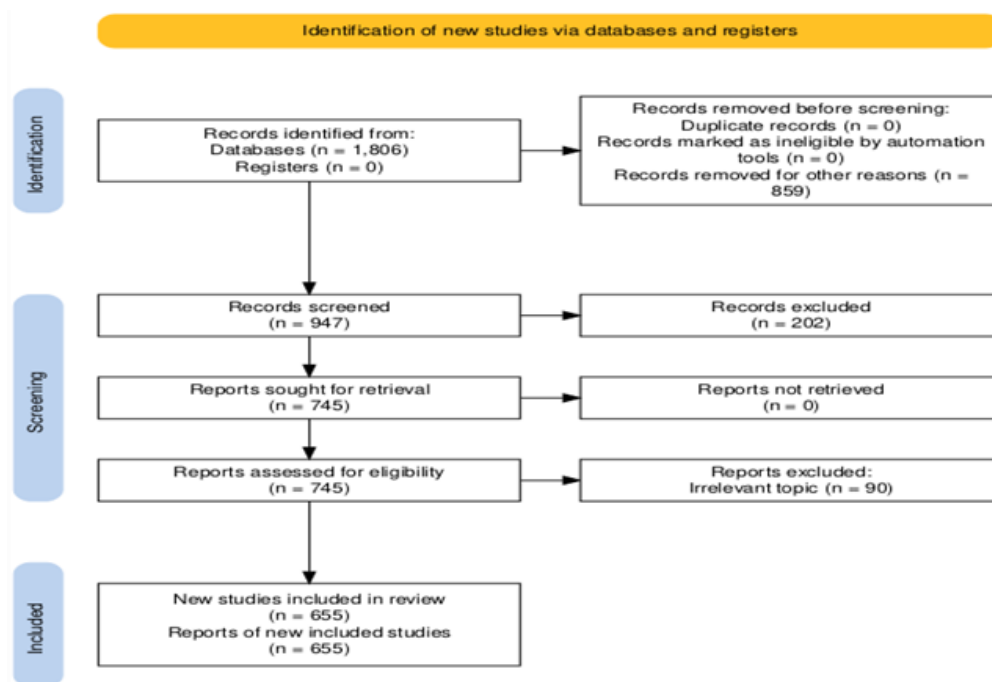


Figure 1. PRISMA diagram

This study adapted the bibliometric analysis stages from Donthu et al., (2021), which include data collection, document screening, bibliographic data export, analysis, and interpretation of results. Data were exported in *.csv format* and analyzed using VOSviewer version 1.6.20 because it is able to effectively visualize bibliometric relationships through network mapping (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010, 2017).

The research analysis consisted of descriptive bibliometric analysis and bibliometric mapping analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to identify publication developments, citations, and articles with high influence based on the number of citations. Meanwhile, mapping analysis was conducted using *co-occurrence analysis of author keywords* to identify the research's conceptual structure based on the co-occurrence of keywords in the literature (Callon et al., 1983; Van Eck & Waltman, 2014).

*co-occurrence analysis* produces three main visualizations: *network visualization*, *overlay visualization*, and *density visualization*. *Network visualization* is used to identify the structure of themes and relationships between research clusters, *overlay visualization* is used to trace the evolution of research themes over time, and *density visualization* is used to identify themes that have received the most academic attention in the literature (Van Eck & Waltman, 2017). These three visualizations are used to interpret the development of *human dimensions in tour guide* research during the period 1990–2025 and to identify research opportunities that are still open in the future.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

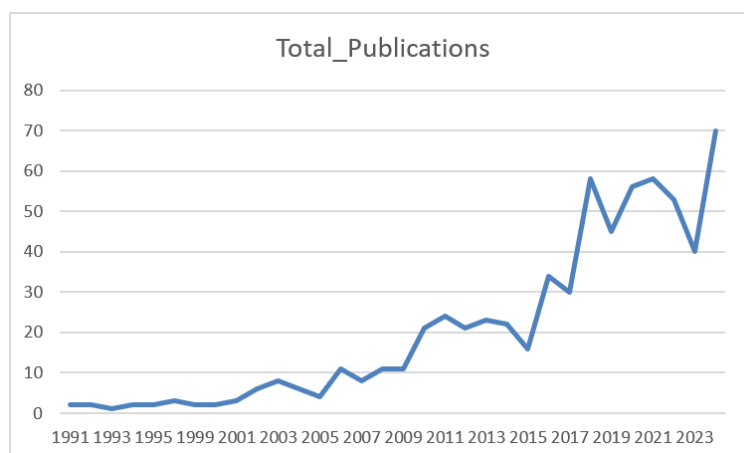
In general, the number of publications shows an increasing trend over time, although there are some fluctuations at certain periods. At the beginning of the observation period (1991–2000), the number of publications was still relatively low, at less than five articles per year. This condition indicates that tour guide research still receives limited academic attention and has not yet developed into an established field of study.

A surge in publications began to emerge between 2001 and 2010. The number of articles published gradually increased, reaching over ten publications per year by the end of the decade. This development indicates growing academic attention to the role of tour guides in supporting tourism activities, particularly in relation to service quality, tourist experience, and destination interpretation.

More significant growth occurred after 2010. The number of publications increased consistently, reaching over twenty articles per year for most of the period 2011–2016. These findings indicate that tour guide research is beginning to expand into a wider range of themes, including tourism sustainability, cultural heritage, tourist behavior, and destination management.

The period 2017–2025 shows the most rapid growth phase. The number of publications increased sharply and peaked in 2025 with around 70 publications. Although there were declines in certain years, such as 2019, 2023, and 2024, the overall trend remains strong. This pattern indicates that tour guide research is gaining increasing attention from the international academic community and is developing into a relevant topic in contemporary tourism studies.

Overall, these publication trends indicate that tour guide research has experienced continuous development over more than three decades. The increasing number of publications reflects the growing academic attention to the various dimensions inherent in the tour guiding profession, including those related to tourism services, destination development, and the human aspects underlying the profession's role.



Tour Guide Research Publications 1990-2025

Meanwhile, the number of citations shows an increasing trend, despite significant fluctuations between periods. This pattern indicates that the scientific influence of tour guide research is growing progressively along with the increasing number of publications and the expansion of academic attention to the topic.

In the initial observation period, 1991–2000, the number of citations was relatively low and tended to be unstable. This indicates that tour guide research was still in its early stages of development, resulting in limited publications and limited influence within the academic community. Citations began to increase in the early 2000s, along with the growing number of studies addressing the role of tour guides in service quality, tourist experience, and destination interpretation.

A more significant increase in citations began to emerge after 2010. During this period, the number of citations increased sharply, reaching over 1,000 citations per year on several occasions. This phenomenon indicates that tour guide research is beginning to gain wider recognition in the international tourism literature. This increase in citations is likely related to the development of more diverse research themes, such as tourism sustainability, cultural heritage, tourist behavior, and destination development, which position tour guides as key actors in the tourism experience.

However, the graph also shows significant fluctuations in certain years. This difference is a common characteristic of citation analysis, as the number of citations is influenced by the age of the publication. Articles published earlier have a longer time to accumulate citations than articles published more recently. Therefore, the decline in citations in recent years does not necessarily indicate a decline in research interest but may be influenced by the limited citation accumulation time (citation window).

Overall, citation trends indicate that tour guide research is not only increasing in terms of the number of publications but also in terms of scientific influence. These findings indicate that tour guide studies have developed into a topic receiving increasing academic attention in the tourism literature. However, citation analysis is not yet able to explain the research dimensions that receive the most academic attention. Therefore, further analysis of the research theme structure through network visualization, overlay visualization, and density visualization is needed to identify the development of various human dimensions in tour guide research.

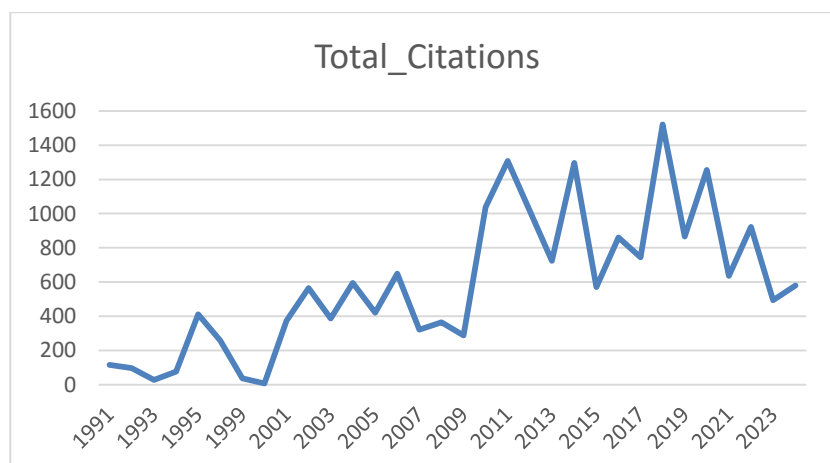


Figure 3. Total Citations of Tour Guide Research 1990-2025

Furthermore, network visualization shows the conceptual structure of tour guide research based on the co-occurrence of keywords in the analyzed publications. The visualization results show that the keywords tourism, tour guide, and tour guides occupy the most central position in the network. This finding indicates that tour guide research is developing as part of broader tourism studies, with most studies attempting to explain the contribution of tour guides to the tourist experience and destination development.

The network structure shows several main interconnected clusters. The first cluster focuses on heritage tourism, interpretation, tourist satisfaction, and destination image. This cluster demonstrates that tour guide research focuses heavily on the role of tour guides in creating tourism experiences, interpreting cultural heritage, and enhancing tourist satisfaction. These findings align with research confirming that tour guides' interpretation and communication skills contribute to the quality of the tourism experience and positive perceptions of the destination (Alazaizeh et al., 2022; Zátori et al., 2021).

The next cluster connects the themes of tourist behavior, service quality, and tour guiding. This relationship indicates that the literature still positions tour guides as part of the tourism service system, oriented towards service quality and tourist behavior. Furthermore, the ecotourism, sustainability, sustainable tourism, and tourism development clusters demonstrate increasing academic attention to the role of tour guides in supporting destination development and sustainability. This finding aligns with the growing tourism literature that positions tour guides as agents of education and conservation within sustainable tourism practices (Hall, 2023).

However, several themes more closely aligned with the Human Resource Management (HRM) and Organizational Behavior (OB) perspectives, such as identity, performance, and stakeholders, still appear with relatively small node sizes compared to tourism themes. This situation indicates that academic attention to professional identity, work behavior, and individual aspects of tour guides is still relatively limited. However, the HRM and OB

perspectives place these factors as important elements that influence the implementation of individual roles in the workplace (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023).

Overall, the network structure indicates that research on tour guides during the 1990–2025 period was dominated by themes related to tourism services, tourist experiences, destination development, and tourism sustainability. Conversely, themes related to professional identity, work behavior, and individual psychological aspects received relatively less attention. This finding indicates that studies on tour guides still primarily view the profession as part of the tourism system rather than as individuals with unique characteristics and work dynamics. Therefore, the HRM and OB perspectives still provide ample room for future research development.

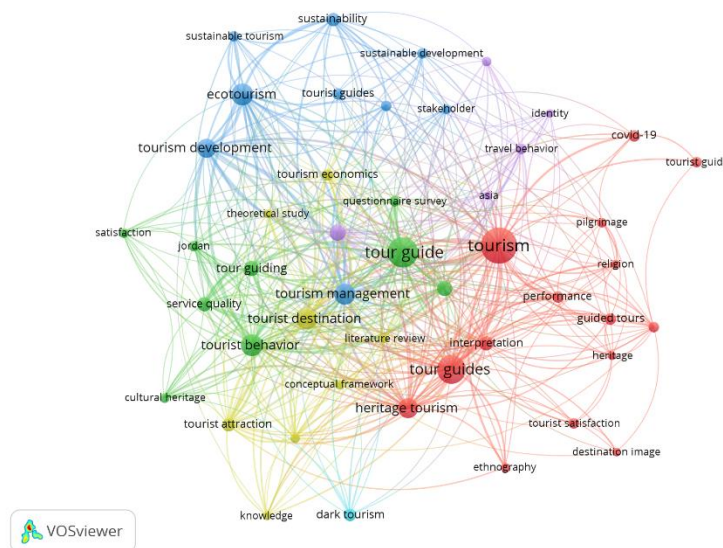


Figure 4. Network Visualization of Human Dimensions in Tour Guide Research 1990-2025

The overlay visualization image then shows the evolution of tour guide research themes during the period 1990–2025 based on the time dimension. Blue represents themes that developed in the early period, while green to yellow indicate themes that gained attention in the more recent period. Unlike network visualization, which depicts the structure of relationships between themes, overlay visualization explains how the focus of tour guide research has changed and evolved over time.

tour guide research focused heavily on themes such as interpretation, ethnography, identity, destination image, sustainability, and sustainable development. These themes indicate that academic attention in the early period was more focused on the role of tour guides as cultural mediators, information providers, and supporters of sustainable destination development. This finding aligns with the literature that views tour guides as actors involved in the interpretation and meaning-making process of destinations for tourists.(Salazar, 2012; Weiler & Black, 2015).

In the following period, the research focus shifted to themes related to the broader tourism system, such as tourism, tourism development, tourism management, tourist behavior, service quality, and heritage tourism. This shift indicates that research is beginning to position tour guides as part of the service and destination development mechanisms that contribute to the quality of the tourist experience. This development reflects the growing academic attention to destination management, tourist experiences, and service quality within the tourism industry.(Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023).

In more recent periods, research has shown a shift toward more diverse themes, such as tour guides, tour guiding, stakeholders, tourism economics, knowledge, dark tourism, COVID-19, and tourist attractions . The emergence of these themes demonstrates that tour guide research is beginning to respond to the dynamics of the contemporary tourism industry, including the impact of the pandemic, knowledge management, stakeholder engagement, and the emergence of new forms of tourism. This indicates that the scope of tour guide research is expanding and no longer limited to the tourism service aspect alone.

Interestingly, several themes closely related to human resource management (HRM) and organizational behavior (OB) perspectives , such as identity and performance, have emerged in the literature and remain connected to the research network. However, the size of the nodes and the degree of connectivity remain relatively low compared to the main themes related to destinations, tourists, service quality, and tourism development. This finding suggests that academic attention to the individual aspects of tour guides has begun to grow, but has not yet become a dominant focus in the evolution of research during the observation period.

Overall, the overlay visualization shows that tour guide research has evolved from themes of cultural interpretation and destination development to broader and more complex themes, such as service quality, tourist behavior, tourism economics, stakeholder engagement, and the impact of Covid-19. Although themes related to individual identity and performance have begun to emerge, the literature is still dominated by tourism and destination development perspectives. This finding indicates that there is still room to strengthen studies that view tour guides as individuals with professional identities, work behaviors, and psychological characteristics that can influence the implementation of their roles in the tourism industry.





The synthesis of bibliometric analysis results shows that tour guide research during the period 1990–2025 developed in several interrelated human dimensions. Based on the results of network, overlay, and density visualization, there are at least five groups of human dimensions that dominate the literature, namely the cultural interpretive dimension, service dimension, destination development dimension, sustainability dimension, and individual-professional dimension. These findings indicate that tour guide research not only views the profession as an implementer of tourism activities, but also as individuals who play a role in building tourism experiences, interpreting culture, supporting destination development, and contributing to tourism sustainability.

The first dimension is the cultural interpretive dimension, reflected in themes such as interpretation, heritage tourism, cultural heritage, and ethnography. This dimension positions tour guides as cultural mediators who translate the meaning, values, and identity of a destination to tourists. These findings align with the perspective of Cohen, (1985); Salazar, (2012) which explains that tour guides not only convey information but also shape tourists' understanding of the social and cultural environments they visit. Furthermore, recent research shows that tour guides' interpretive skills contribute to the creation of authentic and meaningful tourism experiences (Zátori et al., 2021).

The next dimensions include the service dimension, destination development dimension, and sustainability dimension, reflected through themes such as service quality, tourist behavior, tourism destination, tourism management, tourism development, ecotourism, and sustainability. These three dimensions indicate that the literature often places tour guides as part of the tourism service and development system. Various studies have shown that the quality of interaction between tour guides and tourists influences tourist satisfaction, destination image, and the success of sustainable tourism development (Ap & Wong, 2001; Hall, 2023; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023). The dominance of these themes also explains why the tourism perspective has remained the primary approach in tour guide research for more than three decades.

Meanwhile, the individual professional dimension is reflected through the emergence of themes such as identity, performance, knowledge, and stakeholders. Although their frequency of occurrence is not as high as other tourism themes, the presence of these themes indicates that academic attention is beginning to shift to the characteristics of individuals who practice the tour guide profession. This perspective aligns with the professional identity theory of Ashforth & Kreiner, (1999) and the theory of conservation of resources from Hobfoll et al., (2018) which positions individuals as actors who bring their identities, resources, and work experiences into the performance of their work. These findings indicate that future research has the opportunity to strengthen the perspectives of human resource management and organizational behavior in understanding the dynamics of the tour guide profession, particularly those related to professional identity, work behavior, psychological well-being, and individual performance.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the overall research results, it can be concluded that tour guide studies experienced significant development during the period 1990–2025, both in terms of the number of publications and scientific influence reflected through citations. The results of the bibliometric analysis show that tour guide research is dominated by themes related to tourism, tourist experience, service quality, destination development, and sustainability. In addition, this study identified five groups of human dimensions that shape the development of tour guide literature, namely the cultural interpretive dimension, service dimension, destination development dimension, sustainability dimension, and individual-professional dimension. Although the individual-professional dimension is beginning to emerge through themes such as identity, performance, and knowledge, academic attention is still mostly focused on the tourism perspective.

Further research suggestions could deepen the study of tour guides through the perspectives of human resource management and organizational behavior, particularly on the themes of professional identity, work behavior, psychological well-being, performance, and career development. Furthermore, the use of a broader database and more specific studies on emerging themes could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the future development of the tour guide profession.

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